

The Athenian

Volume 12, Number 1

Sponsored by Grafton Cares

SEPTEMBER 2021

The Long Road Continues...

We thought it was getting better by mid-summer when we felt things would reach a “new normal.” But Covid had other things in mind—the Delta Variant. Here we are scrambling to adjust to life with the virus again.

In this issue of The Athenian, you will find a number of items of interest on subjects new and old. Changes that have taken place with Grafton Cares are that Dennis Hunt has stepped back from the presidency and Kate Bova has unanimously been voted in as President. She is energetic and experienced with the ins and outs of our programs, especially our meals programs and financial assistance. Three new members have been added to the Board: Ginger Maciejowski, Lynn Field, and Noralee Hall. All are enthusiastic and ready to go. Dennis will remain on the Board.

As you know, we have voted to cancel our community suppers and Wednesday lunches out of concern about the spreading of the virus. But we miss those great meals and the sense of community that they bring.

In this issue you will also read about the Meetinghouse, the Nature Museum, the Grafton Library, and news from the Select Board and more. So, read on and stay safe!

- Dennis Hunt

Select Board Meeting Tidbits

In addition to news in other pieces below, here are a few things from the August Select Board meeting that might be of interest:

- Don Capponcelli noted that the mitigation work that has been done on culverts, the Reed Rd. bridge, and underdrain work in other areas has been paying off given how past trouble spots held up to the recent



heavy rains and encouraged the Town to continue with additional mitigation work

- Wichi Artu informed the Board that they had run into a roadblock in trying to seek assistance for flood damage in their farm fields. They were not able to pursue flood insurance because the Town’s Hazardous Mitigation plan had expired and because the flood zone maps were not up to date. Discussion followed on what can be done to address these concerns.
- No progress has been made on exploring the idea of making more use of Australian ballots in future Town Meetings to engage more people in the decisions and/or election of officers.
- Tim Stevenson shared information about a new program from Green Mountain Power aimed at helping communities develop Resiliency Zones that could help prevent outages by leveraging renewable generation, battery storage and other innovations.
- Lynn Morgan shared information about the COVID Recovery monies coming to the school district and how they have been used to date. There is discussion on how to use the funds still to come. School opens on Sept 7th and masks will be mandatory for inside and optional for outdoors. The teacher’s union will be working out the question of mandating vaccinations for teachers and staff. Lynn also confirmed that work on the air ventilation system was done a year ago. Also the climbing structure at the school is being removed as it did not pass a recent inspection.
- The victim of a dog bite in town has requested a hearing. It was scheduled for August 25th at the Town Office.

- Matt Perry thanked all the contractors who helped out with the storm damage and noted that work that has been done in the past 15 years helped considerably in mitigating the road damage seen in town. Over the rail mowing will happen on Sept 6th.
- Sand bids were reviewed and there was discussion about quality concerns as last year's sand was too fine and not good for the roads or for ice storms. Matt will check with the sources and report at the Sept. meeting.
- An executive session was called by David for a personnel matter and Matt was asked to stay. After 45 minutes the Board came back to public session noting that no decisions or motions were made.
- Krista Gay asked for clarification on who could stay in executive sessions.
- Sandi Capponcelli noted that she and Matt are working on grants related to the town garage.



Sherry Maher

Results of School Financial Vote

A joint town meeting with the towns of Westminster, Grafton and Athens was held on August 26th at the Westminster school and via zoom. The reason for this meeting was to present information regarding the upcoming school vote to be held on August 31st regarding the financial agreement that will be part of Westminster being released from the Windham Northeast Union Elementary School District.

On August 31st 44 votes were cast in Athens and 38 voted yes, accepting the financial agreement, while 6 voted no, not accepting the financial agreement. The article passed in all three communities, so as of June 2022 the ownership of the Westminster Central School and the Westminster West school will be returned to the town of Westminster. Also the debt that Westminster brought into the Union will be returned to Westminster. Athens and Grafton will remain a union school and will continue to use the Grafton Elementary School building without the extra cost of the two Westminster school buildings or their school build debt.

The Westminster school district and the WNUESD, composed of Athens and Grafton, will once again be two separate school districts that are a part of the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union as we were before the forced merger by the state. Grafton and Athens will continue to work closely with the rest of the SU, as we were doing before the forced merger, to create programs and policies that will unify the three districts of the SU to better serve the students of our three districts.

