

**Minutes**  
**Town Council Steering Committee Meeting**  
**February 22, 2016**  
**Town Hall Conference Room B**

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.  
**Present:** Thomas Pope, Julie Blanchard, Richard Williams, Lisa Thomas  
**Also present:** John Elsesser, Town Manager

2. **Library Expansion Project – Policy Considerations:**

Tim Timberman, Chair of the Booth & Dimock Library Expansion Building Committee and Vice President of the Library Board of Trustees, introduced other representatives in attendance. Present were Kathleen Willett, Board President; Libby Parda, Secretary of the Board of Trustees; Kristi Sadowski, Director and Kathleen Ryan, Committee Member.

Thomas Pope said he put this item at the top of the agenda to give the maximum amount of time for discussion. The Town Council heard the full presentation before. We submitted questions and received some answers.

Tim Timberman said there is only one item on the agenda that pertains to the expansion committee and that is parking. We met with Town Planner Eric Trott twice. The parking requirements are governed by zoning regulations. We went over regulations as they pertain to our town and he explained various differences. He agreed the use of the Library didn't fit office or retail use. We do have assembly use for the community room. He suggested we go to various sites and get information. We obtained information from Planning & Zoning regulations and also went to the Institute of Transportation Engineers manual. This manual has every possible use that generates traffic. We found the use that relates to our building size is 52-80 parking spaces. Eric also had some other information he obtained from the APA through CRCOG that gave additional requirements generally in New England and Connecticut. We are in the process of compiling this information as it relates to our zoning regulations and plan to meet again in two weeks. We compared our zoning regulations to other communities in our state as well as the square footage of the building to come up with cogent requirements. The plans we presented to you showed 64 parking spaces. We can add another six in back and another 10 can be utilized on-site so we are at about 80 on-site irrespective of parking spaces across the street.

John Elsesser said he talked with Eric Trott today and he is planning to have it on the Planning & Zoning Commission's agenda for their meeting on March 14<sup>th</sup>. Under our regulations it is decided by P&Z. We should have a response for what they would look at for the formal application. They are the determining body.

Thomas Pope asked if ITE had a factor for use of the building or just size. Tim replied they were looking at suburban libraries. They are divergent. There are some averages. Average supply and peak usage ranged from 50-80 spaces. We are trying to get that number to come up with realistic numbers for Planning & Zoning's review of our particular site. Thomas said he would think divergence would be a factor in use because we have a community center. Tim said that is not true - most libraries have a large community room for assembly. This is what the use is for libraries. They have an assembly for programs. We're trying to come up with numbers that meet our particular use so as not to shortchange the people of Coventry.

Thomas asked how many events the Library has that are beyond their capacity in a year. Kristi Sadowski said 3-4, because we know the limitations of the room and don't plan events that will reach

our capacity. Some of the popular Music & Movement classes that require room to jump around are at capacity. The Librarian doesn't think that program can expand in the existing space. Thomas asked if they are planning more programs. Kristi replied without knowing whether the expansion is going forward we haven't planned anything larger, but we are planning more programs in general. Without space to have them and with so many scheduling conflicts is pointless to schedule larger events. She can think of 3 events in the last 8 months where we have exceeded capacity and had to make other plans. She distributed a copy of spring 2016 program brochure.

Richard Williams asked how they were able to squeeze so many more parking spaces into the existing location. Tim Timberman replied there is more space by the back wall. He showed a layout of the 64 spaces. He said we are looking at possibly getting another 4 by cutting into the embankment and another 10 in front. It is still in flux. Richard asked what the capacity of the building is. Kristi said we do not have a capacity for the building as a whole but the meeting room is 125. Richard asked who is going to make the decision. Tim replied Planning & Zoning. John said it is helpful to get them to go on record before the project goes ahead.

