

The Athenian

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Sponsored by Grafton Cares

NOVEMBER 2021

The Holiday Season Begins---Thanksgiving

It would seem with the Pandemic still taking its toll, that there would not be much to be thankful for. But if you look at the national level, vaccines have done their wonderful work and soon children 5-11 will have a vaccine as well.

Locally, much has been happening. We are no longer in a forced school merger with Westminster. Our old Athens school house is open to new possibilities and creative ideas. Important conversations are happening about how voters will make decisions on officers and town business going forward.

The list goes with a lot more to discover in this issue, so read on...

- Dennis Hunt

Select Board Meeting Tidbits

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

- Wichie Artu updated the Board on research into the outdated Town flood maps, the National Flood Insurance Program, private flood insurance and related matters. David Bemis stated we should pursue getting flood insurance and suggested Wichie get in touch with Hilary Cooke to discuss flood insurance.
- There is a new chair rack in the Town Office thanks to Dennis Mirante.
- An executive session for a personnel matter was called at 7:15. The minutes reflect that the session ended at 7:27. No decisions were made in executive session and no motions were to be made at that point.
- Gabriel Sistare from Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) addressed the Board about a funding request. BDCC is currently



assisting with a USDA grant and loan program for a facilities grant. David indicated that a line item could be put in the budget for next year for funding for BDCC.

- The culvert in back of the Town Office leading into the parking lot needs replacing. A temporary fix has been made and grants are being pursued. There was discussion about the church possibly sharing the cost as it is primarily used by the church.

- Sandi Capponcelli is working on finding grant funds for the garage bathroom. The board will need to sign a letter of resolution at their next meeting committing to securing matching funds.
- Sandi reported on the roads for Matt Perry. More gravel is needed for completing maintenance on Mill Hill and in some areas on the upper roads. They are getting ready for winter, sand has been delivered but salt is still needed.
- Don Capponcelli reported on some settling in the piers under the floor of the Meetinghouse. Sherry Maher was in touch with Jonathan Jesup who did the work in 2016/17. He will arrange to come take a look and can make adjustments.
- There was a lengthy discussion related to Special Town Meeting/Australian ballot. They are wondering if the legislature will again rule on how Towns can conduct Town Meetings. Some are concerned about waiting for that. Some expressed concern about losing the legislative process that is part of Town Meeting if all business is done by Australian ballot. Janet Perry made a motion for two articles related to voting by ballot, one for Town officers, and one for voting on budget and monetary issues. She also asked if these votes could be by

Australian ballot rather than a Special Town Meeting. Janet & David voted yes on this motion, while Denise Randall voted no. It is not clear from the minutes if these articles are just with regard to the 2022 Town Meeting, or if these changes are intended for all Town Meetings going forward.

- Denise asked that the road crew be more specific with information on their highway logs, and inquired about the time the sheriff's department patrols.
- Concern was raised about the school bus using Mill Hill Rd. and Janet will follow up on getting restitution from the insurance company for the driver of the vehicle that went into the beaver pond at the top of Brookline Rd.
- The Board accepted the resignation of Angel Squires and will appoint someone to fill the auditor position at their next meeting.

Sherry Maher

Special Select Board Meeting Abruptly Adjourned

We want to be sure that the Athens voters understand an important decision that may be approved by the Select Board tomorrow, November 6 at 10am. If

- 1. The Select Board approves making the December 9th Special Town Meeting an Australian ballot vote;**
- 2. And if the 2 articles formulated to make future Town Meetings only by Australian ballot pass when presented to voters in December**

...the voters of Athens may never again come together for a traditional Vermont Town Meeting.

Here's some context:

The Select Board posted notice on Monday, Nov 1 that they were holding a Special Select Board meeting on Nov. 4 to address a Special Town Meeting for December 9.

Last night, shortly after calling the meeting to order, a member of the public read a letter suggesting that the November 4 meeting was in violation of Open Meeting Law 1 V.S.A. §§ 310(5), 312(c)(2), (5). It was determined that it was in fact in violation, because the local press had not been notified. So the chair promptly adjourned the meeting, which has now been rescheduled for this Saturday, Nov. 6 at 10 AM.

