

Minutes
Coventry Town Council Meeting
May 16, 2016
Town Hall Annex

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.
Present: Lisa Thomas, Julie Blanchard, Matthew O'Brien, Thomas Pope, Andy Brodersen, Hannah Pietrantonio
Also present: John Elsesser, Town Manager
Absent: Richard Williams

2. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. **Audience of Citizens:**

Dorothy Grady, 42 Cornwall Drive, is concerned about accusatory comments that were made about staff by Councilman Pope during a recent public hearing of the Parks & Recreation Commission about a potential increase in beach sticker fees. She feels it was an intimidating and insulting attack and was wrong. She believes a Council member with a concern can ask the Town Manager to respond or meet in executive session if there needs to be a discussion of personnel concerns or disciplinary actions, and that staff should be told in advance if there is an issue or question so that they can provide an explanation or clarify the issue. She said this kind of attack is not new in Coventry and shared an article from the *Chronicle* dated 2-14-06 addressing the tenor of Council meetings and asking for civility. She asked that Town Council members be respectful to one another, to staff, to volunteers and residents. *Ms. Grady's full remarks are attached to these minutes.*

Harvey Barrette, 24 Avery Shores, said a couple of meetings ago there was mention of a possible ordinance change to address dog waste in the lake area and Patriots Park. He is wondering if it has been talked about since the budget is over. He is also wondering if he missed an email on the start of hydrilla treatment on Coventry Lake. He thinks it should be done before boats get out and disrupt the plants and spread it more quickly. John Elsesser responded, saying the Council Steering Committee discussed the pet waste issue and felt increased education was the best approach, so an article was published in the spring newsletter. Enforcement would be very difficult for the police to do. We are waiting for CT DEEP on hydrilla – and we have been reminding them. June was the original target and we were told they wanted it to grow a bit. Mr. Barrette said if signs need to be put up he has volunteers to help. He is also concerned about rowing crew safety. There have 3 accidents so far. They are not required to wear life preservers. In one accident a boat drove over the other one. Fortunately no one was hit but he imagines they would not survive if knocked unconscious into the water. He used to serve as chair of the Recreation Commission and at that time we required life preservers in the chase boat. He sees none at present. He feels if something happened it could be deemed the Town's responsibility because we have contracts with four organizations that are approved by Recreation. He would like this matter to be looked into. The regulations also stipulate one chase boat per three boats. One boat had eight people in it and one chase boat won't cover it. John Elsesser said he talked with the E.O. Smith Superintendent and they have developed a new set of guidelines. They take the issue very seriously and he believes they have life jackets. The guidelines are modeled after the women's crew team guidelines which are very detailed. Mr. Barrette said there is an inflatable life support which is only \$60. If it were his child he would want that investment made. He also thanked the Town Council for their work on the budget.

Police Chief Mark Palmer presented two commendations the Officer Thomas Kuhns. The first commendation is for an incident that occurred in April 2016. While working on patrol assignment

Officer Kuhns was dispatched to aid an unconscious person experiencing a potential opioid overdose. After determining this to be the case, Officer Kuhns delivered two doses of Narcan and the subject regained consciousness and was transported to hospital. Chief Palmer says the opioid addiction epidemic knows no boundaries and we have lost far too many lives. The actions of a trained officer at the scene of an overdose can be a lifesaving measure. He praised Officer Kuhn's quick thinking. The second commendation is for traffic safety, a core police function. We try to do education as part of that along with enforcement. Traffic enforcement is the number one complaint we have heard over the years. Every year we take a look at statistics per officer and Officer Kuhns had over 400 traffic stops by himself during 2015. Not all resulted in a citation; some were warnings which are part of our safety effort. The Chief issued a meritorious commendation certificate to Officer Kuhns, who received a round of applause.

Julie Blanchard announced that Chief Mark Palmer was nominated as law enforcement officer of the year for the Windham Chamber of Commerce and was given the honor of being selected for the award at their annual awards ceremony this month. She read the nomination aloud (*attached to these minutes*) and presented the award plaque to the Chief, who received a round of applause. Chief Palmer said he appreciates the Town Manager nominating him and the Council's recognition, but in reality the real work is done by the officers on patrol. For his entire tenure here he feels he just gives them a little guidance and training and the equipment to do their job. They are here 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year and the recognition should go to them. They are doing the hard work.

Harvey Barrette also mentioned he is involved with the Memorial Day parade if anyone wants to do a float to contact him.

