

Athens City Council
Committee Meeting
Thursday, March 5, 2020

Mayor Bob Dowell opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. 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 Linda Wasilewski, Derrick Fritz, Ryan Seifert, Gary Richardson, Kyle Hopps, Mike Coonrod, Robbie Bluett, Michael Lockwood, Hayley Yoakum, Beth Gouge, Dexter Gouge, Nicole McCormick, Jackie Lindsay, Lisa Bohannon, Lyndsey Bosie, and Craig Jensen.

Sgt. Fritz presented the Police and the Vehicle Maintenance Reports. Ryan Seifert presented the Treasurer Report. Mayor Dowell said the Streets Report will be available Monday, and that the places where the gas-powered jetter was tested to improve drainage are draining well. The vote to purchase the jetter will be on Monday's agenda. Robbie presented the Water and Wastewater Reports. He said that 50 of the new meters had arrived and have been switched out. Mayor Dowell said this will significantly decrease our meter re-reads. Treasurer Seifert suggested that we pay as much as we can on the meters from our checking account so as to lessen the amount we borrow from the meter fund. This will decrease the time needed to pay off the new meters. Alderman Lantz presented the cemetery report. She said that we need to start taking bids for mowing, and that there will be a tree planted at the cemetery dedicated to Ron Canterbury. Mayor Dowell said that we have had a 2-year contact in the past for mowing and asked the council what they thought of a 3-year contract. The council was interested, and the Mayor said there will be a 30-day bid notice in the paper. Nicole McCormick presented the Office Manager Report.

First on the agenda were presentations from individuals and businesses. Lisa Bohannon and Lyndsey Bosie stepped to the podium to speak about the Glory Days Festival which will replace the Fall Festival this year. They explained that the festival would be held May 7-9, 2020 and provided a handout to the committee showing the daily schedule of activities, entertainment, and competitions planned for the weekend. This schedule is available on Facebook and on the city website. Lisa explained that the festival will need liability insurance and a liquor license. Jackie Lindsay will assist with the liquor license. Mayor Dowell said he will check with the Municipal League on the liability insurance. Lisa went on to say that she wants to get the word out that this festival will replace the Fall Festival and the dates have been changed due to previous calendar conflicts and in hopes of bringing out more people. The committee is reaching out to area businesses for sponsorships.

Next Mayor Dowell asked the owner of the Blue Dog Barber Shop to step forward and introduce himself. Dexter Gouge approached the podium and introduced himself saying that he is the owner of the new barbershop on Main Street. He went to school in Decatur and spent some time working in the Netherlands. His style is old school classic haircuts and hot towel shaves. Appointments can be made on-line. Dexter said business has been good. His schedule fills up fast, but Thursdays are slow. The Mayor introduced the owner of another new business in town, Mike Coonrod, the owner of the Athens eBay Consignment Shop, also located on Main Street. Mike spoke from the podium saying that he went to school here in Athens, grew up in Menard County, served in the military as a combat vet, and then has been in business for himself doing on-line sales for about twenty years. His shop has been open for two months, business is doing well and picking up, and he is expanding his hours. Mike said that he can buy your items outright or you can consign them. Mayor Dowell welcomed each new business to town and said to let him know if there is anything the city can do to help them out.

For the first discussion topic, Mayor Dowell said that we have been looking at what we are spending on legal notices. For example, one previous ordinance legal notice cost \$305 to run in the paper, another notice that had to run for 30 days cost \$1190. The Mayor reached out to the State Journal

Register and was told that the cost is \$15 per inch so the price will vary. The Shopper no longer runs legal notices. We sent the Illinois Times the example notices for pricing and found that the two previously mentioned notices would cost \$175 and \$110. The Mayor suggested that we try the Illinois Times for the upcoming cemetery bid notices since the price is considerably lower. Alderman Nichols said that we will also run the bid notice on the city website.

The Salute to America Celebration was the next topic. The date this year is June 27. Mayor Dowell asked the council for their input on how much the city should spend for the fireworks. Should we reduce from the \$6000 spent last year to \$4000? The American Legion would try to raise the additional funds through donations. Alderman Buhr said to stay at the \$6000. Alderman Reichert said that we may want to stay at the \$6000 since this event is so close to the Glory Days Celebration and we are asking for local sponsors and donations for that as well. Alderman Chernowsky suggested \$5000. Alderman Thompson said that maybe we shouldn't spend any extra money when our streets are not fixed. Alderman Buhr said that we've always paid for this from the Gaming Fund. Sargent Fritz provided information on the status of the gaming fund. Alderman Nichols said that if we are going to cut too much, maybe we shouldn't have a show. Jackie Lindsay suggested another local fireworks company. Mayor Dowell replied that the company we use is also local. The Mayor asked the council if they would like to gather more information and put this on next month's agenda. The council agreed.

