

Minutes
Coventry Town Council Meeting
January 19, 2016
Town Hall Annex

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.

Present: Julie Blanchard, Andy Brodersen, Lisa Thomas, Hannah Pietrantonio, Richard Williams, Matthew O'Brien, Thomas Pope

Also present: John Elsesser, Town Manager; Beth Bauer, Finance Director; Noel Waite, Fire/EMS Administrator

2. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. **Audience of Citizens:**

Christine Pattee, 98 Brookline Road, wanted to comment about the Dorothy Road land swap later on the agenda, as well as a proposed zone change to a piece of property at Daly/Standish Road. She is a member of the Planning & Zoning Commission but is speaking as an individual. She believes the Dorothy Road swap is a win-win solution. Staff worked very hard to make it work and she is delighted. She is very familiar with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development and nodes. In the past Planning & Zoning voted to change a piece of property where a person wanted to put a business in a residential zone to residential/commercial because we felt it was the best and highest use. Daly/Standish came to our attention because it would require a zone change from lake residential to commercial. She had an opinion but the Commission did not issue an opinion. There is some concern about publicity to interested buyers. She lives near there and as she walked by she couldn't believe any rational business person would want to put a business there, especially since it is right near the Penalty Box bar which has lots of parking and the other space there has been vacant since Francesca's relocated. There is no question in her mind that the highest and best use is residential, or offering it to an abutter. How to market it is the rub. She wanted to mention it here as part of the public record and spoke this morning to a reporter. When he asked if what she was saying was on the record she said that was the point. Julie Blanchard clarified that the land swap is on tonight's agenda and is not yet a done deal.

Tim Timberman, 1194 Main Street, is Chair of the Library Expansion Building Committee. He sent an email to all Council members in response to their concerns about parking should the expansion proceed. He read the email aloud so it would be part of the record. A copy is attached to the minutes. He noticed nothing was on agenda regarding the Library. He will stay if it is to be discussed. Julie Blanchard said the matter has been referred to the Finance and Steering Committees - once they review it will be back on the Council agenda. John Elsesser noted that Steering has a full agenda for their next meeting so they may not be able to spend a lot of time on it.

4. **Acceptance of Minutes:**

Motion #15/16-271: Matthew O'Brien moved to accept the minutes from the Town Council meeting of January 4, 2016, seconded by Thomas Pope. The following corrections were requested:

- Page 2, first paragraph, line 6: remove the word "previous."
- Page 2, last paragraph, last sentence: add the word "as" so the sentence reads, "Thomas Pope said if it works anywhere near as well..."
- Page 3, second paragraph, 14th line: change "Jim Galey" to "Coventry Youth Soccer."
- Page 7, third paragraph, 9th line: add the word "the" so the sentence reads, "She feels it is a slap in the face..."

- Page 8, 2nd bullet, 2nd sentence: change “The” to “They.”
- Page 8, 7th bullet, last sentence: change “They understand...” to “The Coventry Arts Guild understands...”

The motion to accept the minutes as corrected carried on unanimous vote.

5. Consent Agenda:

Motion #15/16-272: Matthew O’Brien moved to accept the consent agenda, seconded by Richard Williams. Thomas Pope request to remove item 6F5. The motion to accept the consent agenda with the removal of item 6F5 carried on unanimous vote.

8. New Business:

Motion #15/16-273: Lisa Thomas made a motion to move up items 8B and 8C relating to ambulance services. The motion was seconded by Hannah Pietrantonio and carried on unanimous vote. Joining the Council for this discussion were Noel Waite, Fire/EMS Administrator; Bud Meyers, President, NCVFD; Sean Brierly, Deputy Chief, CVFA and Ann Brierly, EMS Captain, CVFA.

B. 15/16-60: Consideration of Temporary Staffing Agency for Ambulance Response during

Daytime Hours: John Elsesser said we have been having some staffing difficulties getting the volunteer ambulance out in a timely fashion during daytime hours. Trying to focus on daytime sometimes takes away from nighttime hours. We are looking at alternatives to help during the transition period until the turnover of the PSA on July 1, 2016. We are still working on paperwork to make that happen. We were asked if we would be interested in entering into a temporary staffing contract to provide EMTs to ride on ambulances during daytime hours to relieve the pressures on volunteers. Since it is a short interim period it was felt it might make sense for the Town to enter into a contract. In the Council packet is a letter from Denny Dittrich, CVFA President, committing to reimbursing the Town for these expenses. Before we went any further we thought we should have a discussion and then get a proper legal review to make sure the contract is sound. Effective July 1st we will probably be looking at expanding from 3 days to 5 days per week.

Noel Waite noted that daytime staffing is critical. This type of shortage is not uncommon. A lot of small towns are in the same boat if not worse. We have 6-8 people on average doing 90% of the calls. We looked into different avenues. CVFA has done a per-call pay system. Other towns have gone up as high as \$50 per call. If people aren't there the money is irrelevant. They did a good job trying to keep going with duty crews. That ran smoothly for a while but people got jobs or other interests and the crew declined. The number of calls that get turned over affects income too. We looked at the best way of doing temporary staffing. Two companies in the area provide it, Vintech and another company out of Portland. We chose Vintech because they will hire local people. The other company would not hire anyone from town; they felt it was a conflict of interest with the Fair Labor Act. Vintech has taken that issue to court a number of times and prevailed because they are a private contractor. This is spelled out in the agreement. We discussed how many days we could afford – and originally thought just one, but then we talked about funding it through the ambulance replacement fund and came up with three. CVFA thinks they can come up with staff two days a week - Wednesdays and Thursdays. Come July 1st we are budgeting for 5 days - if we don't need them we will cut back. If we sign the contract with Vintech, we will be responsible for paying them and then will be reimbursed by CVFA. After July 1st it becomes a town budget item.

