Mayor Behnken addressed the board at the beginning of the meeting asking what type of meeting they wished to have. He stated that the last meeting turned into a town hall meeting, and he stated that he had no problem with that meeting what-so-ever. He stated that he would defer to the board as to what style of meeting they would prefer to have, regular or town hall. All trustees replied that they would prefer a regular meeting which follows the Roberts Rules of Order.

6:30 p.m. The regular meeting of the Village Board of Trustees was called to order by Mayor Behnken. A roll call was answered aye by Trustees Newbold, Politsch, Kearns, Wilson, Geppert and Feder. Leo Simburger, Chief of Police, and Chris Remick, Superintendent of Public Works were also present, as well as Sandy Stolte, Village Treasurer.

VISITORS

Devin Brown and RJ Keim were present for observation. Jamie Burkett and Tina Burkemeier were present for observation and to support Trustee Debby Politsch. Mark Schreder thanked the board and the mayor for allowing the town hall style meeting at the last board meeting.

Matt Ridlen was present to ask the board if he would be retaliated against by members of the Board for voicing his opinion at the last board meeting, citing that a letter was sent to Terry Hamon’s full-time employer from the village attorney for behavior he exhibited at the meeting on December 5, 2022. Trustee Politsch stated the attorney had stated somebody should get a copy of the recording to Mr. Hamon’s employer and that he would do that. Trustee Politsch followed up with the attorney on the status of the letter and that is when the letter was sent. Trustee Politsch stated she should not have had to follow up on this, it should have been handled by the attorney and the mayor. Mr. Ridlen asked if that would not be considered harassment and retaliation? Trustee Politsch stated there was no retaliation and the letter was to address the behavior exhibited by Mr. Hamon at the meeting.

Richard Fitzgerald was present to voice his concern for the treatment of employees. He stated that he takes issue over employees being scared to come to work and frightened of reprisal from the village board. He feels the board should support employees and put their wellbeing first. He further stated that police officers and other employees should not be worried about board members taking their photos, looking into their personal vehicles, or making them feel unsafe in the workplace. Mr. Fitzgerald said he still believes there should be a couple of resignations from the board.

Jamie Burkett addressed the mayor, stating that she wanted to clarify that he did not have any problems with the last meeting that occurred. The mayor replied that he did not have a problem with it being a town hall meeting. Burkett stated that the mayor should have stepped in and not let the meeting get out of control. The mayor replied that it was a decision he made, and he would make it again. Burkett stated that this was “sad.”

Terry Politsch expressed his sympathy to the Simburger family. He then stated that he was concerned over the recording of the meeting. He felt it was out of control and should have never happened. Politsch said that Debby (his wife) had spent so much time going to “grant school” and does a lot for the community. He felt that Chief Simburger was out of line.

Jake Renner was present to express that he was concerned about repercussions from Chief Simburger. Officer Renner started to quote a voice message that Chief Simburger had left him using harsh language when the mayor interrupted him and called a point of order for language. Trustee Politsch disputed the point of order with the mayor regarding language after hearing the ‘harsh’ language 500 times at the meeting two weeks ago. Mayor Behnken stood behind the order for language.

READINGOF THE JOURNAL(MINUTES)

The minutes from the previous board meeting had been distributed prior to this meeting for approval.

A negative motion was made by Trustee Politsch, seconded by Trustee Feder, to not approve the minutes. Trustee Feder did not feel it was a fair representation of a three-hour meeting. Trustee Politsch stated that the minutes do not reflect the full extent of the meeting. Mayor Behnken informed Trustee Politsch that a negative motion cannot be made; it does not follow Roberts Rules of Order. Clerk Benwell defended her minutes saying that it was a fair synopsis and followed Roberts Rules of Order. Mayor Behnken reminded the board that the minutes need only consist of actions, motions, seconds, deliberations, and votes. Those are the only things required per municipal code and the minutes included all those components. He informed the board that there would need to be a motion and a second, then they could vote as they choose.

A motion was made by Trustee Feder, seconded by Trustee Newbold, to approve the minutes. Clerk Benwell suggested a roll call vote. A roll call vote was answered nay by all members present.

REPORTS AND COMMUNICATION

MAYOR

Mayor Behnken reported that Village Clerk and Collector, Amy Benwell, had tendered her resignation, effective December 28, 2022. He stated that once a decade he has come across people that are capable of the positions that they are in and that Benwell has done an outstanding job on everything she has done.

The St. Clair County intergovernmental agreement for the new emergency alert system was presented for approval.

A motion was made by Trustee Geppert, seconded by Trustee Newbold, to enter into a twenty-year agreement with St. Clair County for the emergency alert system. A vote was answered aye by all members present.

Mayor Behnken supplied the board with the November and year-to-date financial reports.

