

Minutes
Special Town Council Budget Meeting
March 27, 2017
Town Annex

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.
Present: Justin Trzaskos, Hannah Pietrantonio, Richard Williams, Julie Blanchard, Matthew O'Brien, Thomas Pope, Andy Brodersen
Also present: John Elsesser, Town Manager
2. **Unfinished Business:**
A. 16/17-41: FY 2017-2018 Budget: Human Services

Prior to beginning a discussion with the Human Services Department on the FY 2017-18 budget, Julie Blanchard noted that the creation of the budget for fiscal year 2017-18 is posing many unique challenges. She outlined the procedure by which the process is accomplished and indicated this process is established by the Town Charter. The Town Manager and Board of Education present their proposed budgets at the annual budget hearing. The budgets are reviewed and may have adjustments made by the Town Council. The Council proposed budget goes to the Annual Town Meeting on Saturday, April 22, 2017 at 10 AM in CHS Veterans Auditorium. The State plays a large role in our development of the budget. The Town Council is working diligently on your behalf.

Courtney Chan, Human Services Administrator; Crystal Morawitz, Youth Services Coordinator; Brenda Bennett, Human Services Administrative Assistant; and Emma King, Senior Center Coordinator were present to discuss their budget and goals for the coming year.

Courtney Chan began by introducing the staff, each of whom will go over their roles and what each department does. The Human Services Department consists of Youth Services and Human Services. A typical day can vary depending on which clients walk into the office. Some of the more popular programs include the Food Bank, which serves Coventry residents by appointment and also on an emergency basis. The Food Bank is run with help from high school students and staff. We also help clients get on food stamps. We do applications and referrals to various energy programs during the winter. This year we had 91 Access Energy applications for propane, oil and wood heat. We also do emergency oil applications in collaboration with Second Church. That program has served 10 people so far. The weather was nice for much of the winter. The Human Services Department advocates for our clients. We help them with legal resources, referrals for counseling, and case management for those who need extra support. The holiday program is huge and wouldn't be successful without help from volunteers and staff. The interns also help. This year we helped 263 Coventry residents for Thanksgiving and Christmas, demonstrating definite need. We also coordinate the Salvation Army bell ring program, which raised over \$7,000 this season. We see a lot of different people who need assistance. The needs are ever-changing.

In addition to supporting the Human Services office, Brenda Bennett also administers the Renters Rebate program, which is tax relief program for disabled renters. We served 90 renters last year. Brenda also distributed Farmers' Market vouchers to 80 residents. Brenda is also the secretary and treasurer for this region's Salvation Army unit.

Crystal Morawitz said that Youth Services provides programming including the Back to School gear program, camp scholarships, and pro-social positive youth development activities. We have established a mentoring program where students help other students. It is a great leadership program for high school students and a great resource for the mentees. Youth Services also runs the

Promaganza program which provides clothing, services and accessories to help offset the cost of attending prom for students who might not otherwise be able to go. We just completed the 4th year of this program. We also work with the library to offer programs for at-risk youth and divorce groups. Programs change based on what we hear current needs are. We are also involved with opioid prevention initiatives – we just finished up participating in a regional forum. We are collaborating on a Grandparents Raising Grandkids resource fair next week. We do a lot of collaborative work.

Emma King said that activities at the Senior Center are varied and exciting. She runs the day to day operations and develops and coordinates programs. She also maintains the marketing materials and newsletter. She serves as the Municipal Agent to the Elderly, helping families connect to resources to stay happy and healthy at home. She is currently coordinating the transportation program while evaluating the future of this service. We have re-introduced some programming that had lapsed during the absence of the previous coordinator and are back up to last summer's levels. We are also piloting some new programs including mahjong which is very popular. We are doing a new Crafternoon program supported by the donation of supplies from Parks & Recreation. We have increased programming on Mondays and Wednesdays and are increasing our pro-social and therapeutic programming. The monthly TVCAA lunches draw 25-40 people. We are also piloting some potluck events. The Center will also be working to support grandparents in town following the upcoming resource fair. We are seeking to identify activities directed toward the male population. Emma also manages the Senior Center volunteers – a robust pool of people who answer phones, serve lunches, and update the bulletin boards. Having an additional person would be a big help as we are trying to grow and be competitive with our neighboring communities. We can't expect volunteers to meet with patrons on any type of confidential requests. We having an amazing center and she is trying to build upon that as much as possible. She knows this is a challenging year when we're pinching a million pennies but she thinks the return could be three-fold if we can really grow the center as she thinks it can. She hopes the Council will see this is an area to invest in.