Matthew O’Brien asked if we got pricing from the second company. Noel replied it was a 50-cent difference with the same level of staffing, and the same flexibility for hours. John Elsesser clarified that the other company indicated if a person became an employee of that company they could no longer volunteer for us. Noel said we felt it was beneficial to hire our people and still enable them to

volunteer. They know the town.

Thomas Pope said if nobody is around to drive ambulances how could the company hire them. Noel replied there are kids who are going to school or people who are unemployed. John said that career firefighters are often on 3 days a week and then off. They are often looking for other jobs. Noel said that Vintech also covers Brooklyn one day a week. It gives those people an option to come here.

Lisa Thomas said she imagines that for some people who might not be as forthcoming to volunteer, if they are working other piecemeal jobs to try and bring in an income they would probably prefer to work in town doing the job they are trained for. She knows people obviously need income.

Ann Brierly said right now we have several students who are covering daytime shifts who are looking for jobs. Once they find jobs we will lose them. If they are hired by Vintech maybe we can keep them.

Thomas Pope said in tonight's *Chronicle*, Sean Brierly is quoted as saying this is the result of combining the departments. Sean replied that is not the case. The issue is we are not rolling calls on a day-to-day basis. We are scrambling. Every building fire gets mutual aid. It is normal and accepted. This is not permitted for EMS – we have to be able to cover it and we haven't been. We can't show you a schedule with people in place. An ambulance call is at least an hour and a half and two people are required. Currently CVFA is covering it with 9 people. We can't look at next week or next month and say we have it covered for the future. It is why he led the charge to have town take the PSA. It hurts – it feels like a failure. But every time we don't take a call also feels like a failure.

Thomas Pope asked why two people are needed. Sean replied we need one EMT and one EMR on the ambulance for transport. These roles have different levels of certification. The State may be dropping the EMR certification. They want people to be interchangeable. Then they can both drive and be with the patient in back. Thomas said it sounds like the levels may go up. Sean said they will at least stay the same and provide the people of Coventry with some certainty. John said that response may be faster also because staff will be able to leave immediately rather than waiting to get to the station.

Andy Brodersen asked if we have been training our own EMTs. Noel said yes. Andy asked who pays for it. Noel replied the individual pays up front and once they complete the program they are reimbursed. Sean said CVFA has been paying for it from recovery funds. Andy asked if they expect to continue that way. Noel said yes. Andy asked why then would anyone want to go through all that and then volunteer and not get paid. Noel said we won't be running it 24-7. Bud Meyers said as a full time job the wage is not sufficient. John said it is \$14 per hour or less. Minimum wage is \$10. Andy asked what their most recent attempts were at getting new volunteers. Noel said we are always advertising. Andy asked where. Noel said the sign out front. Sean said we also recruit at a health booth at high school and do other marketing through the high school. John said also through the juniors program. Sean noted a lot of second and third shifts have gone away. That's where we have gotten our people. Volunteerism is on a decline. EMS with its hour and a half commitment beats up our volunteers.

Thomas Pope said he had seen some concern from Ann Brierly on Facebook saying that things will never be the same. Ann replied she did not make this statement. She doesn't post on Facebook. Right now we are volunteers. Volunteerism doesn't change. People will still volunteer. Bringing paid staff in will take some of the stress off. Having that uncertainty is stressful. The certification process is lengthy. We are dealing with volunteers who don't have a set work schedule. We are trying to get a new person to ride on the ambulance and can't come up with time where we are both available. It is difficult to predict when the calls will be or if people will be available. It is a minimum of 6 months to

a year before someone is able to ride on an ambulance. It is not like a commercial service where you can plan for it. We're volunteering because we love it and to give back to the community. A core of us continues to persevere but at any point in time one of us could get sick and not be available. We want to be more proactive than that. This is an issue all towns have. It will change a few things but we don't expect it to change drastically.

Thomas Pope noted that Vintech requires Internet access. Will new computers be required? Noel replied no. Thomas asked if they would have access to the entire building. Noel replied yes. Thomas said there is something in the contract about right of refusal. It talks about getting rid of a Vintech employee and any officer can do that. He said you might want to restrict that. Noel said Vintech has the final say on hiring and firing. We have input and if we have an issue with that employee we bring it to their attention and they have the final say. Matthew O'Brien said the contract needs to be reviewed. Thomas suggested taking another look at paragraph 13. John said his point is valid that there should be an officer or acting person in the department to have input. We wanted the right to say we don't want a person who has been a problem to be able to come back. Noel noted on page 6 section 8, Vintech is exclusively responsible for hiring and firing. Thomas said that is not contradictory to his concern. Paragraph 13 says any officer can do it. Sean said we generally think of the Town of Coventry Fire Department as two chiefs and Noel. It could be changed to the Fire Board. Thomas said somebody has to be in charge.