Thomas Pope said there are two other two items on the agenda: ownership of the building and land, and admission fees for the book sale. Kathleen Willett said it is their understanding that the Library owns the building and the land. John Elssesser said he has looked up the deed and concurs that they own the library building and the land. Thomas Pope said he is not questioning that. Kathleen said she is not sure why ownership is under discussion. Thomas said for the same reason that was discussed when the firehouses were expanded. It was the Town Council's position we wouldn't expand the buildings without taking ownership. Thomas asked if they are willing to deed the property to the Town. Tim replied not at this time. Certain decisions were made during the previous expansion and we don't know how it would relate to bequests. We would have to look at those interests. If the Council has a sample of what you propose we can take it back to the full board and perhaps have a legal review to see how it compares to the present agreement we have with the Town. Kristi said she did some research. One of clauses when the land was given to us says if the conditions of this deed are violated then the deed becomes null and void and the land reverts to the grantors and heirs. She is not clear what those conditions are and we would need to get an opinion. Lisa Thomas said she knows a probate judge who is a Coventry resident and might be willing to volunteer to interpret the deed. Kristi said it might have nothing to do with this situation but there are potential concerns. The last thing we would want to do is lose the land and Library. John asked if the Council would want the Town Attorney to review it. Thomas suggested letting the Library do their research first. If their position is they are not going to turn it over then there nothing to talk about. Lisa asked if there was a discussion to turn it over at the time of the previous expansion. John replied he was just coming on as Town Manager then and the third referendum had already passed. The first two referendums failed because they didn't have enough money. There was discussion of the Porter Library and Loomis House - Loomis House was given to the Town as part of the 3rd referendum. We tried to do something with the building for several years and gave it back to the Library to use for programs. He wasn't here for those discussions, but a question was raised at the Town Meeting regarding the building and it was said that as long as it continued as a library that would be acceptable, but if not they would have to give the building to the Town. At that point the referendum passed. With the firehouses the Council at that time decided that for the investment they wanted to own the building and the land. Lisa noted the potential bequests make this complicated. Richard said he was part of the Council that required ownership of North Coventry firehouse. It was a big deal and he thinks the investment here is pretty substantial. He thinks it would be in our interest to achieve that goal here as well. John said we have a care, custody and control agreement with both fire departments that could be used as a sample. If we used that model we would own the building and make payments but the Library would still have care, custody and control. Practical daily operations would be left in the Library's hands.

Thomas Pope suggested to Tim when they have their meeting, to look under paragraph B section 2, the last sentence about if the Library is reopened. He asked their opinion of what that sentence means. Tim said it doesn't make sense. John said it comes out of the Avon Library agreement. You have to read further up. If the Town doesn't fund the budget technically it is a breach of contract. There is a catch that we can't give money if the Town doesn't authorize it.

Libby Parda said for the last 100 years we have had a mutually beneficial relationship between the Town and the Library. She asked what advantage you see in the Town owning the building and land. Richard Williams replied if we're going to invest that amount of money into a piece of property he thinks the Town should own it. He asked how he would justify it to the taxpayers that we are going to put all this money out there but we don't own the land and building. It wasn't a stumbling block for the fire departments. Most of us would want ownership – to bring it to the taxpayers and say it is now a town property. The dynamics are easier to defend to the public. Libby asked who pays the people who are paid at the fire department. Julie Blanchard replied the Town. Libby asked if they are they Town employees. Julie said no; they are volunteers. John said that is a separate discussion. This is just about ownership of the building, not staff. In the existing contract it talks about the role of the Board of Trustees in terms of who selects books, etc. The ownership of the building doesn't impact that. It does impact liability. If he were a trustee he would worry about that. The Town has better protections than the Library. We have limited liabilities. As a member of a Board of Trustees you can be personally liable. We'll get sued anyway but we have a better cause of actions.

Lisa Thomas asked who does plowing, etc. now. Kristi replied we have a nice mix. The Town plows and we contract for shoveling. If we get in a real bind we might call for assistance from Public Works. Lisa asked what would change. Thomas Pope said nothing. Lisa asked who would clear sidewalks. John said they would. We don't do gardens or sidewalks at the firehouses. Lisa said she is wondering what our exposure becomes if we own the land, regarding expectations. John said it depends on what the contract says. Thomas Pope said it wouldn't be our intent to change the operations of the Library. This is strictly a transaction on the building.

Kathleen Willett asked if the process with the fire departments began like this, or was there a written request that they look into it. Julie Blanchard said it was discussed at Council and they took it back to their Board. John Elsesser said it was tied together with the successful referendum. It had to be passed and built and they turned it over to us. Tim asked if that would be the same as this. John said it might be a reasonable request by Board of Trustees. Kathleen asked if the structure of our Board would change with a representative from the Town. John said right now the discussion is really ownership of building and not the other issue. Thomas Pope said if that was something the Board wanted we could certainly discuss it at Steering. Tim Timberman said it would be helpful for the Board to look at what was done by the firehouses. John said the fire departments then had to bring it to their full membership for a vote. The Library Board has more power to make the decision. John will forward the fire department agreements to Kristi.