- Lynn Morgan

Community Center Advisory Committee

The newly formed Community Center Advisory Committee held its initial meeting on Thursday, September 2.

Its members include: David Bemis, Kelsea Burch, Sandi Capponcelli, Don Capponcelli (non-voting advisor) Dennis Mirante, Matt Shea, Tim Stevenson and Tina White.

At its 15 July meeting, the Select Board agreed to a proposal submitted by the Athens Emergency Committee to form a town committee to explore the Athens school as a site to (a) house our neighbor's domestic pets during a catastrophic storm and (b) provide a cooling shelter for our neighbors during a severe heat wave who otherwise lack air conditioning, or a neighbor to go to.

There is also considerable interest, especially amongst the younger folks in town in having the building serve as a community social space, that could also raise modest funds to help defray such expenses as electricity, cleaning, etc. by renting it out for parties, receptions, and the like. There is also talk about relocating the Town Office to the school.

Sandi stated that she wanted to chair the Committee, and the members agreed to have her do so. Don volunteered to keep the meeting notes.

The Committee agreed to gather at the school on Saturday, September 18, from 10 to 12 in the morning, in order to do a walkthrough of the entire building to survey its needs, and to begin the process of getting it cleaned.

It also agreed to sponsor a donation tag sale sometime in October in order to move on the supplies and equipment that are not needed.

The Committee will meet the 1st Thursday of each month, from 6:30-7:30 at the Town Office with a warned agenda. The public is always welcomed to attend. Minutes from preceding meetings will be available at the Town Office. The next meeting will be Thursday, October 7.

- Tim Stevenson

COVID-19 Memorial Will Honor Vermonters Lost

MONTPELIER -- In honor of Vermonters lost to COVID-19, Vermont Interfaith Action is hosting a memorial service on the Vermont Statehouse lawn in Montpelier at 3 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 19.

The heart of the event will be a ceremonial reading of the names so that each individual who has died of COVID-19 is recognized. In addition, there will be

music, and several clergy and spiritual leaders will offer brief interfaith prayers and readings. Governor Phil Scott has been invited, and Dr. Patsy Kelso, State Epidemiologist for Infectious Diseases, will participate.

The event can be watched live on the VIA Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/VermontInterfaithAction/>

If you are a family member or are otherwise closely connected to a Vermonter who has died of COVID-19, and you would like to take part in the service, please contact Debbie Ingram at Vermont Interfaith Action, debbie@viavt.org or 802- 651-8889. – *C.J. King*

Athens Weather Emergency Committee

At its 6 July meeting, the Weather Emergency Committee had an extensive conversation about the growing climate crisis, and how the Committee might respond to the dangers it represents to Athenians.

In addition to severe weather events, the Committee recognized the danger of heat waves, especially to our older neighbors and those with health issues who live in homes without air conditioning. In response to this, the Committee visited the former elementary school building and in particular the basement with the idea of it serving as a cooling shelter. Currently access for elderly and physically challenged is lacking so they have turned to the church basement as an interim option.

Members of the committee had previously attended the July Select Board meeting to suggest that the Board form a committee to look at possible uses and needs for the former school building and suggested that among other things, it could serve as a cooling shelter in a heat emergency, or a place to shelter domestic pets if neighbors needed to evacuate their homes.

Additionally the committee sent a town wide mailing informing residents that if they are unable to adequately cool their space during a severe heat wave, or stay with a family member or neighbor with air conditioning, they should contact a member of the committee. The Athens Community Church basement can be opened as a temporary cooling shelter. If you don't have a copy of this August

mailing, look on the town website or get a copy at the Town Office.

– *Tim Stevenson*

Grafton Cares Updates

Imagine you're a child once again, and suddenly it is announced, "There will be no Christmas this year!" The feeling that would generate is very much what all of us

experienced when it became obvious that a steady surge in the COVID Delta variant could not allow us to proceed with our plans to reestablish community dinners and lunches. So--there will be NO Athens community dinner on Friday, September 3, and no lunches or other dinners in the immediate future. It is indeed depressing, but we'll put our heads down and keep plugging.