Matthew O'Brien asked if training staff would be able to ride with the full time people. Noel said yes. Vintech employees will be the two main people on call but if volunteers are available it will be encouraged. Matthew asked what the long-range plan is. What do you want to have happen in a year or two years from now. Sean replied we would like predictably reliable service for the Town of Coventry. If Vintech allows us to rebuild our volunteer base on a reliable basis then we could not have them one day. Matthew noted that having Vintech on hand might allow volunteers to become trained more quickly. Noel said if we get more people around then Vintech is more than willing to drop back. Matthew said there are a number of issues with the contract. Noel said there will be another draft and our attorney will review.

Richard Williams said it sounds as if we have gone to paid volunteers if a lot of the employees are going to be Coventry people. What is the percentage? Noel said we don't know yet. Thursday is the first meeting. We think because it will be 3 days a week, 10 hours a day that we might pick up a few people from town and the others will be Vintech employees and paid firefighters from other towns.

John Elsesser noted that the term "volunteer" is kind of cloaked anyway. We already pay points, mileage, etc. It is recognition for service but not a full time career. They will lose those points if they work for Vintech so they are giving something up too. He attended a workshop at the CT Fire Academy regarding the SAFER grant. One of the topics was developing techniques to recruit and expand volunteerism. There is a statewide town meeting in March to promote best practices. Suffield picked up 8 volunteers going through the program. We will work with both departments on that. It is not just an ambulance problem. We have a need for fire fighters too, although fires are much less frequent. We only had 7 last year. We have a couple employees who are authorized to leave the workplace to respond to a structure fire. We have not expanded beyond that because it affects work crews. Frequency of ambulance calls is much more substantial. Another option to look at for firefighters is hiring our own staff.

Richard Williams asked what Vintech employees will be responsible for while on shift. Noel replied reporting, light housekeeping, etc. Reports alone take quite a bit of time. EMS charts must be completed, filed and sent off to the billing agency, which takes quite a bit of time.

Matthew O'Brien asked if a volunteer can come in and take over the call if staff is nearing the end of their paid shift. Noel replied that Vintech doesn't have a problem with that. We also discussed if we have two staff on and a volunteer wants to go on the call that Vintech staff might stay back. Sean said they are very flexible and willing to work with us. Matthew said he does some temporary staffing work and knows that overtime is a big factor.

Sean Brierly said we average about 3 EMS calls a day. Matthew O'Brien asked how many result in transport. Sean replied about 80%. We had 700 calls last year. John noted some past practices are going to have to change, like providing standby coverage for football games. We can't afford to tie up an ambulance and a crew at a game. They can't leave. We will have to put people on notice that starting next season they will have to find other alternatives.

Lisa asked if there are any liability issues having volunteers fill in at the end of a shift. Noel said Vintech staff is supposed to work from 7 AM – 5 PM, and if a call comes in at 4:45 Vintech takes the ambulance to the scene. If a volunteer shows up and can finish then Vintech staff takes the vehicle back. Lisa said she wants to make sure there won't be confusion regarding workers comp. John said he thinks people in the back of the cab will make the call based on patient safety. It depends on the type of call and what is going on. It becomes a medical decision. If the person feels they need to finish up the call then they will do that. We can look at whether there are opportunities to reduce overtime but at the end of the day it is about quality service. The next step would be to get our attorney to fine-tune the contract for authorization to begin as soon as possible. Matthew said if we have questions should we submit them now? John said yes. Lisa suggested funneling comments through Julie Blanchard. Julie agreed.

8C. 15/16/61: Creation of special revenue fund for ambulance expenses per ordinance: John Elsesser said that Finance Director Beth Bauer put information together in a standard format right out of the ordinance. Noel Waite noted that the budget summary we provided is a quick summary. The ordinance states all EMS revenue goes into the fund. Budget summaries are going to be looked at for the coming year. There is a reduction in what we have actually collected - one reason is Medicare calls have increased. Medicare reimbursements have been reduced. This is one of the difficulties CVFA was having in trying to keep their budgets up. Thomas Pope asked when that went into effect. Was it part of Obamacare? Noel replied yes and Gov. Malloy. Tom noted it is like a tax increase. Also when we get a paramedic intercept we pay Windham Hospital \$370 per call. We might only get \$90 from Medicare for that call. We have a contract pending that will reduce that, but if you take that by 163 calls it is over \$60,000. John said under the new contract they will get what we get and they will get it when we get it. We have been working on all areas of cost savings, as have Fire Chiefs in the whole region. It started with WINCOG and the chiefs took it over after WINCOG dissolved. There has been lot of hard negotiating over several years.