The re-scheduled Special Select Board Meeting is posted on the town website, with the key piece of business again being item #4 on the agenda. In part, that includes approving the final wording on the 2 articles that will be put before the voters in December, the gist of which will ask us to decide on how we vote on all future Town Meeting business - by Australian ballot or vote from the floor at a Town Meeting. The

question here really boils down to whether the Town of Athens will continue with a traditional in-person Town Meeting or vote exclusively by Australian ballot for the future until such time that the voters decide to reverse that decision.

The other piece of this important change is not readily apparent in this agenda, but a second notice posted for abruptly adjourned meeting for November 4 sheds some light on the matter. The Select Board will be deciding if the December 9 vote would also be by Australian ballot, negating the expectation of a Special Town Meeting in December. Instead there would likely be just a virtual informational meeting prior to the vote. This would be the ONLY opportunity for voters to express their opinions on this matter prior to votes that could change Town Meetings going forward.

Last night a member of the public had a petition with signatures of 50 voters calling for the December meeting to be in person. They intended to hand those signatures to the Board last night but had not done so before the meeting was adjourned. We expect that there will be more signatures by the time it reaches the Board on Saturday.

– Sherry Maher

Community Center Advisory Committee

The Athens Elementary School. What a lovely ring that has to it but unfortunately that school is no longer. Several years ago, due to outside pressures beyond the control of the town, we started sending our children to Grafton Elementary School. It was a pivotal moment in the town's history. We had gone from 3 schools scattered on the upper and lower roads, to one school, to a brand-new school and finally to no school. It wasn't an easy decision, and it wasn't a decision supported by all the towns people. Since the school closed it has been used infrequently. On occasion it has been used for kindergarten but mostly it has laid empty and somewhat neglected except for the yearly town meeting when it would get a quick cleaning and the heat was turned up. It seemed like a sad end to a wonderful building.

Due to the Emergency Committee thinking about the future needs of the residents of Athens in future possible weather situations, a discussion was opened about what to do with the building. That was how our committee, the CCAC, was formed under the auspices of the Select Board.

Our first goal was to start emptying the school. We went from top to bottom bringing anything in good condition to the main classroom and we were surprised by the number of items that had remained in the school all these years. So, it was decided to have a 'un tag sale'. To just let community members and others come it and take what they wanted and leave a donation to be used to start the process of giving the main class room and

hallway a deep cleaning and possibly a coat of paint to freshen up the interior look of the building.

We were more than pleased and very thankful for all that came and joined in the 'un tag sale' on Saturday Oct. 23rd. We received over \$500 in donations. There are still a few items left that we will be donating and some items that may appear on Front Porch Forum or FaceBook Marketplace in the future. These items are mostly school desks and chairs.

I realize, as to the other committee members, that although there is support for the building to become some type of community center and possibly move the town office into the building. There are also those property owners that are worried about their property tax situation and the impact this idea might have on them.

What the committee is hoping to do is any repairs and/or renovations with as little impact on your property taxes as possible. We are looking into the use of grants to cover whatever work may be done and some work may be done by volunteers to help keep the costs down. We are also looking at this as a long-term project if need be. The hope would be that the building at some point will help pay for, in part, its own upkeep.

Our committee realizes there are a lot of questions out there to be answered, and we hope that at the Town Meeting in 2022 we will be able to answer some of them.

- *Sandi Capponcelli*

Budget Committee Update

The Budget Committee is getting the 2022 budget drafted. Notable items are: the current backhoe is now paid off, so that \$25,875 payment will no longer be in the budget. At the selectboard's advising, we are building in a 10% increase for road materials given the current rising costs for many goods. With several large projects in town looking for grant funding, there shouldn't be any new large expenses on the budget.

-*Hannah Regier*

Notes From the School Board

As of Oct. 29 there have been 57 cases of COVID within the WNESU school communities. All the WNESU schools are now set up to do weekly voluntary asymptomatic COVID-19 surveillance testing on Thursdays. However, the testing day will be changing from Thursdays to Tuesdays starting November 9th. Due to the lingering of COVID, our schools are still not able to allow any visitors to enter the schools.

