

TOWN OF ATHOL
MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN
March 3, 2015 7 P.M.
ROOM 21, ATHOL TOWN HALL

- Present: Chairman Stephen Raymond, Vice Chairman Lee Chauvette, Susannah Lee & Anthony Brighenti. Also Town Manager Shaun Suhoski & Town Counsel Mark Goldstein.
- Call to Order: Raymond called the meeting to order and asked Mayor Mark Hawke to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Minutes: Chauvette made a motion to approve minute from Feb 17, 2015. Brighenti seconded. The motion carried 4-0.
- Permits & Licenses: n/a
- Public Hearing: Raymond opened a public hearing for a joint pole hearing for National Grid and Verizon for a new pole on New Sherborn Road, near the Petersham town line. Chauvette made a motion to approve the easement. Lee seconded. The motion carried 4-0.
Raymond opened a public hearing for a over head easement for the new school construction project off Pleasant St. Chauvette made a motion to approve the easement. Brighenti seconded. The motion carried 4-0.
- Public Comment: n/a
- Town Dept. & Committee Reports:
- General Business: **AOTV Gift Acknowledgment**
Carol Courville and Bonnie Benjamin addressed the Board regarding AOTV's progress with WVAO Radio and the gift the Town of an emergency generator to be located at the High Knob water tower. Courville said the generator will meet both the radio's needs as well as the Town's emergency antennae. The installation was completed on Jan. 5th and has been tested and approved by the Town's Fire, Police, and Water Departments.
Chauvette made a motion to accept with appreciation. Lee seconded the motion carried 4-0.
- Regional Dispatch Inter-Municipal Agreement**
Chauvette recused himself from the meeting as he has a son who is currently employed by the Gardner Police Dept.

(* Documents on file in the Board of Selectmen's office in accordance with the Public Records Division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcmu/rmuidx.htm>) and electronically at <http://www.mytowngovernment.org/01331>

Suhoski presented an overview of how the two communities have been working towards a regional dispatch solution. He said it is the recommendation of himself, the Athol Police and Athol Fire departments to approve a 25 year agreement. He also noted, however, this agreement has multiple "escape hatches" for both communities should things not progress as anticipated.

Chief Anderson addressed the Board's concerns about staffing and service to the public. Chief said he will structure his budget to include two part time administrative staff to man the window and be available to the public from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. After 8 p.m., he said, there will be the option of a Sergeant at the desk or a customer will have to use an interactive screen which will link them to the dispatch in Gardner. He said the way that officers respond to the public will not change.

Mayor Hawke said he was aware that people will be weary of change and knows that leaders in both towns will be getting a lot of questions. He said that questions about the changes are normal and will be helpful because they will help identify possible areas that need more attention.

Hawke said Massachusetts is moving in the direction of regional dispatch in the near future and it is better to come into it voluntarily and while there is grant money available for start up costs. Other advantages include a state of the art work environment, advancement opportunities, and professional development.

Lee asked about whether the Town Manager has met with the Unions affected by the agreement. Suhoski said he has and has agreements with two of the three.

Goldstein said he reviewed the contracts and is satisfied with the language.

Brighenti said he believes this will be a good opportunity for the Town and made a motion to support. Lee seconded. The motion carried 3-0.

Chauvette rejoined the Board at this time.

Annual Town Meeting

Lee made a motion to open the warrant for the Annual Town Meeting and adopt the corresponding schedule.

Selectmen's Reports*: Brighenti, nothing tonight

Lee invited residents to attend a speaking engagement on March 10th at the Athol High School with former Celtic star Chris Herron who is representing the Purple Project, an anti drug campaign.

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She also noted she is participating in a budget update meeting on March 12 at the state house.

Chauvette asked for more information about the former Mobil gas station on Main Street and whether the owners might be encouraged to better maintain the site.

Chairman's Report*: Raymond noted it's been a tough winter and that the public works employees have done well dealing with back to back snow storms, sewer back ups, water main breaks, and frozen pipes.

Town Manager's Report*: Suhoski said bids are due for the Town Hall improvements and he is optimistic they will be on budget.

He said he hopes to have Hampshire Council of Governments at an upcoming meeting to discuss a cooperative buying opportunity for residents.

Suhoski asked the Board for permission to add an insert into the tax bills to encourage homeowners to catch up on their taxes if they have fallen behind.

He said he has met with MIIA's health insurance representatives and is disappointed to learn the Town will face a 10.4 % increase for FY16. Unfortunately, he said he feels it will only be one of several "double digit" increases threatening to choke the FY16 budget.

Finally, Suhoski asked the Board to buy back nine vacation days. He said he has accrued 25 days so far but will be unable to use all of it before the end of the fiscal year. He said there will not be any additional appropriation needed as there is enough money in the budget.

Town Counsel's Report*: Nothing tonight.

Adjournment: 8:10 p.m.

A True Copy Attest:

Heather Brissette

*Related Documents: Agenda 3/7/15; minutes 2/17/15, joint pole hearing request, overhead easement request, AOTV generator gift letter, regional dispatch agreement, annual town meeting schedule, Town Manager's Report.

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