

Athens City Council
Committee Meeting
Thursday, August 6, 2020

Mayor Bob Dowell opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. He noted that masks and hand sanitized have been made available for those in attendance Clerk Cindy McFarland called roll. Those in attendance were Mayor Bob Dowell, and Aldermen: Larry Buhr, Amy Chernowsky, Rachel Lantz, Butch Nichols, and Chris Reichert. Alderman Angella Thompson was absent. Persons in the audience included Gary Richardson, Linda Wasilewski, Allen Tedrow, Office Manager Nicole McCormick, and Robbie Bluett.

Mayor Dowell presented the Police Report and said that Sgt. Fritz has been working on several properties regarding ordinance violations. Mayor Dowell also presented the Treasurer's Report, and said the Streets Report will be available Monday. Robby Bluett presented the Water and Sewer Reports. The cleaning of well #5 and the use of explosives to break up the sediment around it was discussed, as well as, low water alarms for the water tower. Alderman Lantz said the Cemetery meeting would be held on Monday. Nicole McCormick presented the Office Manager's Report. She explained that our current collections company has not been very successful in collecting on overdue water accounts, ordinance violations, or DECCA loans, so we will be looking into getting a more aggressive collections company. Also, we have had some trouble with our billing system and their customer service. Nicole will be researching new companies for compatibility and pricing. Mayor Dowell said that the Fleet Report will be available Monday.

The first discussion topic on the agenda was the recent vandalization at the park by juveniles. The Mayor explained that there was graffiti, outlet covers had been broken off, and tables had been turned over. There were two adults present with the juveniles and the activity had all been captured on security cameras. So far, six juveniles and two adults have been identified and banned from the park. Mayor Dowell said that he has applied with the Stahl Foundation for more security cameras.

Next on the agenda was an update on water information. Mayor Dowell said that the CWLP person that we had been working with is starting a new job so we will no longer have that person. Prairie State will submit a bid for two more hydrants at the water plant. We had talked about new engineers after talking to Williamsville Mayor, but everyone has been on vacation or out due to COVID so hopefully the Mayor can meet with them next week. Our engineers had asked about doing a financial study, but this may be a conflict of interest. Mayor Dowell contacted our auditors and they said they were not interested and suggested our engineers. Mayor Dowell said that he thinks it would be best to have an independent group conduct the study rather than anyone with ties to the city.

Mayor Dowell said that he had a couple other things. We have been working with AYSA on a bid for a new concession stand to submit to the Stahl Foundation. The Mayor said this bid will go to the council first. The new pet pantry is up and running at the park. The Farmers Market is picking up. It is held every Wednesday at the park from 4-7pm. Linda Wasilewski suggested applying to the Stahl Foundation for improvements to the old park.

Under old business was an update on problem properties. Mayor Dowell said that we had a court case in which the property owner did not show up. Our attorney will place a lien on the property. Alderman Nichols asked about the property on Washington Street. Mayor Dowell said that the city is mowing it and a lien has been on property. Someone is trying to purchase the property on Hickory Street. Mayor Dowell said that we have several properties in town that are empty but are not for sale. He suggested researching an ordinance that would require a certain time frame that a property must be lived in. Alderman Reichert said that he is not in favor of this. He gave an example in that if there is a death in a family, it may take quite some time to get the house cleaned out and listed for sale. He said that he would be more in favor of ensuring better property maintenance and using discretion on a

case by case basis. Mayor Dowell said that he is not in favor of more government oversight but that he does really want to see the city cleaned up.

The Mayor asked if anyone had anything else. Alderman Lantz said that people have still been asking about a city-wide clean-up. Alderman Nichols said that this really wouldn't be safe for our city employees during the COVID outbreak. The Mayor said that maybe we could try for spring and have the clean-up after the yard sales and offer curbside pick-up. Alderman Reichert said that he had a few things. First, he asked about the 24% delivery fee for limestone delivery. Alderman Nichols explained that other companies charge even more. Next, Alderman Reichert said that he had received complaints that people are required to opt out of the Direct Energy agreement rather than opting in. Mayor Dowell explained that this is regulated by the Illinois Congress. Lastly, he asked if we had checked into lower priced help wanted advertising. Nicole explained that we had shopped around but other options were priced higher.

The council adjourned to Executive Session at 7:45pm and returned to the meeting room to adjourn at 8:12pm.