Richard Williams asked if the number shown on the document reflects the new or old contract. Noel replied the old contract. He said that CVFA has also tried to send uncollectible items to collections for out-of-town residents. Richard asked if we could assume this is not a negative number going forward. Noel replied that is what we're hoping. We will see a negative on Medicare. The proposed EMS budget for coming year sits at \$316,000, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. If you take out what was recovered in 2015, \$274,000, it leaves us \$69,000 in the hole. This is the first year we have taken the fire budgets into a combined operating budget. Each station still has a budget for heating, electric, etc. We combined office, gear, etc. into a joint account. Anything that has to do with EMS was taken out of the joint account and put into the EMS budget. By doing that we have a savings of \$27,000 in the joint account. We took that savings to reduce the \$69,000 deficit, which leaves us with \$42,000. John said we believe this is the worst case scenario and we will discuss it at budget. This is a preview of the budget. Noel said this is the first year doing the EMS budget – it is

hard to give exact numbers. Matthew O'Brien said there would be overtime, too. John said we are also going down from three ambulances to two. Noel said the daytime staffing numbers are included. For town budgeting purposes, if we put \$42,000 into the EMS budget it will give us full service.

Motion #15/16-274: Andy Brodersen moved to approve the creation of a special revenue fund for ambulance services per ordinance. The motion was seconded by Thomas Pope and carried on unanimous vote. John Elsesser asked if the Council wishes us to seek legal advice on the contract for consideration at the next meeting. The Council agreed by consensus with questions or concerns submitted to Julie Blanchard.

7. Old Business:

Motion #15/16-275: Hannah Pietrantonio made a motion to move up item 7B, as the next item of business. The motion was seconded by Lisa Thomas and carried on unanimous vote.

B. Consideration of Fire Truck Replacement/Refurbishment:

Matthew O'Brien reported on discussion of this matter that took place at the last Finance Committee meeting. The Finance Committee met again with representatives of the Fire Department and Noel Waite to discuss options. The Department reiterated their focus and request is for a new tanker truck and a used Quint to be purchased for \$650,000 or less. They also have agreed that we will not be increasing the fleet so once the used Quint is purchased they will sell one ET and place the second ET in reserve. They propose also that in year two we refurbish one of the ETs and sell the reserve ET. The Finance Committee recommends that the Council follow the department's request and include the purchase of the new tanker truck and a used Quint for \$650,000 or less in our upcoming budget discussions to consider how to best make those purchases in consideration of all of our other budget requests. Julie Blanchard asked if this was recommended by the Fire Board. Noel and the other members present indicated yes. He said at the end of the two purchases and the refurbishment we will not have any additional vehicles. Matthew noted they have still not determined which ET would be refurbished. John Elsesser said there has been a lot of discussion but that decision would be made a year from now. Thomas Pope asked if we get a Quint where it would be located. Noel said in the north station. Thomas asked if the Quint would require training. Noel said yes. Hannah Pietrantonio said this plan is essential for sufficient water. Noel noted a tanker has been in two of three fire study reports the Town has done over the past ten years. Matthew thanked the Fire Board for all their hard work in putting this together. The Council agreed by consensus to include this in the budget. A motion is not needed. Noel noted there is a tanker in capital so that will need to be changed too. John noted this approach is much less than the \$950,000 that failed in referendum for a new Quint last year. We took that input respectfully into consideration. Matthew said he was pleased and he thinks the Finance Committee was as well. Andy and Hannah agreed.

6. Reports:

A. Council Chairwoman: none.

B. Council Members:

- Lisa Thomas noted that one of the Council goals is to help senior citizens. There has been some conversation at Steering and Finance to perhaps enact some additional ordinances. There are some things in our community that people should know about, including the elderly disabled homeowner program and veteran's assistance programs to help with tax relief. We are also looking at applying for the CDBG program again but need to demonstrate community interest. The CDBG program provides a no-interest loan for home repairs that doesn't have to be repaid until you sell your home. All of these programs are mentioned in the Town newsletter. Interested persons can contact the town clerk or human services offices to get pointed in the right direction.

- Thomas Pope said that Coventry is a member of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM). CCM is the state's largest nonpartisan organization of municipal leaders, representing towns and cities of all sizes from all corners of the State. There are 158 member municipalities all with one common mission: to improve everyday life for every resident of Connecticut. The organization shares best practices and objective research to help our local leaders govern wisely. They advocate at the state level for issues affecting local taxpayers, and pool buying power to negotiate more cost-effective services for our communities. The Board and staff is made up of leaders from across the State, some are names you are familiar with from the big cities. Some key officers are from small towns – the Second Vice President is none other than our own Town Manager John Elsesser. We are currently in our budget season. As I talk to constituents I find that many are interested to hear about the relationship or partnership between State and Local government and how it impacts their own property taxes. They have heard about spending cuts and reductions in municipal aid at the State level but are often confused as to what that means to a town like Coventry. Some do not realize how much a decision at the capitol plays a role in a Town Council decision when it comes to setting priorities and spending in Coventry. CCM has produced a video to help taxpayers understand the partnership of State and Local government and how it impacts their own property taxes. As a Town Council preparing a budget, we have a lot of work to do, a lot of questions to ask and priorities to set as we move forward. I thought it would be helpful to present the CCM video here tonight as a visual tool for ourselves and our constituents to help everyone to better understand some of the considerations we must look at as we go forward and set our priorities. *The video was shown. It highlighted how cuts to municipal aid and unfunded mandates create rises in property taxes.* Thomas said Coventry has done its part in some degree by electing Representative Tim Ackert who has voted against these budgets. If we can replace the Governor maybe we can do more.
- Hannah Pietrantonio said the new format for the Town newsletter is wonderful and thanked Laura Stone for producing it.

