

Athens City Council
Committee Meeting
Thursday, May 7, 2020
Zoom Meeting ID: 825-300-3670 / Password: Apr9Athens

Mayor Bob Dowell opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. The Meeting was held via Zoom technology due to the COVID-19 Executive Order issued by Governor JB Pritzker. 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, and Dexter Gouge.

Chief Becker presented the Police Report and noted that his staff have been making extra patrols around town. More speeders have been noticed and the police will begin making traffic stops and enforcing speed limits again today. There has been a rash of vehicle break-ins lately and 2 cars were stolen. Both vehicles were recovered, and suspects have been identified. Several personal items that were stolen have been recovered and the investigation continues. Alderman Lantz asked about the FOID card violation shown on the police report. Chief Becker explained that when a person's FOID card is revoked, the local police are notified and will seize the FOID card from the person and turn it into the Illinois State Police. Chief Becker also said that he had recommended Officer Morgan Gum for a lifesaving award for actions taken during an attempted suicide call in April.

Next on the agenda was the Treasurer's Report. Mayor Dowell took a moment to explain that he had also provided for the council a plan for \$232,484 of street maintenance that needs to be done over the next three to four years. He said that he knows we do not have the money for this now. Treasurer Seifert presented the treasurer's report. Mayor Dowell presented the Streets Report and went on to explain in more detail some of the road work needs. He suggested holding back some of this year's Motor Fuel funds for next year since we will probably get less Motor Fuel funds next year. He asked the council to think about this and bring forth any suggestions on funding our road maintenance needs. Mayor Dowell continued with the Water Report and Wastewater Report. He said that he had approved an emergency purchase of a DR 900 meter for \$1,491. This meter had quit working and was needed right away. Alderman Lantz presented the West Cemetery information. She said that Linda Wasilewski needs \$100 to purchase the markers for the Veteran's graves. Mayor Dowell presented the Office Manager Report explaining that there has been no water shut-offs this month due to the Covid-19 emergency. Office staff have been calling those with past due accounts to remind them of their overdue balance. There have been several meters still not reading correctly on the driving route. The Mayor and office staff will meet, using social distancing, with Badger Meter and CUSI tomorrow to remedy this. Mayor Dowell presented the Fleet Management report. Then he explained that we will be suspending the presentations from individual city businesses until the Covid-19 emergency has passed.

First on the agenda was an update on Covid-19 future steps. Mayor Dowell said that he had asked the council how they felt about Peoria's plan to open-up. Meanwhile the Governor came out with his plan for Illinois. After talking with the Municipal League, attorneys, insurance companies, our representatives, businesses, and the Department of Public Health, Mayor Dowell said that if we let businesses open up before the Governor deems that it is time, the city could be liable if things get worse. Also, the Department of Public Health could go after the licenses of these businesses and/or levy heavy fines if they go against the Executive Order. Mayor Dowell said that he felt that we really needed to look into this because businesses are hurting. However, he said that we would be premature to do anything other than what the Governor is recommending. We are now in the Governor's Phase two of his plan to reopen. We are in Region 3 and we do not yet know who will be in charge of our region. Businesses are getting ready to reopen when we are allowed to move to

Phase 3. Mayor Dowell asked that council for their opinions or ideas. Alderman Reichert thanked the Mayor for looking out for our businesses and for looking at other alternatives. He agreed that we should stay with the Governor's plan. Alderman Nichols also agreed. Mayor Dowell said that we are all on the same page that we want our businesses to prosper. Some businesses did not qualify for financial assistance and will not be able to survive. Representative Butler had told the Mayor that they are looking at another type of plan to help those businesses that did not qualify for anything else. Alderman Thompson said that she believes that the Governor is over-reaching. Walmart, Menards, and Lowes are all open. The workers at McDonalds are working the drive through and using the same gloves to serve every meal. To say that if we do anything to help our own businesses open, we are going to put the entire city at risk, is an overreach. We need to do anything we can to get these businesses open versus conceding that it is not possible. Alderman Thompson continued, saying that it is not okay with her, as a small business owner, to concede. Mayor Dowell said that he has been looking for other funding options for our small businesses. We can't let our businesses open without an OK from our attorney, insurance company, and the council. Alderman Thompson said that she believes that small businesses would open more safely than the larger chain stores because the small business owner has their own lives, livelihood, reputation, and their own insurance policy on the line. Mayor Dowell said that he understands but the people that protect the city say they can't OK it, so he doesn't see how we can OK them opening. Alderman Thompson asked the Mayor if he had asked our attorney and insurance company how a store like Walmart can open more safely than a small business. Mayor Dowell said that everyone he had asked agreed with what you're saying. However, if there were a legal battle, we have very limited funds to fight a legal battle. Larger communities or companies may have more funds to fight these battles. Alderman Buhr said that the Villas in Sherman had four more deaths today and until this all get straightened out, we are going to have to go along with the Governor's plan. Alderman Thompson said that it is not alright that small businesses are being held to a different standard than larger businesses.

The budget was next on the agenda and each council member was provided a copy. Mayor Dowell said that the Fall Festival information will fall off in next year's budget. Alderman Buhr asked about the money we budgeted for fireworks. Mayor Dowell said that we will most likely not be able to have fireworks this year due to the COVID-19 guidelines. Alderman Nichols had clarifying questions about the Low Prairie payments and credit card fees. He also asked about a line item in the Police Department LESO section. Mayor Dowell explained that this entry is in case we move forward with putting a modular or spec home on one of our properties. There was clarifying discussion about this line item and the Fall Festival. Mayor Dowell said that he will add this vote to the agenda for Monday night.

Under old business was an update on problem properties. Court has not been in session due to COVID-19. Sgt. Fritz is following up with a few properties. Ryan Seiffert asked about abandoned vehicles. He will contact Sgt. Fritz about this tomorrow. Alderman Nichols told the Mayor about an abandoned property on Washington and an abandoned vehicle on Washington & Mill. Chief Becker said that he will follow up.

Under Public Comments, Dexter Gouge, owner of the Blue Dog Barbershop, spoke to the council and thanked them for all their opinions. He said he would like to be open but, because of his professional license, he cannot open until June 1st. The list of rules that he will have to follow now is five pages long and some of these rules will hurt his business. Also, he was not eligible for unemployment or any of the stimulus funds. He has been surviving on money he made before closing and the sales of gift cards. The Mayor asked if there is anything he can think of that the city can do or has fallen short in doing? Dexter said no, he has been welcomed into a great town and he does not expect anything else. Mayor Dowell said that Dexter is an asset to this community, and he hopes that Dexter's business can make it through this.

Christine McVeigh was the winner of the weather radio. The meeting adjourned at 8:16pm.