Thomas Pope said he thinks it is important to note the top paragraph of the second page asserts the independence of the Library. It is not a Town operation. He hasn't heard of anybody who wants to get involved in taking over the Library. They do a fine job. Tim noted the next full Board meeting is in April. Thomas said Steering will wait to take further action until we have feedback from the Board.

Thomas Pope said the other agenda item is about the Library's admission policy for books sales. He asked if anyone else wants to give an opinion. Richard Williams asked what difference it makes and why they can't handle it the way they want. Thomas replied they are asking for his vote. He is not giving them his vote with that policy in place. Richard said those two things should not be tied

together. Thomas said he appreciates the list of other book sales that the Library provided. He looked at the list for next month. Of the 15 Libraries on the site they mentioned only one has a \$5 preview with friends getting in free or joining at the door for \$10. The rest of them except for Colchester, which charges a preview for all, treat everyone equally. His problem is not the fee to get in it is the inequality. As an elected official he has to answer to taxpayers. He likes the idea of expanding the Library. He can't support this if it won't be fair to taxpayers. Libby Parda said that every year we are charged to have a fundraiser. It is town-wide and people who send in donations become "members." A number of years ago dealers started showing up at our book sales. Many felt it wasn't fair to people in town that paid to get in – so we decided to impose a fee on dealers or anyone who wasn't a member to get into the book sale. Over the years we have reevaluated depending on how many dealers have been coming. Fewer and fewer dealers are showing up because book sales aren't what they used to be. So the preview fee has gone down and it usually isn't members who come in and pay it. We are not going to have a preview at all this year, but the reason we started it was to be fair to people in town. Thomas asked if they sell refreshments at the sale. Some libraries seem to do well with that. Libby said we used to have a student group do it. They have graduated and the younger group isn't interested. Thomas asked if they are changing their policy regarding preview admission. Libby said we are not charging a fee this year. We are not sure we are even going to do another book sale – it is a lot of work and doesn't bring in the return it used to. Plus we have an ongoing book sale. Thomas said they should update their listing on [findbooks.com](http://findbooks.com). He goes to the Mansfield one all the time and there is an enormous line to get in – it must be a big fundraiser for them. Glastonbury has a good one too. Maybe it is the publicity. Libby said she doesn't think it is publicity, they are different towns. Thomas said he would like to see it be successful. Libby said we would too.

Kathleen Willett said the book sale is not regular programming at the Library – it is a special event and is a fundraiser. She can't speak to the list that Thomas Pope cited but perhaps those other libraries are not mandated to fundraise. It is purely an economic decision. She has looked on the Library Association website to see what they say about preview sales. They have a book sale guide called “More Money Less Stress.” They do a couple of case studies on previews. Ultimately their recommendation is the Board should make the decision on what makes the most economic sense. Over the years our fee has ranged from \$1 to \$15 and \$15 is not the most recent. We were getting dealers in droves that were only too happy to pay the fee. It was important to us that those who support the Library during the membership drive not have to pay that additional sum. We have lowered the fee due to declining dealers and declining profits. We evaluate the merits of a preview every year and it continues to change. The decision this year does not determine what we will do next year. Our primary fundraiser is not the book sale but the membership drive. The letter that is part of the membership drive includes one major funding opportunity that is targeted, i.e. more comfortable seating, which was not included in the regular budget. Membership continues to be the backbone of our fundraising efforts.

Thomas said he went to the Library and took a tour with Kristi. She did a marvelous job and he wants the Board to know.

Libby said another reason our book sale might be declining is our limited space. We only have two closets to put the books in and the space we use for the sale is the children's room. Thomas asked if they had more space to store books if they could they get more books. Libby said yes. Thomas said we have storage space in town like Creaser Park, meeting rooms, etc. There is no reason why we couldn't have an enormous library book sale in the firehouse. Libby said it would be a massive logistical challenge to get books out and sorted. None of us are getting any younger. To take all the books off site would not be practical. Kristi said we had a trustee a couple years ago who won an award for running our book sale. It took a minimum of 2 hours per week plus two weeks off from her job to coordinate it. Richard Williams asked how much they charge for the books. Kristi replied \$1

for hardcover and trade paperbacks, 50 cents for regular paperbacks and half that for children's books. Thomas asked what they do with the ones that aren't sold. Kristi replied they donate them to the Boy Scouts and Dollars for Scholars. That keeps the money in Coventry. Tom said he knows of a town that has a swap shack and it has a library section. Kristi said we offer that every day in our swap basket, plus books on cassette.

