

Athens City Council  
Committee Meeting  
Thursday, April 8, 2021

Mayor Bob Dowell opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. Clerk Cindy McFarland called roll. Those in attendance were Mayor Bob Dowell, and Aldermen: Amy Chernowsky, Rachel Lantz, and Butch Nichols. Alderman Chris Reichert was absent. Alderman Angella Thompson arrived at 7:30pm. Persons in the audience included Public Works Superintendent Derrick Fritz, Office Manager Nicole McCormick, Gary Richardson, Linda Wasilewski, Joe Crowe, Athens Police Officer Chris Thomas, Treasurer Ryan Seifert, Norman Flowers, Darren Humphres, and Alan Keller from the Stahl Foundation.

Mayor Dowell said that some of tonight's agenda items will be moved to Monday's agenda since there is a lot to be discussed and we will need everyone present for the discussion. Items moved to Monday's agenda were #2-Recap of City information, #7-Water improvements report and recommendations, #8-Brush pick-up modifications, and #11-Budget including library information. Mayor Dowell presented the Police Report. Ryan Seifert presented the Treasurer's report. Public Works Superintendent Derrick Fritz presented the Public Works and Fleet Report. Office Manager Niccole McCormick presented the Office Manager's report including a recommendation to raise the minimum past due for water shut-offs from \$25 to \$50. Mayor Dowell asked the council about this change and the council agreed that this is a good idea. Alderman Nichols noted that we will need to make an amendment to the water ordinance. Mayor Dowell said he would like to take a moment to recognize Joe Crowe who recently retired as the Athens-Fancy Prairie Fire Chief. Mayor Dowell said that Joe has been a great leader and mentor. He presented Joe with a recognition plaque.

On the discussion agenda was the upcoming Salute to America. Norm Flowers from the American Legion approached the podium and asked if the city was having fireworks this year. Mayor Dowell explained that our incoming Mayor, Chris Reichert, had spoken with Darin from the Boar's Nest. Darin is offering to help to generate donations from other local businesses to offset the cost to the city. We usually use funds from the gaming fund for fireworks, but the gaming fund has really taken a hit due to Covid. Norm explained that the Legion also has struggled due to Covid. Norm said that if the city does have fireworks, then Salute to America will take place at the park. The Legion already has a band set for the event which is scheduled for July 3. Mayor Dowell said there will be more discussion on this on Monday night.

Next on the agenda was the Ward 2 appointment. Mayor Dowell spoke to our attorneys about this. The problem is that, in the next administration, there won't be enough members sworn in for a quorum to vote on appointing another member. The attorneys have recommended that the council vote on Monday night to appoint a replacement for Alderman Buhr's position which would take effect that night and go for a two-year term. Greg Hoffman expressed interest in the position. The vote for his appointment will be on the agenda for Monday night.

License fee adjustments due to Covid was the next discussion topic. The Mayor explained that in 2020, all annual license fees such as liquor, gaming, and beer garden licenses, that were due on March 31, had already been paid. Then Covid hit and most businesses had to shut down. The Mayor asked the council at that time if adjustments should be made to these fees. Mayor Dowell said that some businesses had to shut down completely, like Main Street Gaming. Other businesses stayed open, like Casey's. Alderman Nichols said that if the business did not shut down, there should be no refund. The Mayor said he will have a list of the businesses at the next meeting.

Next, Darren Humphres from AYSA presented an update on the new concession stand for the park. Mayor Dowell explained that The Stahl Foundation had donated \$40,000 last year for this project.

Alan Keller was also present representing the Stahl Foundation. Darren said that two bids have been received. The work will probably start in July. The teardown of the building will be done for free. All interior work will be done by volunteers. Springfield Overhead Doors is donating all the roll-up doors. Alderman Nichols asked about the bids. Darren said that he didn't feel comfortable disclosing the bids just yet, but when all costs and bids are gathered, the information will be shared with the council.

Next was an update on Athens Glory Days and liquor license. The liquor license application is complete and our insurance coverage is set. Mayor Dowell said that in the past, the city has donated funds for wristbands for underprivileged kids, and the money had come from the Gaming fund. There was discussion about the amount. Mayor Dowell asked that the council think about this and it will be on the agenda for Monday night. When the motion is made, the council member can make a motion with a set amount.

The Covid Small Business Stimulus was next on the agenda. One business had applied. The vote for this will be on Monday's agenda.

Under old business was a problem property update. Four of the properties had been put up for sale and all have been sold for full price.

Mayor Dowell said that there are several items on Monday's agenda. Several people have asked about a city clean-up. He said that this should be included in the budget discussion.

The Mayor asked if there was anything else. Alderman Lantz asked about the total of the sale of the properties. Alderman Nichols asked how much the city had spent on the properties. Mayor Dowell is checking on the information. He said that we lost money on the properties but the city is in better shape. Alderman Nichols asked about the property on Main Street that was supposed to be renovated into a restaurant. He is concerned about the structural stability of the building. Public Works Superintendent Derrick Fritz said that we can check it out and write an ordinance violation if there is cause. Alderman Nichols also asked that the large hole at the post office by the telephone pole be filled in. Alderman Thompson said that we are heading into tornado season and we still have a tornado siren that is not working. Mayor Dowell has been working on this. The company is coming out again on Monday to make this repair. Linda Wasilewski asked about a memorial brick at the park for Mr. Gaston. Mayor Dowell said that he believes Tony Doellman is the person in charge of this. Linda also asked if the Long 9 would be opening this summer. Mayor Dowell said that it will be opening soon and information will be on the city website.

Mayor Dowell confirmed that the monthly bills had been reviewed and the council adjourned at 7:53pm.