D. Finance Committee – Matthew O’Brien:

Blum Shapiro presented the June 30, 2015 audit. The auditor reported that “In our opinion, the financial statements referred to above represent fairly, in all material respects, the respective financial position of the governmental activities, each major fund and the aggregate remaining fund information of the Town of Coventry, Connecticut, as of June 30, 2015 and the respective changes in financial position and where applicable, cash flows thereof for the year then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.”

The auditor did not report any issues of concern. They complimented the financial team of the Town and praised the cooperation in helping them prepare the audit.

It was noted that the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) awarded a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting to the Town of Coventry for its comprehensive annual financial report for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2014. This is the seventh year that the government has achieved this prestigious award. This certifies that the Town published an easily readable and efficiently organized, comprehensive annual financial report that satisfied GAAP principles and applicable legal requirements. We offer our congratulations and appreciation to all involved.

The Finance Committee has been reviewing the Board of Education’s request for an additional appropriation and recommends that the Town Council consider a motion to meet the needs of

the Board as they relate to unanticipated special education expenses as per their request. This item is on the agenda for tonight.

We began discussion of the STOP draft policy and its financial impacts. We asked staff to do some research on the number of Coventry homes that may be eligible with the 30-year requirement and also with a 25-year requirement. We also discussed that we would like any such plan to be able to be easily administered by staff and recommend that they raise several issues for discussion with the Steering Committee.

We discussed the Library expansion proposal and asked staff to perform analysis of several different funding levels for the project and different levels of grant funding scenarios to facilitate our future discussions once Steering has evaluated some issues that may have impacts on our deliberations. We asked the Town Manager to do some research and identify ways in which the Library expansion proposal could be more precisely evaluated for costs and what resources the committee might need in order to accomplish that.

We received an estimate of State funding reductions that now total \$62,647. That figure includes \$48,662 in PILOT funds that were identified previously, an \$8,339 reduction in our ECS grant and \$5,646 in our Public School Transportation grant.

The Finance Committee also forwarded to the Council a request for information to the Board of Education prior to budget deliberations. Information is in your packet. Finance recommended bringing it here for consideration and he recommends we send it to the Board of Education now as they begin their deliberations. It is on the agenda for later tonight.

Thomas Pope noted that as part of the report, we also got some background information provided by the Director of Finance, including a chart that shows general revenue funds. He was very encouraged that it looks like a lot of people paid their taxes on time in July. But it seems overall collection has dropped – he is wondering if it is because we are not charging late fees. John Elsesser replied that interest and penalties are a different line item. There was some discussion at Finance about the cycle of December payments. We will know more after February 1st, which is the collection deadline.

E. COVRRRA – John Elsesser: no report.

F. Town Manager – John Elsesser:

1. Projects Update:

- Work on the Laidlaw soccer fields started this week. We have already cleared off 80% of the topsoil. Tree removal should be done by the end of the week. We are hoping the revised weather report for less snow holds true. Matthew O'Brien asked if we had gotten any prices for fencing. John replied not yet. Matthew asked if we do it when it would be. John replied the end of April.
- The Animal Control truck is in. If you are interested we can bring it to a Council meeting. It has a cab in back and can handle larger animals and also tow the boat or trailer. It also has 4WD so it is another tool for winter.
- We are finishing up with getting the body put on the large dump truck and it should be in service in about a month.
- We get a daily listing of surplus goods and got a golf cart for \$50. It is a Jacobsen utility cart with a dump body. It needs a new engine but has a solid frame. DPW thinks they can take it on as a project to get it online for the Farmers' Market.

- The solar panels are operational. Ackert Electric has installed lights underneath the panels. It helps with some of the lighting issues we have in the area. We have a price on other lighting on the back of Town Hall but are putting that on hold until the STEAP grant, which was submitted.
- Eric Trott is working on Hydrilla issues on the lake – he is keeping in touch with CT DEEP. We also got some opinions for how to address it from Dr. Kortmann that are less risky than using chemicals. This will give us numbers that we can use at budget time. We are hoping the State will follow through and take care of it in the spring but we are following through on both.
- We are in the process of starting work to apply for CDBG funding – we will probably do it in conjunction with Columbia again. Our funds from two years ago are 90% spent and Columbia is at 100%. We are glad we have been able to help citizens make their homes safer. Three homes sold and paid off their loans. Those funds go back into the program to help others. The Council will be seeing some documents for approval and a public hearing will be required. It is becoming more and more competitive to get these funds and requirements for smoke detectors, lead paint, etc. keep going up.
- Thomas Pope asked about State bids for asphalt – noting that oil prices have dropped. Will we be getting a better price and be able to do more roads? John replied the price has dropped about \$5 ton – we will get a report at the next meeting. We did have some overages so this will help.
- Thomas Pope asked about the lake gate to follow up with Dick Brand's concerns about lowering the lake level, which were expressed during of Audience of Citizens at the last meeting. He asked when this is done. John replied we start in October to get it done by November. We have a little flexibility but next year it will be lowered early for the lake gate project. We have to be cautious to get lake levels down before ice forms because it can shatter people's stone walls. Sometimes people want to repair those walls and it can be too cold in November. We can talk about it.
- Thomas Pope asked about the LoCIP grants. It was mentioned that a small amount of money would be available for open space access in February. Any update? John replied we haven't talked with staff. We have at least one bridge on Riverview Trail that needs some updating. This money is for existing space not new. We would like to do some fencing at the entrance of Thornton Brook Preserve to try and maintain what we have and make it more usable. We will be submitting applications next month for the LoCIP money.
- Thomas Pope said the Manager's written report contains comments about the water project that are really a negative comment on the driving forces that raise our taxes with things we can't control.
- Richard Williams asked about tennis courts. John replied there are three courts at the high school. As part of the road bond and hardscape surfaces bonding there was money to add a court. The reason was the schools can't hold a match with less than four. Todd Penney was going to put bid specs together but we are so busy he will probably have an outside vendor put it together. Richard asked if they would be lighted. John replied there are there are lights on three of them. We will have to check how they are controlled. Richard said he plays there with his son sometimes and it seems like they are neglected, and now they are adding another. John noted that tennis is important from a Title IX perspective.