The Committee thanked the Library Committee for their input.

**3. Acceptance of Minutes:**

Richard Williams moved to accept the minutes of the Steering Committee meeting from January 25, 2016. Lisa Thomas seconded the motion. The following corrections were requested:

- a. Page 1, 6<sup>th</sup> paragraph: Revise the sentence at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> line to read, "She has a good friend who chairs the Bar Association Labor Committee and she said the first two firms have a good reputation."
- b. Page 3, item 9, first paragraph: Remove the word "to" after written comments.

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

**4. Reports:**

- a. Chair: none.
- b. Committee members: none.
- c. Possible recommendations/vacancy list/Board & Commissions list: Thomas Pope commented that there are items on the directory that appear to be outdated. John said he went through it and marked it up – he found a lot of things that need to be updated. Part of the issue is we are working to get the new software operational. We have 4 employees doing data entry to populate the committees. We are making progress except it is still the older version of the software so we won't have political affiliations. We will have to watch that carefully. That is what we bought and what was demonstrated but the owner of the company had a car accident so the upgrade is still not ready. We will be operational by next month. Lisa said one thing that has always been awkward is when she wants to find that list she always has to go to a Steering agenda. John said that will be taken care of by the new software. Lisa said it would be helpful for town committees too to know if they can put someone forward. Lisa noted there are 3 vacancies on Inland Wetlands - can they meet? John yes, but barely. They need the full membership including alternates for a quorum.

**5. Resignations/Not Wishing to be Reappointed:**

Resignations for Lorraine Burokas from the Lake Advisory & Monitoring Committee, Michael Burokas from Inland Wetlands and Ray Chicoine from Inland Wetlands were noted. Thank you letters will be developed for Richard Williams' signature. Lisa noted that the lake committee is one of the most active and Lorraine worked really hard. John said he thinks she will still help. Lisa said they were disappointed to realize they could no longer serve once they changed their voter registration to another state.

**6. Reappointments:**

None.

**7. Appointments:**

- a. **Request for representation, Pathways to UConn Eastern Gateways Study, Technical Advisory Committee:** Thomas asked if there is anyone with expertise in traffic control. Lisa said there was a person from the Farmers' Market who was involved in parking. John said that person doesn't live in town. Eric Trott will be going to represent Coventry. We can't send Todd Penney too – there are too many demands on his time. We don't have to send two

people; it is just an opportunity for someone to be involved.

**8. Charge to CHS Walls Code Compliance Building Committee:**

John said the charge is already adopted. He put this in as a reminder that the committee needs members. He will remind the Board of Education too. We could do press releases or put it in an e-blast. Thomas said the situation is endemic. Volunteerism has steadily declined since the 1950s. John said overall we are pretty full. Thomas said when you look at the number of positions we have to fill we are doing pretty well. Lisa said we have to be careful not to get volunteer burnout. It would be nice if we could have a waiting list so people who might want to move on but have not resigned because they don't want to leave the commission short would know that people are waiting to step up. John said the Citizens Academy he did was successful in getting new volunteers but it was very draining to run.

**9. Consideration – Tax Abatements for Seniors:**

Thomas said he thinks this warrants more review. John said when the committee started this he had provided some information - there are certain types of tax abatements that require a study committee and we think we need to determine whether that applies in this case. He would like to have the Town Attorney review. Thomas said he thinks the numbers are too high in the calculation. John will check it.

**10. Revised Statement of Interest Form to Serve on a Board or Commission:**

The committee reviewed the revised form. Thomas said he feels it is too intimidating in the way it asks for educational background. Richard Williams agreed. John said maybe we could make that section parenthetical (i.e., “provide interest, education etc. that you feel would be relevant.”) The committee agreed to revise the form to make it less intimidating, and to make it clear you must be a resident elector to serve.

**11. Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM on a motion by Richard Williams, seconded by Lisa Thomas and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone  
Town Council Clerk