Word from Secretary of Education, Dan French, is that the state is recommending that all winter athletic sports be reinstated this school year. It is recommended that the student players and the coaching staff be vaccinated and wear masks. Because of varying conditions among school districts state wide, the final decisions are being left up to the superintendents.

Please contact me if you have any suggestions, concerns, or positive feedback. - *Lynn Morgan*

News from Grafton Cares

In tune with the season, Grafton Cares has been moving right along experiencing a bit of color and perhaps a touch of melancholy, but nothing that disrupts our usual activities.

After what seemed like a long search, we are delighted to welcome Judy Dickison as a new board member and our new treasurer. She will be taking over from Cathy Hallock who has served wonderfully as treasurer for many years. Thankfully, Cathy will remain a board member.

We were pleased to present to our Grafton and Athens residents of eighty years or more gift bags meant to convey our gratitude, respect, and affection. Hopefully, in the coming year, the plague will have abated sufficiently to allow the resumption of the Over-Eighty Luncheon.

At the very end of September, we received word that the Dam Diner in West Townshend has taken up the contract for producing Meals on Wheels. We continue delivering meals to 9 customers. Various other deliveries include: 4 welcome bags, 7 sunshine baskets, and 2 shawls. In the medical department, we distributed \$135 in gas cards, gave 4 rides to appointments, and loaned out 3 walkers and 1 shower seat.

Now we can settle down and wait for frost, snow, freezing rain, more snow, and bitter cold, and . . . SPRING! It's coming!

Best wishes to all.

- *Bill Toomey*

And here's a sweet piece of poetry from Bill Toomey that accompanied those 80+ gift bags:

Throughout our land the stonewalls run over mountains, streams, and fields

And leave the mark of our forebears left of what hard labor yields.

And, you our friends of "eighty plus" like walls of stone still stand,

And win our admiration for how you've built this land.

To honor you, this basket here we've filled with tasty things

And hope that every morsel a bit of pleasure brings.

May long you live and joy be yours, we think of you each day,

So stay the course with heads held high for it's you who light our way.

“Giving Tuesday” at Grace Cottage Hospital

After Black Friday and Cyber Monday comes Giving Tuesday, a worldwide day of philanthropy during the season of gratitude. Grace Cottage Family Health & Hospital asks its friends and neighbors to participate in its Giving Tuesday campaign on November 30 to support much needed renovations to the Hospital Emergency Department.

The goal is to raise \$50,000.

To participate in Grace Cottage’s Giving Tuesday 2021 campaign, call (802) 365-9109 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. or go online to www.gracecottage.org/ through midnight on Nov. 30. Checks payable to Grace Cottage with “Giving Tuesday” on the memo line can be sent to PO Box 1, Townshend, VT, 05353. – *C.J. King*

From Senior Solutions

Senior Solutions Needs Meals on Wheels Volunteers in our Area! Every week, 25-30 senior households in our area rely on the trusted, long-standing “Meals on Wheels” program to deliver much-needed nutritional food to their doorstep. But this program relies on local volunteers, and more are needed to ensure the uninterrupted continuance of this service. For many of our aging neighbors, there are good days and there are bad days. That’s why a knock at the door from Meals on Wheels is not only comforting, but at times, lifesaving.

According to Senior Solutions, Meals on Wheels is delivered every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday on a route that includes Athens, Brookline, Grafton, and Newfane. Drivers for Fridays are particularly needed.

Karen Sabin is the volunteer coordinator for our area. She would love to hear from you, and asks that you call her at 973-769-4628 or email her at karensabin@hotmail.com. Any time you can give is a contribution to the well-being and strength of our community!

Fuel Assistance Applications Should be Submitted This Month! Thom Simmons, the Fuel Assistance outreach specialist for Senior Solutions, reminds all seniors that Fuel Assistance applications should be submitted by the end of November in order to qualify for full benefits. The federal program, known as “LIHEAP,” is available to single-member households with incomes of \$1,967/month or less, and two-person households of \$2,659/month or less. There is no “resource test” for this program, which means you are eligible even if you own your home and have bank accounts. Payments are made directly to your heating fuel provider, whether you use electricity, oil, or propane; for those heating with wood, benefits are mailed directly to the homeowner. Many area residents have received assistance of \$1000 or even more.

