

Athens City Council
Regular Meeting
Monday, April 13, 2020
Zoom Meeting ID 825-300-3670/Password: Apr9Athens (if needed)

Mayor Bob Dowell opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending during these trying times. The Meeting was held via Zoom technology due to the COVID-19 Executive Order issued by Governor JB Pritzker. The City attorney has approved this. Clerk Cindy McFarland called roll. Those in attendance were Mayor Bob Dowell, Clerk Cindy McFarland, and Aldermen: Larry Buhr, Amy Chernowsky, Rachel Lantz, Butch Nichols, Chris Reichert, and Angella Thompson. Persons in the audience included Treasurer Ryan Seifert, Gary Richardson, Office Manager Nicole McCormick, Police Chief Tim Becker, Water Clerk Sarah McCart, and Fire Chief Joe Crowe.

Mayor Dowell said that he did not have the wastewater report yet. He will provide it to the council by email when available. Motion made by Alderman Buhr, seconded by Alderman Reichert, to approve the police, treasurers', water, streets and alleys, cemetery, fleet maintenance, and office manager's reports. Ayes: Buhr, Chernowsky, Lantz, Nichols, Reichert, and Thompson. Motion passed.

Motion made by Alderman Chernowsky, seconded by Alderman Lantz, to approve the March council meeting minutes and the payment of the March bills. All ayes. Motion passed.

The next topic up for vote was to proceed with the plans to sub-divide the old ballpark and donate the section along Cedar Street to the Old West Cemetery. Mayor Dowell said that he might have moved too quickly on this. He said that there are three houses along there, and he had not spoken to those residents. He spoke to one resident today and that person was not completely happy with the plan. Mayor Dowell apologized and said that he will speak to each resident. Alderman Nichols asked if notices would need to be sent out and zoning changes made. The Mayor affirmed both. Alderman Lantz said that the man that mows the cemetery checked out the additional area to mow and said that he would need to increase his price and possibly get a new mower. Mayor Dowell said that the city can continue mowing that area this year. With the COVID emergency and the need to have a zoning meeting, this could take a few months. The Mayor said that he is concerned that the cemetery is getting full, but he also thinks the wishes of the residents in that area should be taken into consideration. Alderman Nichols said that he also thinks a fence line should be put up there as well. Mayor Dowell asked if the council would like to postpone this vote. Alderman Buhr proposed that we table the issue for now. All agreed.

The next topic up for vote was to give the Mayor authority to pay the monthly bills during the COVID-19 shut-down. Mayor Dowell explained that this vote would not be necessary if the council would like to continue with the process as we did this month. The Mayor would leave the bills in the wall file at City Hall after the monthly Thursday meeting and the council members could review the bills at their convenience over the weekend before the vote on the following Monday night. The council agreed that this process worked well.

Motion made by Alderman Nichols, seconded by Alderman Buhr, to approve the clean-up of the creek along South Main Street for approximately \$1,800 to be paid from the new Streets fund. The work will be done by DiGiovanna Trucking. All ayes. Motion passed.

The next topic up for vote was to move forward with the possible purchase of the properties located at Jefferson and Adams. This was not originally on the agenda, but the Mayor received a couple calls from council members about the issue. The Mayor explained that this vote would just be to proceed to try to get the best deal for the city on the properties. We would start with offering \$12,000 for the

properties, to be paid from the LESO funds. This would not include waiving any fines. This would just be a starting point. Motion made by Alderman Buhr, seconded by Alderman Chernowsky, to proceed with the possible purchase of the Jefferson and Adams Street properties, for the offering price of \$12,000 to be paid from the LESO funds, with no waiving of any fees owed. Ayes: Aldermen Buhr, Chernowsky, Lantz, and Reichert. Nays: Aldermen Nichols and Thompson. Motion passed.

Mayor Dowell said that the next topic up for vote was to increase Brian Lewis' pay. He has been employed with the city for a year now and is doing a good job. Mayor Dowell asked what the council would like the hourly pay to be. Alderman Reichert asked what his current pay rate is. Mayor Dowell said it is \$12.36 per hour now. Alderman Buhr suggested \$14.50 per hour and made the motion. Motion seconded by Alderman Chernowsky to approve the performance-based wage increase for our Water/Streets employee, Brian Lewis to \$14.50 per hour. Ayes: Aldermen Buhr, Chernowsky, Lantz, Reichert, and Thompson. Nays: Alderman Nichols. Motion passed.

The Mayor said he had a couple more items. First, he asked the council to take some time to look over the budget. We may need to have a meeting later in the month to finalize it. He asked that everyone contact him, Derrick, or Nicole if there are any questions. Alderman Nichols said that we need to pull the Fall Festival information out of the budget since all those funds have been transferred. Mayor Dowell confirmed this would be removed. Alderman Buhr asked about the funds appropriated for the fireworks. Mayor Dowell said since we are unsure as to whether the fireworks or Salute to America event will be rescheduled, he would like to leave it as is to be safe if we do decide to use it. Next, Mayor Dowell said that he would like to discuss a possible burning ban because some other communities have done this, and the COVID-19 virus is a respiratory virus and leaf burning can aggravate it. The Mayor said that he is torn because this would be the government stepping in yet again to tell people what they cannot do. Mayor Dowell asked what the council thinks about a voluntary burning ban. Alderman Buhr said that the people he has spoken to would be for a burning ban only if the city paid for the bags and picked up the bags of leaves. Mayor Dowell checked into the price of the bags and they can get very expensive for people with lots of trees or a bigger yard. Ryan Seiffert said that a lot of people don't clean up their yards and then they blow into other people's yards. Then the people who do clean up their yards would need to buy the bags. Alderman Thompson said that burning leaves is fine as long as it is not windy. Alderman Buhr said people should not be burning after a certain time at night and he wants the police to make the people put those fires out. The council agreed on a voluntary ban. Alderman Reichert asked that the city pick up the leaves if people do choose to bag them. Mayor Dowell said he will add this to the voluntary burning ban notice.

Last was the raffle drawing for the weather radio. Mayor Dowell drew the name of Mark Shaffer.

The Mayor thanked everyone and the meeting adjourned at 7:34pm.