A motion was made by Trustee Newbold, seconded by Trustee Geppert, to approve the November and year-to-date financial reports presented by the mayor. A vote was answered aye by all members present.

VILLAGECLERK

Clerk Benwell had nothing to report but wanted to thank Mayor Behnken for his mentorship during her time with the village. She stated that it was a joy to work with chief Simburger and Superintendent Remick, as well as all the other employees. She was proud of what they were able to accomplish in just over a year, but sad that she would not be able to continue her professional endeavors with the organization due to it being an extremely toxic environment. She further emphasized that she had never worked anywhere as toxic as the Village of New Athens in her entire career.

TREASURER’STIME

The Treasurer had nothing to report.

POLICECHIEF

Chief Simburger had nothing to report.

SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND BUILDINGS

Superintendent Remick reported that the new lift station pump would be installed in the

coming days.

AMBULANCE SERVICE DIRECTOR

Director Green was not present.

REPORTOFSTANDINGCOMMITTEES

STREETS AND ALLEYS

Nothing to report.

FINANCE AND AUDIT

Nothing to report.

WATERANDSEWER

Nothing to report.

PERSONNEL

The purchase of gift cards to local businesses for employee Christmas gifts was discussed at a previous committee meeting. It was discussed to give all full-time employees $75 and all part-time employees $40.

A motion was made by Trustee Newbold, seconded by Trustee Feder, to purchase gift cards for employees as Christmas gifts. All full-time employees, $75 and all part-time employees $40. A vote was answered aye by all members present.

PUBLIC PROPERTY AND PARKS

The 2023 Arbor Day Proclamation, proclaiming April 29, 2023, as Arbor Day for the Village of New Athens, was presented by Trustee Politsch. The village is still in the process of becoming a part of Tree City USA.

A motion was made by Trustee Politsch, seconded by Trustee Geppert, to proclaim April 29, 2023, as Arbor Day in the Village of New Athens. A vote was answered aye by all members present.

CEMETERY

Nothing to report.

ORDINANCE

Trustee Politsch reported that 202 St. Clair Street had a retaining wall that was in violation of village ordinances and presenting a safety hazard. The owner has been previously warned verbally and in writing. Mayor Behnken stated he would send the property owner a letter stating they had a specific number of days to fix the issue. Trustee Feder suggested thirty days for a response and ninety days for the repair to be complete. Trustee Newbold further added that if should be subject to the approval of the Superintendent of Public Works. Trustee Newbold also reported that there is a ‘big mud’ hole further up on St. Clair Street.

IMPROVEMENTS AND GRANTS

Nothing to report.

PUBLIC SAFETY/ADA

Trustee Geppert requested that ambulance contracts be put on the agenda for the next Committee of the Whole meeting.

The purchase of a lighted & solar powered school pedestrian crosswalk sign to accompany the new sidewalk along Spotsylvania St. had been discussed previously. Superintendent Remick is to order one from RWTC in Freeburg in the amount of $5,200.

A motion was made by Trustee Politsch, seconded by Trustee Kearns, to purchase a solar powered lighted school pedestrian crosswalk sign from RWTC in Freeburg for the amount of $5,200 and to be paid for from MFT funds. A vote was answered aye by all members present.

MARINA

The marina will be discussed at the next Committee of the Whole meeting.

REPORT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Nothing to report.

COMMUNICATIONS, PETITIONS, RESOLUTIONS, ORDERS AND ORDINANCES

Ordinance No. 2022-07: Funeral Leave was presented by the board. The amended ordinance will allow employees to use three bereavement days within thirty days after the death of covered family, instead of three consecutive days.

A motion was made by Trustee Politsch, seconded by Trustee Geppert, to approve Ordinance 2022-07, amending Funeral Leave in the employee code. A vote was answered aye by all members present.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Trustee Politsch addressed the board because she has been accused of harassment and bullying. She feels she is the one being harassed and bullied. She is offended, hurt, and upset about the things that were said at the meeting two weeks ago and continue to be said. She is not the person that she is being made out to be and feels retaliation and disrespect. The meeting we had two weeks ago was uncalled for and unnecessary. Trustee Politsch stated, “I think we need to work on what are we going to do from here. How are we going to move forward? What are we going to do as a board because we are not a bad board. We have good people. We’ve done good things. People choose not to acknowledge that we’ve done lot of good in the community already and I want that to be known. I’m concerned about retaliation. I’m concerned about my safety and my family’s safety. I just want that to be out there just like everyone else. Thank you for the time.”

Motion to Adjourn

There being no further business, a motion was made by Trustee Newbold, seconded by Trustee Wilson, to adjourn the meeting at 7:14 p.m. A vote was answered aye by all members present.

Amy Benwell, Village Clerk

Joe Behnken, Village President

Corrected minutes per Village Board 01/16/2023

Nancy Ritter, Deputy Clerk