The next discussion topic was the cemetery mowing contract, which had already been covered. Mayor Dowell said that he just wants to remind the council that the new budget is coming up. Alderman Lantz had asked about another city-wide clean-up. Mayor Dowell checked, and we had budgeted \$4000 for our last city-wide clean-up and it had actually cost \$14,500. Mayor Dowell said that we should look at cleaning up some areas of the city ourselves, and we should all take care of our own places as well.

Under old business was an update on problem properties, Mayor Dowell said that we have had a couple court cases this last month, fines were levied, and possible jail times were levied. Specifics will be discussed in Executive Session since this is litigation. Mayor Dowell said that he has spent entire days in court and with property owners on these issues. Sargent Fritz stood up and showed the council four large files of ongoing litigation cases concerning problem properties in town. Sargent Fritz proposed that an Alderman from each ward accompany him to properties in their own ward to speak to the individual owners of about thirty more problem properties in town. Sargent Fritz explained that we would like the citizens of our town to understand that the city does not want to cite the property owners. We are not doing this to raise money. We just want the city to look nice and for everyone to be responsible for their own property. Alderman Nichols said that he saw that "For Sale" signs have gone up on some of the problem properties. Mayor Dowell said that the city has placed liens on these properties so that they cannot be sold until they are cleaned up, in compliance, and all fines have been paid.

Next under old business was the vacant lot properties. Mayor Dowell said that at budget time, if we appropriate funds for those projects, according to our attorney, it will fall under beautification of the neighborhood: removing the old houses from abandoned properties in violation. Therefore, we can use LESSO funds if the council would like to go that route. There are no modular home companies in our area, but we would like to use local businesses. The Mayor suggested that we get prices on modular homes and then get bids from local companies to see if a home can be built for the same cost. If not, we could use local people for the electrical or possibly a garage on the property. Mayor Dowell said that we will probably not make money on the projects, but we will improve the neighborhoods and have future income from taxes and utilities.

Mayor Dowell said that the Census will begin April 4th which is being publicized and the committee is working on getting the word out.

Mayor Dowell said that before we do the weather radio raffle, he did want to share some information about the grocery store going up for auction. Mayor Dowell said that, according to GIS, the city owns about one quarter of that lot. Also, the State of Illinois owns another two parts of that lot that may also have been turned over to the city when Hargave Street was turned over to the city. Mayor Dowell has contacted the administrator of the Menard County GIS to check on this. The Mayor has also contacted County Market to see if they are interested. If anyone has any other ideas for the lot, please let the mayor know.

Mayor Dowell said that he and Butch has received a couple calls from people requesting that the time to pay for water shut-offs and still be turned on that day be changed to a later time than 1pm. Mayor Dowell gave a few reasons why people may not pay in time. Nicole McCormick said that the person receives a shut-off notice and then the utility clerk also calls the person to remind them. Michael Lockwood said that no one that was shut off this month was a person who was not familiar with the process. Alderman Nichols said that we also cannot make the payment cut-off time so late that the city is paying overtime for the water staff to drive to each location to turn the water back on. Nicole is also checking with the bank to see if we can set up so that customers can pay their bill automatically from their checking account to make the process easier. The council concurred that the payment time would stay the same.

Lastly, Mayor Dowell said that four houses on Hickory Street are interested in city water. Our engineer is checking to see the cost and Robbie is checking other specifics. The Mayor will bring the information back to the council and hopefully we will have four new water customers.

Jackie Lindsay said that the EPA currently has some grants for forgiveness for water project loans. Mayor Dowell said that we are working on this and we are really hoping.

Last was the drawing for the weather radio giveaway in conjunction with Athens being a Storm Ready Community. Marjery May was the winner. Congratulations!

That ended the agenda for the evening. The Mayor thanked everyone and asked for a motion to adjourn to executive session. Motion made by Alderman Buhr, seconded by Alderman Lantz, to adjourn to executive session at 8:24pm. The council returned from executive session at 9:05pm and adjourned.