Select Board Meeting

June 17, 2021

7:00pm

Athens Town Office

Present were Janet Perry, David Bemis, Darlene Wyman, Dennis Mirante, Krista Gay, Tina White, Tom Taylor, Donna Currier, Denise Randall, Linda Taylor, Danny Taylor, Sheryl Maher and Tim Stevenson.

David called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Adjustments to the agenda: There were no adjustments to the agenda.

Minutes of prior meeting: David made the motion to accept the minutes of the May meeting. Janet seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. David made the motion to accept the minutes of the June 9 meeting. Janet seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried.

Public comments: Krista asked it the meetings could still be virtual as well as in person. David stated we could try doing this at the next meeting and see how things go. Krista asked to speak to the board about the mailbox situation. She presented documents to the select board concerning this. Krista stated she would be sharing why the mailboxes did not have to be moved. She stated at the last select board meeting Matt stated the driveway to the town garage needed to be 40 feet wide. She stated she had contacted Marc Pickering and there is a copy of the email in the documents. Krista stated the town would not be penalized if the driveway is not 40 feet. She presented a copy of the standards and stated if you looked at the first page, there’s a copy of the measurements. She highlighted one of the suggested standards for residential and commercial driveways. It is unclear if it applies to the town because the town garage isn’t by definition a commercial property since it’s not used for businesses. Krista quoted that the maximum for the driveway can be is 40 feet and the minimum is 24 feet so it is not a requirement that it has to be 40 feet. She measured the driveway to the garage and it is 30 feet and the gate is 22 feet so the driveway already meets the standards of a 24 foot minimum. Additionally all the mail boxes do not to be moved since the 2 feet can be taken from the right side and the town has 1000 feet it can be taken from. So even if there is no requirement that it is 40 feet, and if for some reason the town wanted to expand it, they would not having to move the mailboxes. Krista then spoke on the pictures presented about the potential dangers of moving the mailboxes and the other option of moving the mailboxes across the road creates other problem. Permission would be needed from the landowner and they contacted the postmaster who stated it would be hard to get permission. Also the mailbox needs to be 6 to 8 inches from the pavement. If the mailboxes are put next to the road, it blocks the entrance to Butson Circle and Taylor Hill. It will also cause problems because the school bus picks up and drops off school children, residents of Taylor Hill park there in winter when the road is bad. David asked about moving the boxes closer to Miller Road. Krista reiterated that was not necessary because the minimum requirement is 24 feet. David asked if the driveway was supposed to come out straight instead of the angle that it is. Krista stated it does already have a 90 degree angle. Also an entrance from Miller Road in the back has a 90 degree angle. David commented that the town probably wouldn’t like to do is have a driveway off of Miller Road. Tom commented that if they wanted to try to make that entrance legal you wouldn’t be able to get the pitch that would make it legal. David stated a road in the back would have to be made to get to the garage. Krista stated again this would not be necessary since the driveway already meets the minimum state standard. David asked about moving the mailboxes to the south. It was stated the mailboxes are 22 feet long. Again Krista asked why they needed to be moved since it already meets the state minimums. Danny asked what policy was following since the town does not have a driveway policy. David stated we had accepted state standards. Danny stated this was for the roads and bridges and the town does not have a driveway policy. David stated it would be reasonable to have a driveway policy and would pertain to new driveways. David commented the issue came up because of questions concerning Taylor Hill. David suggested the board go look at the mailboxes after the meeting. Tina stated that the mailboxes cannot just be picked up and moved. There are requirements from the Post Office that need to be met before the mailboxes are moved. Donna asked why when the driveway was being fixed why the driveway wasn’t moved. Tom asked about the meeting where there was a request for the town to look at his stone wall that was destroyed. He had not received an answer about it. David stated the board would look at the wall after viewing the mailboxes. Linda asked if the grass could be cut at the top of Mill Hill. Other places were discussed that needed cutting also. Darlene asked whether it would be okay to take the signs down concerning the Covid requirements. We will follow Vermont Department of Health requirements. Sherry asked if Fact TV was contacted about the meeting. Janet said she called them. Sherry stated there was a request for executive meeting and she would like to clarify if there is a request made for personnel matters that doesn’t involve a conflict of interest if this could be clarified before going into session. David stated if it’s a matter of personnel, his understanding is that can be discussed as to what it’s about. He stated Denise and he are there and if there is a conflict of interest they would bring that up. Discussion followed what should and should not go into executive session. Tim commented that the presentation on the mailboxes and he felt it was a very conclusive argument as to why the mailboxes shouldn’t be moved. He asked what the town’s position was. David stated it was brought to the board when trying to fix the entrance to the town garage to meet the state standards and moving the mailboxes would be necessary. The board is going out to look at the boxes and assess the situation.

