

Athens City Council
Committee Meeting
Thursday, January 7, 2021
Zoom Meeting ID: 825-300-3670 / Password: Apr9Athens

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: Larry Buhr, Amy Chernowsky, Rachel Lantz, Butch Nichols, Chris Reichert, and Angella Thompson. Persons in the audience included Ginger Newingham, Ryan Seifert, Nicole McCormick, and Gary Richardson.

Mayor Dowell presented the Police Report. Chief Becker is requesting approval to purchase a replacement vehicle for the 2012 Taurus Interceptor, which is the oldest squad car in the fleet. A Dodge Durango AWD Police vehicle has been quoted from Nikles of Petersburg for \$33,384 plus doc fees. Emergency lighting and radio set-up will be approximately \$4,500. Chief Becker is requesting approval to spend \$38,000 in LESO funds to complete this purchase. The plan is to maintain the Taurus for back-up and use by part-time officers. Aldermen Nichols and Buhr suggested also gathering information on trading in the Taurus. The vote for approval of this purchase will be on the agenda for Monday. The Mayor continued the report explaining that new Kenwood Panasonic police radios and the Panasonic Toughbooks were purchased for the police department and reimbursed by the CARES Act. Mayor Dowell presented the Treasurer's Report. We haven't received any payments on the DCCA accounts. The Mayor said that these are in collections and he really doesn't want to write those accounts off since this money could go back into the General fund. The council agreed not to write these accounts off. Mayor Dowell presented the Streets and Alleys Report. There was an issue with the electrical being up to code in the shop. The repair and upgrade should be done by the end of the week. The cost was \$4,900. Treasurer Siefert suggested that this be paid from the Gaming fund rather than the General fund. Alderman Lantz pointed out that we still may need \$25,000 from the Gaming fund for the well and \$2,500 for the small business stimulus. Alderman Nichols said we could borrow from the meter fund. Treasurer Siefert said that we have not yet set up a repayment plan for the meters. Alderman Buhr agreed that the funds should come from the Gaming fund. Mayor Dowell presented the Water Report, and there was no Sewer Report. Michael Lockwood is requesting \$88,000 from the Meter Deposit fund to replace 550 meters. The bases for the meters are an additional \$50 each. We have been working on tracking down our water loss. We're hoping that this is due to the old meters, so replacing them would more accurately track water usage. If we are correct that the meters are the problem, we should be able to pay this back in a matter of months. If not, we will at least save many hours of manpower every month by eliminating rereads. Alderman Nichols said that he would only want to purchase the number of meters that could be replaced in a month. Alderman Thompson asked if we are making more money from the meters we have already replaced. The Mayor replied affirmatively that customers have called to report that their water bills have gone up since the new meters were installed. Mayor Dowell said that we've had Rural Water come out and check for leaks and we've had the plant recalibrated in order to try to recoup these water losses. Alderman Nichols said that if the meter replacement doesn't work, we've got an undetected leak somewhere. Alderman Reichert asked if there was a discount for buying a larger quantity of meters at one time. Mayor Dowell said there is no discount. Aldermen Reichert and Lantz agreed that we should only buy as many as we need per month. Mayor Dowell said he will put together a schedule for the monthly meter purchases. Nicole McCormick and Mayor Dowell presented the Office Manager's Report. Mayor Dowell presented the Vehicle Maintenance/Fleet report. Ginger Newingham presented the Library report and shared attendance numbers for the Library. She asked that people visit the Athens Municipal Library Facebook page for more Library facts and information. She reported that the Fill the Bus Food Drive was a success. Two truck beds of food and almost \$1000 were donated to the Athens Food Bank before Christmas. Also, planning is going on now for the summer reading program and other fun activities at the Library.

First on the discussion agenda was an update on Covid-19 and on the Main Street creek project. Mayor Dowell said that Steve Digiovanna has completed the work at the creek on Main Street and the area looks really nice. Steve donated the money he earned on this job back to the city Covid-19 Stimulus Fund. Alderman Nichols suggested a plaque for all Steve has done for the community.

Next was an update on the upcoming election. Mayor Dowell said that there had been concern about whether a city employee could also run for office. City employees are running for the city Clerk position and in the contested Treasurer race. Mayor Dowell consulted with the city attorney and the State Board of Elections for clarification. He said that there would only be a problem if a city employee wished to run for Mayor or Alderman. Mayor Dowell took this opportunity to thank Alderman Buhr and Alderman Nichols for their 24 years of service on the council.

The Small Business Covid-19 Relief Stimulus was next on the agenda. Alderman Reichert gave a summary of current funds available, donations received, and past funds dispersed to our local businesses. The application for future stimulus money will be updated with the stipulation that if any business that is granted stimulus funds from our city leaves the city within twelve months will be required to repay the funds. Treasurer Siefert said that there are funds left in the Fall Festival account that could be donated to the relief fund. Mayor Dowell said that he will reach out to the Fall Festival committee and see what they want done with these funds.

Next the Mayor shared suggestions from our city engineers. They are working on grants for water distribution improvement. They would like a water rate study, and to continue work on our water loss problem. Also, we could take a serious look at a \$5 per month water surcharge that Sgt. Derrick Fritz had recommended. The engineers recommend a mentor for our water employee, Michael Lockwood. Alderman Lantz said that she would want to see what happens with the new water meters before adding another charge on to the citizen's water bills.

Last on the agenda, Mayor Dowell said that the vote on the resolution for the bond abatement for the upcoming year will be on Monday's agenda.

Under old business was an update on problem properties. Mayor Dowell said that the properties we have for sale have not been listed yet. This is a bigger process than what we had thought. Mayor Dowell is gathering information from realtors. All our properties except the Squires house can be sold at any time since they have already been offered up for bid.

The Mayor asked if there was any new business and the council adjourned at 8:15pm.