

**TOWN AND VILLAGE OF ATHENS JOINT BOARD MEETING
MINUTES-AUGUST 17, 2022**

PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

PRESENT: Mayor Amy Serrago, Trustee Gail Lasher, Trustee Josh Lipsman, Trustee Rob Scott and Trustee Stephan Bradicich

Village Attorney Tal Rappleyea was also present

Town Supervisor Mike Pironne

ABSENT: Town Council members Mary Brandow, Anthony Paluch, Michael Ragaini, and Shannon Spinner

Mayor Serrago opened the meeting by stating that tonight's meeting was a scheduled joint meeting of the village and town boards. The only member of the town board present is Town Supervisor Mike Pirrone.

The main reason for scheduling tonight's meeting was to negotiate new lease terms.

Supervisor Pirrone informed those in attendance that in order to understand tonight's lack of presentation by town board members one must understand how Town Law works and Supervisor Pirrone referenced Section 52 of Town Law.

Supervisor Pirrone stated that the town supervisor manages the town and appoints a financial employee, which is the town bookkeeper. The supervisor may also get rid of or fire the town bookkeeper. The supervisor at his pleasure employs the town bookkeeper.

The town board demanded that the supervisor allow the bookkeeper to enter into tonight's executive session. The Supervisor states that there is no basis in Town Law that the board demand this of the supervisor. Again, the bookkeeper is an employee and works at the direction of the Supervisor only.

The Supervisor informed the board that he would not allow the town bookkeeper to enter into tonight's scheduled executive session and then they refused to attend the meeting tonight. The Board gave him no option 'either I allow the bookkeeper to enter into Executive Session or they will stay home'. The Supervisor said "no". All of the town board members stayed home.

Mayor Serrago stated that those present will go on with the meeting as this is a meeting that the people have wanted to see take place for a while.

PUBLIC:

1. *Paulette Miller, resident of the Village*

Ms. Miller stated that she was going to thank the Village and Town Board for holding this joint meeting but since none of the town council members have shown up she will still say 'thanks' to those that did.

First question- where does the issue of Eminent Domain stand? Is it a done deal?

Supervisor Pirrone replied 'no'. The public hearing which was held by the Town is still open. All those comments and the 60 letters received by the town board are part of the record and have been forwarded to town board members and the town attorney.

The joint comprehensive plans (Village and Town of Athens) completed in 2007 and 2020 will also be addressed as part of the process.

Second question - Ms. Miller also stated that she was led to believe that there were never any plans drawn up for the community center after attending the last town board meeting. Since then she has attained and has in her possession plans that were produced by an architect/engineer in 2019. Apparently the town board reviewed them at one of their meetings. Even though Supervisor Pirrone was not on the board at the time, is he aware that these plans exist?

Supervisor Pirrone replied that he is aware of them now since he had come across a letter that referenced these plans and contacted the architect. It also has a cost estimate for renovations.

Third question or concern - Ms. Miller reiterated that there are no town board members present to answer her questions but Councilperson Mike Ragaini mentioned that the town is looking at another piece of property for which to build a new government building.

Ms. Miller asked that the town board reconsider the feasibility of using the Community Center building located on First Street in which to house their offices along with the village.

Ms. Miller also noted that the town public hearing regarding the use of eminent domain was very well attended. Most of those in attendance were opposed to the use of eminent domain and building a new building but the town 'right out of the gate' noted that they were looking at another piece of property in which to build a new government building.

Discussion ensued as to whether this building would encompass the village as well as the town or just the town again.

Fourth question - Ms. Miller also inquired whether a property purchased in the village by the town for the purpose of building a municipal/government building would be taken off the tax rolls?

Village Attorney Tal Rappleyea replied 'yes - if it is in the village and it is a municipal building it will become tax exempt.

Supervisor Pirrone referenced the Comprehensive Plans completed in the past and it states that respondents want one building for both governments. It does not state that it be the building located at 2 First Street (Community Center) but somewhere that they can conduct business for both governments.

Ms. Miller concluded that residents from the village and the town should be made aware of the fact that the people they voted into office to represent them chose not to come to this joint meeting so there was hope for some cooperation between the town and the village but it doesn't appear to be there anymore. It would have been wonderful - but they are not here. We should 'scream it from the mountain tops'.