2. CT DEEP – notice of funding, Aquatic Invasives Phase 2 Treatment: We didn't think we were going to get this grant but were notified that we are getting \$13,000. This is a little less than we asked for. Matthew O'Brien asked if the Town would have to make up difference. John replied yes but the second treatment is a little less so it will be about what we spent last year, which was approximately \$7500. He is thinking of putting a lake management/treatment line in the budget to address this and Dr. Kortmann's recommendations for Hydrilla, flyboards etc.

3. Economic Development Kit: Enclosed in the Council packet are samples of some of the EDC materials, including demographics and ESRI data. He showed a map that identifies target economic development locations. Hannah Pietrantonio asked if this is different than the Plan of Conservation and Development. John replied it is more detailed. Hannah questioned the age of the report – noting it has the herb farm, etc. Will this be updated? John replied we have lots of projects and no time – we have no staff. We need guidance on higher priorities. We don't have a dedicated economic development staff person. Surrounding towns do. We have requested it through the budget process from time to time but it didn't make it through. The most important things here are the ESRI data, which shows our community demographics are stronger than people think. It also shows leakage and what kind of market we could potentially have. If Council members want to mark up some things we will see if we can make a quick change.

Thomas Pope noted what Hannah brought up - he has written up some things about it. The demographic statistics are from 2006; they are 10 years old and if I am an outside investor I have to ask when they write about the economic development and mention traffic count, is that old outdated material as well? It mentions the Hartford Conference Center, wasn't that replaced by the Convention Center years ago? It speaks about the 2004 UConn sports teams. It even points out our police station is 10 years old. Is this putting our best foot forward? The report also indicates, "A context sensitive streetscape including cobbled sidewalks, benches, period lighting and bike racks has been approved for the Village and is planned by the State for completion in 2012." It would appear this is either out of date or an attempt to embarrass the State or to point out how it has failed to deliver on a promise. It certainly does not put a positive focus on economic development. In the same packet it states Coventry has recently been ranked first in the State for affordable housing and then debunks their own statement with a handout saying Coventry falls below 31 other towns and has only 6% affordable housing according to the State's 2014 list.

5. CRCOG Monthly Report: Thomas Pope asked for this to be removed from the Consent Agenda because there is a lot in the report that relates to Coventry. The Town Manager made a lot of handwritten notations on the report and I think it would be beneficial for citizens to hear about John's notations and how they relate to Coventry, for example the hoarding task force. John Elsesser replied that two staff members, Courtney Chan and Noel Waite, are on the task force that the State set up because we were one of a few towns that successfully dealt with a hoarding situation. The State housing prosecutor uses us as an example. The group meets quarterly. The task force made some recommendations last year but they were not implemented. Towns need help. Hoarding is a mental illness problem more than anything else. It is not a poverty issue. We are hoping that by bringing towns together we can come up with a good State policy and eventually impact property values. Matthew O'Brien asked how hoarding cases are usually discovered. John replied in various ways, but most often something

happens. In the case of the one we resolved, smoke was coming out from underneath the structure and the fire department responded. Sometimes items spill out into the yard and neighbors notice. Sometimes a family member reaches out for help. Thomas said there is a lot of good information in John's notations.

7. Unfinished Business:

A. 15/16-24: Consideration – Planning & Zoning Commission’s Recommendation to Approve a Land Swap of Town-owned Property on Dorothy Drive, Lot 17, with Property at 77 Reynolds Drive. John Elsesser said this started off with a neighbor asking to buy a piece of Town land. It was sent to P&Z as part of their standard process. They recommended against the sale and the recommendation went back to the last Council. Questions were raised whether there might be a different way to look at it. It was sent to Conservation and Inland Wetlands for consideration and some suggestions were made to trade the land as indicated. It would give them a squared-off lot and the ability to construct a shed. It also gives us a square lot. The piece goes all the way down to South Street and he was concerned about drainage and mosquito issues if it was sold. He is very happy with this solution and P&Z is also on board. We would need the town attorney to review and advise on how best to proceed. It could be a Council resolution but that might require a town meeting. Consensus was given to proceed with attorney review. John said it was great to see the creativity of our Boards and Commissions in resolving issues.