Boards and Officials: Tim stated the Emergency Committee met last week and discussed and revised the memorandum of understanding which is a statement to merchants authorizing to ask and collect food for emergencies. They are asking to expand the merchants to Saxtons River Market and Grafton market. David stated that Lisai’s should also be included. It was also discussed that local farmers be included. David made the motion to accept the revised MOUs to include Saxtons River Market, Grafton Market, Lisai’s, Riverbend Market and local farmers. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. The board and treasurer signed the MOUs. Tim also discussed the housing of animals during and emergency since the school is now owned by the town. Lynn is looking into liability. Tim has also contacted Peter Welch. Insurance was discussed. The board suggested that VLCT be contacted. The committee will be having a meeting in early July to discuss the committee not only as being an emergency committee, but also an emergency preparedness committee. David asked if the emergency trailer has been checked this year. Tim said it had been done. Sherry stated the Meetinghouse plant sale was a great success despite the cold and rainy day. They were pleased to have David’s family present for the dedication of the dogwood tree in Eleanor’s memory. David stated the family was pleased and thanked the committee for doing this. Sherry thanked Janet for the idea. David suggested the committee have another plant sale in the fall. Selling bulbs was also suggested. The Meetinghouse committee will be hosting a concert and ice cream social on August 8, 2021. The Preservation Trust Vermont grant has been reviewed and signed by David. The grant has been sent back. Sherry stated an environmental study which involves pictures, the window repair project and other repairs needing to be done also. The Athens Historical Preservation Society will be attending the history fair in Newfane on August 14, 2021. The committee is looking into renting the meetinghouse. They are looking into rates and what rates other venues use. David suggested asked about a written policy for renters. Sherry stated the committee discussed renting the meetinghouse under the umbrella of the Historical Society was also discussed. Also, insurance was discussed. Sherry asked if the dead maple on the grounds could be cut down by the road crew. The ash tree was also discussed. Darlene had a report from Lynn on the school. The sixth grade graduation was held outdoors on June 9th. The last day of school for the 20-21 year was June 14th. Summer school will run for six weeks between July 6 to August 13 from 8:00am to 4:00pm each weekday. Transportation, breakfast, snack and lunch will be provided. The curriculum will be morning’s scholastics and afternoon indoor or outdoor activities. Westminster is moving ahead with plans to organize their own school board. The board will work with the current WNUESD board for the financial separation of Westminster school from Athens/Grafton school. On August 30, 2021 there will be a vote in each of the three towns as to whether each will accept the agreement of financial separation that is presented by the board. If the plan is voted through, Westminster and Athens/Grafton will officially separate for the school year 2022-2023. The budget committee met with Gary Fox to discuss grants for the town. He asked that a list of grants needed be prepared. Darlene has applied for certification for an ARPA grant.. Tina asked why is was needed to pay someone to help with grants when Dennis and Sandi volunteered to help with grants. Tom asked it the town had already applied for some grants. Darlene stated they had. David made the motion to hire Gary Fox on and hourly basis to help the town with securing grants. Janet seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried.

David made the motion to recess and reconvene at the town garage to view the mailboxes and stone wall. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried.

David called the meeting back to order at the town office at 8:37pm.

David made the motion to rescind the letter pertaining to the mailboxes until plans are put in place in changing the driveway to the town garage. The mailboxes will remain in place and will be brought back up at another time, if needed. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. Janet opposed. Darlene will notify the residents by letter to rescind the decision at this point in time and to leave the mailboxes as is.

Warrants and mail: Denise questioned the invoice for the parts for the backhoe. Matt is checking into an extended warranty for the backhoe. The warrants were signed. Danny stated the board should look into replacing the backhoe sooner than planned. Janet stated she had asked Matt to get prices and how much the trade-in would be good for. The mail was reviewed.

Darlene will send a letter to the WNESU about the school materials that were left in the elementary school.

Roads: Darlene read a report from Matt. He stated that everything is going good and looks good. They have been dealing with a lot of small mechanical issues with the backhoe. The road project on Brookline road is moving slower than anticipated due to breakdowns. The over the road mower is coming the first week in August. Tom asked about the paving on Bemis hill that is undermining.

David made the motion to sign the contract for the generator from HB Energy. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried.

Executive Session: At 9:01 David made the motion to move into executive session to discuss a legal matter where premature knowledge would clearly place the town of Athens at a substantial disadvantage. Janet seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. The question was asked and answered if it was about Taylor Hill. At 9:15 David made the motion to move out of executive session. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. No decisions were made in executive session. No motions had to be made.

Further Business: Krista asked again a link be available for the next board meeting. Tom asked about wood chips being available to townspeople. A policy for how much each individual could take out was discussed. David will check with Matt to see if any are needed for the town. Tom asked about taking the camper trailer and fencing that came from the tax sale out. David made the motion Tom be allowed to take out the trailer and fencing from the tax sale. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. There being no further business David made the motion to adjourn. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 9:30pm.