Mayor Serrago stated that the village board has no interest in leaving the Community Center Building. The village board is committed to making this building a workable community space as it has been for many years and generations. It is part of our village's history.

She reiterated that the reason for the meeting this evening was to negotiate lease terms and possibly talk about how we can work together to make it happen. We are one municipality.

The Public questioned whether the matter can be brought to a referendum allowing the people to vote on the matter.

The village attorney stated that New York has very strict rules regarding what can be put on a referendum and this matter would not be one of them.

Trustee Lipsman urged people to continue showing up, writing letters etc.

UPDATE ON VILLAGE MATTERS

The Mayor informed everyone that Tod Bernard and Andrea Smallwood, representing the joint comprehensive implementation committee gave a presentation at the last VB meeting giving an update on what they have been working on. The Mayor will put the information on the website.

Mayor Serrago also stated that the VB is seeking a proposal from Lamont Engineering to conduct a study on the Community Center building.

Mayor Serrago noted that she does not understand the point of building a new building when we presently have a perfectly viable space. It certainly needs work but the VB is beginning to look at some of the issues we need to address and the engineering report will give us a guideline.

She is 'pretty sure' that that is what the community wants. It will be expensive but we are committed to moving forward with the building.

The VB just received the preliminary engineering study for the Water Filtration Plant. It will be on the website.

There is a sign-up sheet for yard sale day.

She has spoken to NYS PARKs regarding the boat launch- Hudson Eagles Recreation Project. The work to be completed is pending the passage of the Bond Act in November. However, due to the fact that our boat launch is small the State may be able to find funding elsewhere in their budget.

The Village is working with the County on the Hazard Mitigation Plan. As is the Town.

There has been a filter failure and communication problem at the WFP.

The County is sharing \$100,000.00 of the monies that they've received from ARPA to help repair the filter malfunction at the village's WFP.

UPDATE ON TOWN MATTERS

Supervisor Pirrone informed everyone that all of the roads that were on their list to pave this year have been completed and the culvert pipe on Schoharie Tpk will be replaced.

He also noted that today the Highway Department was helping the village with a project. There is cooperation between the town and village on other levels.

OTHER BUSINESS

Trustee Lasher would like to go on record as stating that at the last town meeting she asked all town board members if they would attend tonight's meeting and they all responded 'yes'.

Discussion of the former engineering/architectural study of the community center building completed by Briggs ensued.

Mayor Serrago noted that she joined the VB in 2019 and was not privy to the study at the time.

Supervisor Pirrone stated the cost estimate which included an elevator and an addition onto the building was 5 million dollars.

All agreed that many things can be revised on the floor plan.

Merill Roth noted that there are revisions that can be made to plans to optimize space.

Former Mayor Peter Alberti noted that the Community Center gym is an asset to the residents of the town and village and is used by many groups very often. You won't have that in a new building.

Trustee Lipsman noted the CCA program- 2 year program expires at the end of this month. Presently Central Hudson is the lowest price due to their poor customer service but good energy will be watching rates and if they raise then we will act.

Paulette Miller asked if the town was up to date on paying their rent to the Village.

Mayor Serrago - 'yes' paid up through the end of August.

Discussion ensued between the public and the boards regarding costs incurred so far for pursuing eminent domain and studies of the community center (engineering and architectural).

Supervisor Pirrone stated that currently \$35,000.00 (\$20,000.00 on engineer and \$15,000.00 legal) and formerly \$38,000.00 (architectural/engineering study of the building). Total cost \$73,000.00.

A total of \$73,000.00 with nothing to show for it.

A **MOTION** was made by Trustee Lasher, Seconded by Trustee Bradicich, all in favor to enter into Executive Session at 7:07 PM to discuss litigation

A **MOTION** was made by Trustee Scott, seconded by Trustee Lipsman, all in favor to exit Executive Session and resume the regular work meeting

ADJOURN - **MOTION** made by Trustee Lasher, seconded by Trustee Scott, all in favor

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Jo Wynne

Clerk-Treasurer – Village of Athens