C. 15/16-47: Board of Education Request for Increase to FY 2015/2016 Appropriation for Special Education Budget:

Motion #15/16-276: Matthew O’Brien moved that the Town Council increase the Board of Education’s appropriation to meet unanticipated special education expenses which may be incurred as a result of providing special education services to either or both of the students placed by the State of Connecticut with the district in November 2015 as detailed below:

- 1. Amount of the increased appropriation shall not exceed the amount of actual funds received by the Town from the State of Connecticut or other entity to reimburse the specific costs incurred by the District to provide such services that have not been reimbursed in any other matter.**
- 2. The total amount of the increase in appropriation will not exceed \$150,000.**
- 3. The increase in appropriation is intended to and will be equal to specific costs incurred by the District to provide special education services to one or both of these students to the extent which the new costs cause the Board to incur costs above and beyond the amounts in the special education line items of their final appropriated budget as per Board of Education policy 3120/3160.**
- 4. Requests and documentation for reimbursement shall be submitted to the Director of Finance for the Town of Coventry for review and consideration of an appropriation per this resolution.**

For example, if in response to the specific need of one of these students the district hires additional teaching staff, counselors, therapists, etc. or purchases equipment and supplies not already available within the current budget and they provide specific justification of these expenses.

If instead the need of the student(s) is met through use of existing staff with no additional salary expense (utilizing existing and already paid for by Coventry taxpayers within their budget appropriation) that cost would not trigger an increase in the appropriation for the District.

Richard Williams seconded the motion.

Matthew said this motion is complex and detailed but it is a response to the lack of information from the Board of Education. Also some of information provided was inaccurate and misleading. This addresses what we would like to do, which is ensure we protect taxpayers while covering students. Lisa Thomas said she would want us to consider if the school uses existing staff or materials to provide services to these students, whether they have done it at the expense of Coventry students who might have been bumped down the ladder. She wants to make sure that what is crafted in this motion protects that situation. If they use a teacher already on staff to do testing, what that might mean is there are students who did not receive services in a timely manner because they got pushed down the line. Thomas Pope replied that would be addressed by the Board of Education in how they allocate their resources. All they are asking us to do is reimburse them for the cost of the allocation of the resources. How they distribute is up to them and we have no control over that. Lisa said if they had to pull staff to administer testing to students with more severe needs that takes time out of that provider's day. She would want staff to be able to rely on that revenue coming back if they need to contract for additional services. Matthew said when they first made their request they asked for tuition for students and after weeks of research we found there was no tuition. Then we received a request for an additional appropriation several months later. In lieu of getting appropriate information he is trying to fashion a motion that will protect both taxpayers and students. If they need more they can come back. That is all he is comfortable doing since we never get answers to questions. He thinks this is a good step that gives an appropriate vehicle to them and protects the taxpayers.

Motion #15/16-276 carried on unanimous vote.

8. New Business:

A. 15/16-59: Acceptance, FY 2014/2015 Audit:

Motion #15/16-277: Hannah Pietrantonio moved to accept the FY 2014/2015 Audit as presented. Matthew O'Brien seconded the motion. Julie Blanchard said a great job was done by the Finance Department. The motion carried on unanimous vote.

Richard Williams had a question on the audit. On page 43 it shows expected net pension liability and inflows over the next 5 years. His concern is on page 48 it shows that our OPEB obligation is growing. John Elsesser replied that OPEB, "Other Post Employment Benefits", is not directly related to our pension plan. Most of that is pay-as-you-go. Town employees do not generally get insurance when they retire. They are allowed to buy insurance through the Town when they retire. It has an implicit subsidy - meaning that older people get sick more often. There is some self-correction. Under State law, schoolteachers are allowed to buy insurance from us and we are required to offer the same level of coverage. They can't be in a separate plan. Beth Bauer noted that the retired employee covers 100% of the premium cost but there is an assumption that the older employee raises our experience cost. There is no cash outlay but it is more of a theoretical liability. We do not have a trust where we put funds aside for this liability. It is growing. John said over time we find most Town employees leave our plan because they can find other coverage. Beth said once a Town employee is eligible for Medicare they have to go off. Richard asked how you bring the obligation down. John replied the only way would be to set up a trust and fund it. We do the pay-as-you-go approach.

Thomas Pope said on page 28 the report says, "All compensated absences are accrued in the government-wide financial statements. A liability for these amounts is reported in governmental funds only if they have matured." He asked for an explanation. Beth Bauer

replied we have to calculate sick leave and vacation payouts - if all employees were to resign we would have to pay.

Thomas Pope mentioned bullet 6, which says, "At the end of the year the unassigned fund balance was approximately 10.9% which was above the old goal of 10% but falls well below the goal of 15% set in our Fiscal Management policy adopted by the last Town Council." In recent years he recalls we have dipped into that fund on a number of occasions. Actually last year we decreased the fund balance. If that fund balance were to be at the targeted 15% would it be a favorable factor in improving our bond rating? Beth Bauer replied yes. With the last bond rating we were raised. We have had a trend over the past several years of increased fund balance. The rating agency was impressed with our 10 percent goal and that we have moved toward that. The 15% goal is connected to the GFOA standard, which is that you should have two months operating expenses available. Thomas replied that to move toward accomplishing that goal will put some pressure to reduce spending in other areas.