Applications should be requested directly from the Senior Solutions Helpline at 802-885-2669. If

everyone in the house is 60 or older (or disabled) and no one earns income from employment, the application is a short, 3-page breeze to complete. For those who would prefer to speak to Thom, he can be reached directly at 802-885-2655 ext. 2123, Monday through Thursday during normal business hours, or emailed at tsimmons@seniorsolutionsvt.org. – *Thom Simmons*

November Library Corner

Smiles and Gratitude

‘Tis the month for Thanksgiving and gratitude. Here at the library, we have many blessings to count.

First, we have a wonderfully supportive and responsive board of library trustees. I do not know what I would have done without their help and leadership during the past two years—which had their challenging moments. In addition, we have fantastic staff and volunteers who keep the library running on a daily basis. I’m so grateful to have them back “in-house” working at the library. I’d like to shout out to retiring volunteers Charlie Carta and Chuck Dickison—two volunteers exceptionally skilled at offering a friendly, welcoming atmosphere at the library. Thank you both for your gift of time and support at the library.

On a weekly basis, we receive the support of so many. Bob Bason has once again polished our candlesticks, Chris Wallace loaned us a whisk broom to clean pumpkins, the Donalds donated cheese and crackers for book group, Wendy Martin sent a bunch of lovely stickers to mark our new Red Clover books and David Whittall hauls away our trash and recycling each Wednesday. It takes a community to make a library!

We also are the very fortunate recipients of several directed donations and local grants. These contributions really make a huge difference at a small library in terms of programming and collection development. We are most grateful to the donors.

Even with all this amazing help, the backbone of our financial support comes from yearly contributions to the Grafton Public Library Annual Appeal. Each November, the library mails an appeal letter to the community, which for the library includes our extended community of second home owners and guests to town. The support from the appeal is used for library operating expenses—and in fact, makes up a good chunk of our annual income. Last year we were thrilled to raise almost \$16,000! Our lovely library building, which is on the Historic Register, requires diligence and maintenance to remain in good shape. Up-coming projects include painting, porch repair and carpet replacement. Any annual appeal monies raised over the amount budgeted for our operating expenses will be applied to our on-going building projects—as we did last year. We hope you will be able to make a contribution again this year. It means a great deal to our library, especially during

these challenging times. Thank you for being part of our community.

November Library Programs

Spanish Conversation on Zoom, Tuesdays 11am, intermediate level

The Pager Turners Book Group, Tuesday, November 23, 2-3:30 pm, Theme: Farming: Now and Then

The Nature & Books Discussion Series, co-sponsored with the Nature Museum, Wednesday, November 17, 6-7:30 pm on Zoom, This Is Your Mind on Plants by Michael Pollan

Bill Toomey returns for Holiday Stories!--Stay tuned for details!

Michelle Dufort

Athens Tree Farm News

We are happy to have had so many friends and family make it a yearly event to visit our tree farm in Athens to get a Christmas tree. We have enjoyed meeting families from our community and sharing in their joy in selecting the perfect tree for their home.

We are sorry to say that we will not be selling Christmas trees this year due to a lack of good quality trees. We have many trees growing for future years, but feel our inventory of quality trees is not large enough to open this year. We will, however, be selling wreaths. If you are interested in ordering a wreath please contact Ginger at 802-869-2405, or email at gingermaciejowski@gmail.com. The following wreath sizes are available: 12 inch - \$25, 14 inch - \$30, 36 inch - \$65. Ginger will start making wreaths around the middle of November so please order early if you would like them by Thanksgiving.

We plan on opening again next year for Christmas tree sales. We wish you all a happy holiday season and hope to see you next year. Thank you for all of your patronage and support over the years.

Ginger and Jay Maciejowski

Holiday Wreath-Decorating Workshops

Bring on joyous holiday spirit by decorating a premade evergreen wreath. The number of holiday wreath workshops, annually presented by St. Luke's Church in Chester, VT, has been increased this year to allow safe, social distancing. Masks will be required.