As for the past month's activities, we have delivered Meals on Wheels to 9 customers in Athens and Grafton, as well as \$175 in gas cards for medical appointments. Eight sunshine baskets, four welcome bags, and one baby blanket were also delivered to local residents.

One significant change has been made in our system to provide rides to medical appointments. Maggie Stewart, who has long arranged such rides, is giving up this function, and Bill Toomey will now take over the job Maggie has done so well. Bill's telephone number is 843-2397. At this time, Grafton Cares is asking for volunteers who are willing to help with these rides. Please contact Bill to add your name to the volunteer list.

The Grafton Church has asked that we help publicize their on-going food shelf which continues to offer a variety of fresh produce, eggs, and other foods such as pasta, marinara sauce, peanut butter, and much more. The Church is open most weekday mornings or at other times by special arrangement. You need only call 843-2346 for other pickup times.

We wish everyone in the community best of health and strong spirits as we continue to work hard to put the COVID virus to rest.

– *Bill Toomey*

Meetinghouse Update

Despite a second summer season impacted by the



pandemic, we've been busy at the Meetinghouse this summer! After the 4th and most successful Plant Sale to date despite the coldest Memorial Day weekend I remember, we went on to host friends from Wardsboro and from the Brookline Meetinghouse in late June to tour our building, and continue to share ideas and enthusiasm for these historic gems. Ideas are being generated as to how we can

collaborate and thus bring more community interest to our efforts. In early August we welcomed folks from near and far for a concert and ice cream social with music by Bard Owl of Williamsville, VT. And mid-August found us at the Biennial Windham County History Fair, a great opportunity to talk with history enthusiasts about our historic landmark.

Thanks to all who supported our efforts, either by eating ice cream, enjoying music, entering the raffle or the silent lumber auction. All proceeds go toward restoring and preserving the building. And we'll be starting to think toward next summer season so let us know what events you'd be interested in seeing at the Meetinghouse in the future.

With regards to exterior work we had hoped to at least get started this summer. However, the Committee is still waiting to get the green light from Preservation Trust VT regarding this work that is being supported in part by a grant from the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants Program administered by the National Park Service, Department of Interior. We hope to get started on this work soon, but given the time of year now, it most likely it will be next season, as the grant funds are committed into 2023. Stay tuned. – *Sherry Maher*

Household Hazardous Waste

There will be a household hazardous waste collection on **TUESDAY, September 21 at the Springfield Transfer Station, 2:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.** for residents of Andover, Athens, Baltimore, Cavendish, Chester, Grafton, Ludlow, Plymouth, Reading, Rockingham, Springfield, Weathersfield, West Windsor, and Windsor. Sponsored by the Southern Windsor/Windham Counties Solid Waste Management District and the host town. E-mail mobrien@marcvt.org or call 674-9235 for more information or visit www.vtsolidwastedistrict.org for a list of what to bring and what not to bring.

– *Mary O'Brien*

Senior Solutions helps Vermonters

The economic challenges that have faced us all throughout the pandemic are ongoing – and for many older Vermonters, the challenges of paying for food, fuel, and medical bills are very real. **And yet, 60% of older Vermonters who are eligible for assistance such as 3SquaresVT do not participate!**

3SquaresVT is a nutrition program that helps you put healthy food on your table. A single senior with a monthly income of \$1,969, may be eligible to receive funds for food, as either cash in the bank or on a card that works just like a debit card. A new program, “3SquaresVT in a SNAP,” makes it even easier! If everyone in your household is at least 60 years old or receiving disability benefits, and no one is earning income from employment, you can apply with a simpler

application and you can keep your benefits for three years with no additional paperwork. You may qualify even if you have money in the bank, own your own home, or are employed.

As we have already had several summer heat waves, heating for the winter might be the last thing on your mind...but Fall is upon us, and the time to apply for winter Fuel Assistance is now. 3SquaresVT and Fuel Assistance can both be applied for in a single application. Fuel Assistance helps with winter home heating bills, and may be used for fuel oil, propane, electricity, and even wood heating. The program will make the payment directly to your fuel provider and credit your account, except for those heating with wood; eligible households heating with wood will receive cash funds directly.