John Elsesser said we had another person at the Senior Center - Leigh Wajda, who ran the Coventry Rides transportation program. After Leigh left we took a pause to evaluate the Coventry Rides program. In the meantime Windham Region Transit District (WRTD) is working through some issues to coordinate the Dial a Ride program with Coventry Rides. This means that Emma is also doing the transit work that was being done separately. Leigh was not only doing the transit work but was also there to answer questions, answer the phone, etc., so we are down that person right now. We still have that grant and the proceeds are going to WRTD. We wanted to talk about a plan – if the analysis supports this concept – that combines transit position with some of the other clerical functions we need. We can't use the grant to do the receptionist-type duties but we could have the same person split their time. Emma said she came on board 30 days prior to the previous transportation coordinator's retirement and upon her departure we decided to evaluate the program to see if we wanted to make changes going forward. She introduced the college interns who have been helping to analyze and assess the program. They have researched six centers so far, including interviewing transportation coordinators about how they run their programs. Some are doing a hybrid of paid drivers and volunteers. It's a lot to balance. The geography of where medical appointments are located for Coventry residents is complicated. They are not just in Manchester or Vernon, but also in Avon, Farmington or Rocky Hill. We want people to stay in Coventry for as long as they want to, and this program is one way to help them do that. Matthew O'Brien asked how many vehicles are run by the program. Emma replied two - a 12 passenger white van and an older red van that seats eight. The larger vehicle requires a commercial driver's license (CDL). We have more drivers on the red van. It is clear that appointments are not just during the hours of our program. We are relying on some individuals to help with that. We would like to expand to 9 AM -3 PM five days a week. One way we can do that is to offer compensation to the drivers. John Elsesser said the grant covers the expenses of the vans and the coordinator. The Council funded our match for a new van. He has a meeting at CT

DOT on April 14th to go over regulations, and on April 17th we will be selecting the van. We are buying it through North Haven Transit District. It will be a smaller van. It is good to have both sizes so when we run larger trips we can have a volunteer to drive the bigger bus. The newer one will be lower to the ground and not as bouncy. The drivers will like it. The grant stipulates the vehicle has to be for senior transportation use for 4 years – our red van has been in service for longer than that so we may repurpose it for Youth Services. When a citizen takes a senior to a medical appointment using their own vehicle they can request for reimbursement. Emma said since December 31st we have scheduled 85 rides, including some periods of driver unavailability due to weather or other factors. There were 52 unique riders. Our partnership with WRTD has been great. We can refer to Dial-a-Ride if we can't serve the resident's need. Thomas Pope asked if transportation is provided free regardless of how far they go. Emma said yes but Coventry Rides really only travels to the Manchester/Vernon/Tolland areas. We don't go to Farmington or Avon with the buses because we don't have time to handle rides of that capacity. Courtney noted that medical appointments are the top priority - we try to coordinate taxi rides if need be. If we can go to a paid driver system we might not have to rely on taxis as much. We think this model will be a better fit for our riders as well as allowing the leisure trips that they like to do. Emma distributed preliminary information about the survey work the interns have been doing. She said we think this change will help modernize our program and help the Center be competitive in the region. Hannah Pietrantonio asked how much the CT DOT grant funding is. Emma replied \$26,012. It comes in quarterly payments after we submit our quarterly reports. Matthew O'Brien asked if other grants and contributions are dropping. Emma replied yes. John noted that WRTD is based on the number of actual miles and clients served, and those numbers were down last year.

The Human Services budget was reviewed. Courtney Chan said one of the things we wanted to highlight in our budget was the request for a part time administrative assistant at the Senior Center. Matthew O'Brien noted that we are trying to make up for reductions in aid by the State, and he asked if there will be any savings in Human Services due to the timing of hiring. It looks like there will be some money in the salary account. Courtney replied not in Human Services but there will be some salary savings in the Senior Center budget. John Elsesser noted we have 26 pay periods but pay for every day worked in the fiscal year. This year there are an extra 5 days. Emma King said we will be spending down the programming money. There was a lapse when the previous director left but we are gearing up our fitness program again. Matthew asked if \$16/hour is the typical level someone would be hired at for the administrative assistant position. John replied it would be hard to find anyone who is qualified for less. Minimum wage is \$10.10. Sixteen dollars is less than the entry level for the union. Emma said she did some research on salaries for positions of similar type and they ranged from \$15-\$20 depending on where you are in the state.