At the workshops, participants may choose from an impressive array of especially collected greens, berries, nuts and other natural materials, bow material, and different embellishments that they would like to add to their fresh, premade evergreen wreath. Wire, glue guns, and other supplied equipment make the decorating

easy and successful. Open to the public, the workshops will take place on November 18-20 in Willard Hall at St. Luke's Church, 313 Main Street (Route 11 West) in Chester, VT, and will again benefit both the church and the Chester Conservation Committee's youth environmental-camp scholarships.

Space per session is limited, so participants must preregister early to be assured of a wreath and their preferred session. There are eight different workshops: Thursday November 18, 9-10:30 AM or 1-2:30 PM or 6:30-8 PM; Friday November 19, 9-10:30 AM or 1-2:30 PM or 6:30-8 PM; and Saturday November 20, 9-10:30 AM or 1-2:30 PM. Each session will offer all the essentials to create a very personal, one-of-a-kind wreath. Men and women may come alone or register with a friend or group. Participants are encouraged to bring clippers and glue guns if they have them.

A \$5 early-bird discount on the tentative fee of \$50 per wreath will apply to those who preregister and pay by Friday November 5. Checks should be made out to St. Luke's Church, designated in the memo line for the wreath workshop, and mailed to Lillian Willis at PO Box 318, Chester, VT 05143. For additional information and registration,

please contact Lillian Willis, 802-875-1340 or lbwillisct@comcast.net.

This is a great opportunity to support two good causes, start getting ready for the holidays, and have fun doing it safely! Please spread the word to family and friends.

— Lillian Willis

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 as area farmers and other food producers. And we get to eat nutritious meals! Meals are prepared by the Newfane Country store and distributed every Thursday from 4:30pm to 5:30pm in front of the Newfane Congregational Church. During Thanksgiving week meals will be distributed on Tuesday. 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 all the particulars and enjoy having meals delivered to your door in Athens and Grafton.

Veggie van Go. Free food is available for the months of November (11/29) and December (12/23) from noon to 1pm at the Newfane Congregational Church 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 #Squares 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 taking online orders for pick up on Sundays. The Brattleboro Winter Farmers' Market opens Nov. 6 and is open weekly through March. There SNAP customers will also get an additional \$10 match thanks to a grant from the Vermont FoodBank, so \$10 EBT becomes \$30!

– Dennis Hunt

Notes From Two Weather Journals

Treah Pichette has provided some interesting information on frosts dates.

There has been a wide variation in dates of the first killing frost over the past 23 years I have been living here on Reed Rd. This year's date tied with the earliest one I recorded in 2013 on Oct. 24th. In looking back, the earliest fall frost was on Sept. 17, 2007, but by far, most

of the first fall frosts have been in October numbering 15. Only 8 years have these occurred in Sept. However, there doesn't seem to be a consistent trend as an early first year frost could follow a very late one the previous year & vice versa. I think this shows, rather than a steady warming trend, an increasing unpredictability in our weather patterns.

Snow on Thanksgiving? Not too often, but it can happen. Here are a few exceptions.

November 27, 2008: "Cold, cloudy, feels like snow. Temps 24.1 to 34.3."

November 27, 2014: "Big snow yesterday. Maybe 12 inches. Beautiful! Temps 26.1 to 34.9"

November 22, 2018: "Below zero temps with wind overnight. Full snow cover. Looks and feels like mid-winter. Temps -2 to 34." *-Dennis Hunt*

Thoughts To Ponder

It's Thanksgiving time and here are a few quotes to put a smile on your face...something we can all use!

"I come from a family where gravy is considered a beverage." *-Erma Bombeck*

"A new survey found that 80 percent of men claim they help cook Thanksgiving dinner, which makes sense, when you hear them consider saying, 'that smells good' to be helping." *-Jimmy Fallon*

"It took me three weeks to stuff the turkey. I stuffed it through the beak." *-Phyllis Diller*
-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: NOV 1, 15, 29

RECYCLE PICK-UP: NOV 8, 22