Thomas Pope also noted page 77 table 4, which shows revenues from investment earnings for the last ten fiscal years for the Town of Coventry. He noted that for the years 2006-2008, the last 3 years of the Bush Administration, earnings were \$1,389,264. For the years 2009-2015, the last 7 years of the Obama Administration, earnings were \$611,083. He said at that rate it would take us 16 years under Obama to equal our return from 3 years under the Bush Administration.

On page 80 of the report, Thomas Pope noted for the only time in the last ten years our rate of tax collection has dropped to less than 99% - while not alarming it does warrant consideration to watch.

Mr. Pope also noted the declining student population, shown on the table on page 85. In 2006 we had a student enrollment of 2123, which dropped to 1643 by 2015, a loss of 480 students, or about 24 less classrooms needed in 2015 than in 2006. Richard Williams said it is interesting that Tom would say that. He was looking at the housing profile that has a paragraph that talks about education and school population. It indicates that Coventry is one of 153 communities that could see a significant decline in student population through 2025 due to declining population of children ages 5-19. Lisa Thomas noted there is declining enrollment in a lot of towns for many reasons. People are having smaller families. They are not staying in in the State. They are sending their children to charter or magnet schools, and for some of that we are still responsible for tuition. Those children are not in our classrooms but we have become increasingly more responsible - we retain the financial burden even though they are not here.

D. 15/16-62: Consideration of Request for 2016-2017 Budget Information from Board of Education:

Motion #15/16-278: Matthew O'Brien moved that we forward the Town Council's request for information related to the Board of Education's 2016-2017 budget request to the Board and ask that the responses in detail be presented to the Town Council as part of their budget request. Andy Brodersen seconded the motion. Richard Williams said he thinks this is great. Andy said he thinks a lot of this is information they are going to give us anyway but it lets them know this is information we will need. Hannah Pietrantonio agreed we will most likely get this information. Thomas Pope said these are things they will need to do due diligence. Julie Blanchard said it is good communication to let them know what we expect. **Motion #15/16-278 carried on unanimous vote.**

10. Executive Session:

Motion #15/16-279: Lisa Thomas moved that the Town Council enter into Executive Session at 10:20 PM pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1-200(6)(B)-discussion of strategy and negotiation with respect to pending claims and litigation to which the public agency or a member thereof, because of his conduct as a member of such agency is a party until such litigation claim has been finally adjudicated or otherwise settled; and 1-200(6)(D)-discussion of the selection of a site or the lease, sale or purchase of real estate by a political subdivision of the state when publicity regarding such a site, lease, sale, purchase or construction would cause a likelihood of an increased price until such time as all of the property has been acquired or all proceedings or transactions concerning same have been terminated or abandoned with the following people in attendance: Town Council members, the Town Manager, and the Finance Director. The motion was seconded by Richard Williams and carried on unanimous vote.

Motion #15/16-280: Lisa Thomas moved to leave Executive Session at 10:40 PM, seconded by Hannah Pietrantonio and unanimously approved.

11. Adjournment:

Motion #15/16-281: Lisa Thomas moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:41 PM, seconded by Hannah Pietrantonio and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone
Town Council Clerk

Note: These minutes are not official until acted on by the Town Council at its next regular meeting. Those meeting minutes will reflect approval or changes to these minutes.

ATTACHMENT

Laura Stone

From: DeWilton Timberman <timbermant@sbcglobal.net>
Sent: Monday, January 18, 2016 9:47 PM
To: Julie Blanchard; Andy Brodersen; Lisa thomas; Hannah HPietrantonioTC; Thomas Pope; Richard Willliams Jr.; Matthew OBrien
Cc: John Elsesser; Laura Stone; Kristi Sadowski; Kathleen Ryan; Sondra Astor Stave; Glenn Miller; William R. Bonney; John Bonney
Subject: Building Committe response to 1-4-2016 Council Parking Concerns

January 18, 2016

Dear Coventry Town Council,

As always, the Booth and Dimock Library Expansion Building Committee welcomes any input from the Town Council concerning our renovation plan. We offer our response to the parking computations presented by Councilman Pope on January 4, 2016.

We agree that the parking at the renovated Booth and Dimock Library is an important issue that needs to be resolved however the method outlined in the Library Space Planning Guide by the Connecticut State Library is referenced only as a "Rule of Thumb" estimate. The Library Space Planning Guide further states that ultimate parking space requirements are determined by the local communities Planning and Zoning Regulations.

The Booth and Dimock Library Expansion Committee will be meeting with Coventry's Town Planner, Eric Trott and Town Engineer, Todd Penney, in the near future. Together, we will review the Town's Zoning Regulations and the proposed library floor plans to determine the actual parking required by our Town's Zoning regulation. Town Staff may recommend the Building Committee go before the Town's Planning and Zoning Commission to seek their opinion. We will comply with any staff recommendations and meet with the Planning and Zoning Commission if and when necessary. We will notify the Town Council and the Town Manager of any determinations as they occur.

Yours Truly
Tim Timberman
Chairman Booth and Dimock Library Expansion Building Committee