Simply call the Senior HelpLine at 802-885-2669 to start the process for either program. – *Thom Simmons*



Fairy House Festival

The Fairy House Festival is The Nature Museum's annual fundraiser and draws visitors from far and wide to Grafton each September. Volunteers create a fairyland of small structures built out of natural materials, opening a portal to the incredible world around us through deep observation of nature's gifts.

The funds raised at the Fairy House Festival go to support our natural science programs in schools and libraries, wilderness days for tweens, wild foods workshops, summer camps for kids, mushroom talks, birding walks, and so much more. This event helps keep The Nature Museum thriving!

Because of our changing public health landscape, we've made some important changes to our Festival plans this year. We are limiting attendance for each day, and tickets will be on sale online only. For the safety and peace of mind of our community, we are also requiring masks for everyone over the age of 2.

These changes will ensure there is plenty of room for folks to spread out during this all-outdoor event.

Builders and Volunteers make this community event possible. Join us and receive free tickets to the festival and our everlasting gratitude! Teen volunteers earn Community Service hours and great experience. All proceeds support the year-round programming of The Nature Museum, which includes free programming for kids through the summer, immersive experiences in

nature for kids and adults, and resources for teachers and schools to learn about our regional environment.

Visit their website at nature-museum.org to buy tickets or register as a Builder or event Volunteer, to read all about the event and plan your day. Builders and Volunteers get free admission. Tickets can be purchased online beginning September 1st. Adults are \$15, kids are \$5, and 2 and under are free.

— *From Nature.museum.org*

Library Corner

Smiles and Gratitude

Many, many thanks to Michelle Chickering for her contributions to the library from her mask-making proceeds! Smiles and gratitude to the Grafton Elementary School Summer School for a wonderful co-sponsored summer reading program with the library. Kids—you are fantastic! Teacher and support staff—you are amazing!

We are thrilled to be the recipient of a recent Grafton Fund grant for technology needs. We've purchased equipment to be used for hybrid library programming and are extremely grateful to the Windham Foundation for their on-going and generous support of our community library.

Library Programming and Updated Covid Guidelines

Out of an abundance of caution, the library is once again requiring masks for all library patrons, staff and visitors, regardless of vaccination status, when we are open for browsing. We remain open for curbside service, but closed to the general public for browsing, for a limited portion of our library hours. During these hours of curbside service only, fully vaccinated groups may meet in the library without masks, if local conditions allow and permission has been granted by the library director (me). Our goal, as always, is to provide as many library services as possible, while doing all we can to help maintain public health and safety. We thank you very much for your cooperation and understanding, as we adapt our library operations to the situation at hand. Outdoor activities remain a great way to get mental stimulation and exercise during these challenging times. Borrow a Museum, Vermont State Parks, or Historic Site Passes and save some money while you enjoy.

Looking for something to do from your own home? Read two books and fill out two book

recommendations for the library for our Readers Recommend display and take home a gift certificate to MKT and Rushton's Scoop as your reward!

Or you might sign up for an on-line or in person book group, ask for a curated reading list, use the Library app for downloadable audiobooks and e-books, join our weekly Spanish conversation group on-line or contact the library with an idea for a new program or group based on your interests and hobbies. Be an innovator! Some of our best programs have started with an idea a community member had...

September Library Programs

Spanish Conversation on Zoom, Tuesdays 11am, intermediate level

The Pager Turners Book Group, Tuesday, September 28, 2-3:30 pm, Theme: Literary Luminaries of Vermont

The Nature and Books Discussion Series, co-sponsored with the Nature Museum, resumes in October on Zoom. Stay tuned!

— *Michelle Dufort*



Food News You Can Use

Below is a list of local sites where food assistance is available at no or little cost to you. Please get the word out to your friends and neighbors about these program as we go through these uncertain times.

Grafton Community Church Food Pantry. The food pantry at the Church is sponsoring free food pickup at the Church during the week. Staples such as pasta, tomato sauce, jam, oatmeal, and sometimes even frozen meat if available. Call Mary Feder at the Church at 843-

2346 or email her at graftonchurch@gmail.com and leave your name and phone number to arrange a pickup time and please wear a mask. Delivery can also be arranged.