Richard Williams asked why item 5322 in section 7-4 for \$4800 has not been spent. John Elsesser said this is for Youth Services. We always expect the State to cut the Youth Services money and we have been carrying program costs in case they do. We always find out very late in the process. Youth Enhancement is always one of first State programs to get cut. The amount lapses to the general fund if it is not spent.

John Elsesser said the other area of increase is a request for chairs at the Senior Center. He put \$3,000 in the budget for this. Staff has gone shopping and the word is that the chair everyone likes at the Mansfield center is a good chair, but they are \$300 each. We're not getting those chairs but we are looking for a quality chair. At the \$59-\$100 level the chairs are not good quality. We are looking at 15 chairs @\$200 apiece. This covers the inner room where the seniors play cards and do crafts. Matthew O'Brien asked about storage. John replied these chairs would stay in that room. This does not take care of luncheon/event chairs. There are 65 of those. Emma King noted that the new acoustic ceiling tiles in the Lodge have made a big difference.

Andy Brodersen asked if the Senior Center has advertised for drivers for the transportation program. Emma King replied yes and that the interns will be helping us do some new marketing materials. We had some natural volunteer turnover and wanted to see what direction the program will be going before actively recruiting again. John Elsesser said we advertise in almost every town newsletter and sometimes in the monthly e-blast. Courtney Chan said we also recruit when people come in to the office. Emma said we got two new applicants recently – they are afraid of the size of the white van. Andy asked if they can drive their own cars. Emma said yes; this is done more for medical appointments. For social/rec trips we want to use the Town vehicle. Matthew O'Brien asked if there are insurance considerations. John said yes - when drivers are in their own vehicle we do not cover their insurance. We help pay for them to get a CDL license. Emma said we have two drivers with current CDL classifications - the rest drive the red van.

Thomas Pope asked about the Salvation Army program. He noticed the amount of funds raised has dropped substantially. Why is the trend going in the wrong direction? Courtney Chan replied that she talked with the head of her unit – they are seeing this across the board. People aren't donating as much. Also the volunteers are stretched – a lot of people are just too busy. We are happy with what we get. Thomas asked if the schedule was fully staffed or if there were some times that weren't filled. Courtney replied there were some times that weren't staffed. We went to an online sign up system – it didn't help like we thought it would. This year we also had to start at the Dunkin Donuts location two weeks later than usual. That site is one of our biggest draws. John Elsesser noted there is also growing concern about some of the Salvation Army's social positions - some people just won't donate even though the money stays here in town. As a bell ringer he has been told that. Some people spend money based on their own philosophies.

Richard Williams noted that in Mansfield, 95% of the funding for transportation comes from grants. What level is Coventry at? Emma's King replied 100%. Richard asked if we had paid drivers would it all be paid by the grant. Emma said yes. Richard asked if the drivers would be town employees. Emma said they are in that they are paid by the grant that comes in from the State. Paid drivers would give us more flexibility and allow us to expand our hours. The grant would also cover recreation based activities, so we might be able to do a caravan trip vs. hiring a commercial bus.

The Council thanked the Human Services staff for attending the meeting.

B. 16/17-41: FY 2017-2018 Budget: Parks & Recreation:

Wendy Rubin, Director and Caterina Merriam, Program Supervisor, were present to discuss the Parks & Recreation budget. Wendy introduced several members of the Parks & Recreation Commission who were in the audience, including Todd Messier, Jen Rodgers and Jill Miner.

The Recreation budget was reviewed. Matthew O'Brien said he had noticed that items like licenses, data support and service contracts seem to fluctuate. Are those biannual charges? Wendy Rubin yes. These are fees for royalties for music, movies and software registration. We need to be sure we don't violate copyright laws. John Elsesser said we did negotiate and change software companies and we are looking at that again. We are passing through convenience fees to credit card users now. Wendy said we have been successful putting the 3% fee put back to card users. Some don't like it and will write a check instead. We have seen a small reduction in online registrations but we haven't seen a drop in registrations overall. The savings has been significant - over \$7,000 per year.