Townshend Community Food Shelf. This long-time food shelf is open and providing food to those who need it. They have limited fruit, vegetables, milk, frozen meats, and fresh bread. They also have canned food, pasta, rice, and shelf stable proteins. They are located in the Townshend Church and are open every Monday from 6pm to 7pm. Be sure to wear your mask. If you have questions call 365-4348.

Everyone Eats—Newfane. This program benefits our communities in several ways. It financially supports area restaurants and their employees, as well area farmers and other food producers. And we get to eat nutritious meals! Meals are distributed every Thursday from 5pm to 6pm in front of the Newfane Congregational Church. All meals are free and there is a onetime registration at

the site or call Jeryl at 802-348-7173. Deliveries can also be arranged.

Meals On Wheels. Senior Solutions in Springfield, VT sponsors a Meals On Wheels program for seniors and those with disabilities. Grafton Cares provides pickup and delivery three times a week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Sign up is straight forward. Call Senior Solutions Senior Helpline at 800-642-5119 for the details and have meals delivered to your door. Senior Solutions is currently seeking to contract with a new provider starting October 1.

Veggie van Go. Free food is available for the months of September and October on the 4th Thursday of each month (9/23 and 10/28) at the Newfane Green on West Street. The purpose of the program is to help people obtain fresh fruits and vegetables to sustain a healthy lifestyle. All are welcome and no proof of eligibility is required. This program is sponsored by Grace Cottage Family Health & Hospital and the Vermont Food Bank.

Multiply Your EBT Benefits at a local Farmers Market. Do you have 3 Squares VT/SNAP benefits? When you use 3Squares VT/SNAP or P/EBT benefits at a local farmers market, you'll get up to \$10 match in Crop Cash. That means \$10 in EBT buys \$20 of local food! The Townshend Farmers Market is open on Fridays, Brattleboro Area Farmers Market is open on Saturdays, and the Putney Farmers Market is open on Sundays.

- Dennis Hunt

Notes From A Weather Journal

It is the 10th anniversary of Irene and what follows are selective entries from my weather journal.

August 27, 2011. "Starting to cloud up. Irene is on its way."

August 28. "Irene is here. Very heavy rain, wind gusts. Have had plenty of rain lately, fear of trees falling on power lines. Still have electricity."

August 29. "Irene has devastated the area. Lost electricity. Ernst Road lost. Reed Road impassable at this end. Grafton is a mess; 121 broken, 1 house lost to the river. Vt is in big trouble."

August 30. "2nd day. Running generator for a few hours trying to save propane. Have no idea when electricity will come back. Have seen no road trucks or electric trucks. We are on our own. Hoping for a propane delivery but will not come if bridges not safe."

September 3. "Day 6. The electricity came on last night around 5:30 at the Athens Community Supper—heaven."

Treah Pichette has provided some interesting detail on our weather this summer which saw drought conditions followed by endless rain and a tropical storm.

"The July rainfall total turned out to be a whopping 18.5 inches. The only month that came close was 2011 in August with Irene which was a puny(!) 15.3 inches. I

was not able to track down the Vermont July rainfall record, but 1998 was the year with the most rainfall recorded for the summer. (I'm assuming, June, July, & August). That total was 24.78 inches...So far this month, (8/24) we've only gotten about 4 inches...Our Hurricane Henri was basically a non-event."

- Dennis Hunt

Thoughts To Ponder

"Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans."

-John Lennon

"You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough."

-Mae West

"Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you have to keep moving."

-Albert Einstein

- All quotes selected by Dennis Hunt

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Select Board Meetings: 3rd Thursday 7:00 PM

Budget Committee: 2nd & 4th Tuesday 7:00 PM

Meeting House Committee: 2nd Monday 10:00 AM

School Board: 2nd Thursday 6:30 Grafton School

Do you have a news item for The Athenian or a favorite family story to share? Or would you like to be on our email list and get the newsletter in your inbox?

CONTACT US at theathenianvt@gmail.com.



TRASH PICK-UP: SEPT 6 & 20

RECYCLE PICK-UP: SEPT 13 & 27



Photo Credits:

Road Washout – Hannah Regier

Meetinghouse & History Fair – Sherry Maher

Monarch Butterfly – Sandi Capponcelli

Jalapeno Harvest – Treah Pichette