John Elsesser said there is one other big thing: minimum wage went up for lifeguards. We are also having problems recruiting. Thomas Pope asked if most of the lifeguards are students. Wendy Rubin replied they are typically college age. We also hire from the high school and work with them through

the years. We pair the younger lifeguards with veteran guards for a few weeks which has been successful. This year every time someone walks through the door she gives them information about the lifeguard training class. We have two people in the class right now. Our aquatic director is leaving for a full time job with benefits. This is a huge loss to us. We also lost our camp director, but we have some great people in-house who are ready for the challenge so we are going with that approach.

Julie Blanchard asked if Recreation is proposing any changes in dates to the beach season. Wendy Rubin replied not yet. If we must modify we might open Lisicke Beach later in the day and just have swim lessons in the morning. John Elsesser said there are no plans to raise the parking permit fees this year. Seniors will still get the discount. Wendy said we sold fewer passes but the program is meeting people's needs. We generated more revenue. Guest passes were also used by 54 people. The revenue from non-resident daily fees is very weather dependent. The numbers were down a little bit more during weekdays than weekends but we still made more than the previous year.

Andy Brodersen thanked the staff for providing the budget transmittal document included with the agenda, saying it is very good. The document mentions economic development goals. He asked if there is any information that backs up the economic development component. He can't see how getting a family with 3 children who go to school here is economic development for our town. Wendy Rubin replied that businesses look for a community where people can live. The most significant thing is when we host or sponsor an event. It brings in people from all over the region and they are spending money here. One baseball tournament for Little League is a \$40,000 revenue stream for the community for a weekend. Plus there is the community pride and value of living in a town that is recognized for having nice amenities.

Richard Williams asked how Parks & Recreation might be able to create more revenue without affecting senior citizens, suggesting summer camp fees as a possibility. In reviewing minutes from last year he saw that the Commission talked about whether we are competitive in pricing compared to other towns and it appears there is room to raise our prices. Wendy Rubin said there is a balance if costs get too high - people are looking for a relative bargain. If the price for day camp gets too high, people might compare the cost and choose overnight camp elsewhere instead. Keeping our expenses down helps. It doesn't help that minimum wage went up. We don't know if we can grow much larger with our staff limitations and physical resources. It is a constant balance but we don't see a lot of potential to increase the size of day camp. John Elsesser noted that last year we brought in more students but had to bring in more staff to serve them. Caterina Merriam said we maxed out registration for most of the weeks of summer camp. Matthew O'Brien noted that the minimum wage increase alone is \$15,000. Wendy replied we have a lot of staff who fall into that category. Thomas Pope asked if the fee for camp is set for this year yet. Wendy replied not yet. The Recreation Commission meets on Wednesday and will discuss it. John said he thinks a modest increase will be necessary due to increases in minimum wage. Andy Brodersen asked if we accept kids from out of town. Caterina replied yes. We charge an additional \$10 for out of town residents. Richard asked how can we create more profit vs. trying to keep pricing down. Wendy replied we would have to do a fee study. We could ask people how much they are willing to spend. We have to make sure we don't reach a price point where people aren't willing to pay more. Andy asked if there are any camp scholarships for the needy. Wendy replied yes, it is done in coordination with Human Services. If the family meets the income requirement they are given at least a week or two per season. Caterina said our annual town-wide tag sale is the fundraiser for the camp scholarship program. A donation solicitation letter is also sent to community.

Thomas Pope said that this year we are facing a unique budget challenge. There are going to be some decisions we have to make that we won't like to make. If we were to cut your budget, might there still be time to increase fees? Wendy Rubin replied there are not many areas to cut in our budget. We can

raise revenue to offset the lifeguard situation. If we have to cut hours then we don't have to pay staff. We almost always run under budget with lifeguards but it is weather dependent so we don't like to cut it too close.

Richard Williams asked what we can do to help the Recreation Department create more revenue. Wendy Rubin replied miniature golf might be an idea. We also don't have any clerical help in the department at all - even part time would help by taking registrations, answering phones and managing the front counter. That would free us up so we would be able to do more outreach for sponsorships and grants. Summer interns help but they come and go. Richard Williams asked if we can get some priorities for how the department might be able to increase revenue. Wendy Rubin replied yes; she will work with the Recreation Commission to put some ideas together. She noted we are expanding our canoe and kayak program. We are hiring a coordinator and will be charging an hourly rate. Justin Trzaskos said as someone who works with the Recreation Department on a weekly basis, the amount of things you are able to pull off is amazing. He thanked them for their efforts.

3. **Adjournment:**

Motion #16/17-161: The meeting was adjourned at 8:21 PM on a motion by Richard Williams, seconded by Thomas Pope and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone
Town Council Clerk