4. **Acceptance of Minutes, May 2, 2016:**

Motion #15/16-377: Matthew O'Brien moved to accept the minutes of May 2, 2016. Lisa Thomas seconded the motion. The following corrections were requested:

- Page 1, item 7, 2nd paragraph, 7th line: change "phase it over" to "phase it in." Change "because they are close..." to "because the boilers are close..."
- Page 2, 4th paragraph, 8th line: change "because ours went" to "because our boiler went."
- Page 4, 4th paragraph, first line: change "Lisa Thomas said asked..." to "Lisa Thomas asked..."
- Page 6, Item 6B, 1st paragraph, last line: add "of over \$250,000" after the word surplus.
- Page 8, 3rd paragraph, last line: add "for summer camp" after the word providing.
- Page 9, last paragraph, 4th line: add "what" after the word asked.

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

5. **Consent Agenda:**

Motion #15/16-378: Lisa Thomas moved to accept the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Matthew O'Brien and carried on unanimous vote.

Reports:

A. Council Chairwoman Julie Blanchard: No report.

B. Council Members:

Lisa Thomas said an article in last Friday's *Chronicle* has rekindled her concern about Council members publicly berating Commission members and staff. The Parks & Recreation Commission and Recreation Director are the most recent victims. She feels such behavior indicates poor judgment and unethical contact and is in violation of the code of conduct set forth in the Handbook for Elected and Appointed

Officials and Volunteers. She feels such behavior is especially disturbing when it comes from the Chairman of the Steering Committee which is tasked with finding and appointing members to our volunteer commissions, and wonders if anyone would want to volunteer when they know they will be working under the threat of being publicly demeaned by a Town Council member. Additionally, she disagreed with Mr. Pope that the Town Council was not informed during the budget process of the Recreation Department's need to increase fees to support the beach operations, citing several instances from minutes and the video of the special Council budget meeting on March 28, 2016. She noted that a written document was also given to the Council before the budget meeting with Recreation so we could understand the Department's budget request. The minutes of that meeting do indicate the need for an increase and the Council voted to approve those minutes. At the Council's May 2, 2016 meeting, the Town Manager explained to the Council that we could choose to send a letter to the Parks and Recreation Commission regarding the proposed restructuring of fees, or individuals could speak at the hearing as private citizens. This Council did not choose to write a letter. She thinks the Commission is owed an apology. *(Ms. Thomas' full remarks are attached to these minutes.)*

Hannah Pietrantonio said that this week is the 47th annual EMT Week. EMT Week was authorized by President Gerald Ford to thank emergency services providers for their service. The men and women who perform these services deserve our thanks.

C. Finance Committee – Matthew O'Brien:

Matthew O'Brien reported on the status of revenue and expenditures as outlined in a monthly report from Finance Director Beth Bauer. Projections for budget transfers were discussed – the current total is about \$63,000. Updated numbers and plans to address the transfers will be presented at the June meeting.

The Finance Committee also discussed the history of salary allocations to the COVRAA funds from 2002 – 2003 to the present, and John Elsesser described how he had decided at the January 2016 staff meeting to allocate ¼ of the DPW's Assistant to COVRAA resulting in a surplus in the salary account for DPW. We discussed whether the Town Manager is authorized to approve such a transfer without discussion with the Council. It was decided that the Council should discuss and address this issue, particularly for such decisions in the future.

We discussed a preliminary draft of State grants for the 2016-2017 year that shows a projected shortfall of \$334,643. Beth and John presented some ideas on how we can consider offsetting some of that shortfall in next year's budget. We will have a more detailed discussion when the Town Council considers setting the mil rate.

The Committee unanimously agreed to recommend that the Town Council approve a request by the Board of Education to transfer \$50,000 from the 2016 general fund to their reserve fund for capital expenditures.

We also discussed the 2015-2016 Council Unencumbered Report and it was noted that the March 2016 settlement for Heart & Hypertension was settled at \$75,000, saving \$8,000 from the appropriation and that it is anticipated that none of the \$38,640 February 2016 appropriation for the Town Hall Boiler will be needed, saving \$38,640 from the appropriation. We are waiting for final numbers for the other expenses made for the Town Hall Boiler from the October 2015 appropriation. The current total of all appropriations made is \$193,868.87. The above adjustments will reduce the total appropriation by at least \$46,640.

The Finance Committee requested that a joint session with the Board of Education's Finance Committee be scheduled for our next scheduled committee meeting, if possible.

(Mr. O'Brien's full report is attached to these minutes.)

D. COVRRRA – John Elsesser: No report.

Matthew O'Brien said he would like to get clarity going forward regarding whether the Town Manager can change allocations between COVRRRA and the general fund. John Elsesser replied that he stated at the Finance Committee meeting if the Council wants it undone they can do so. He also stated at the meeting that he believes he has the authority to do this because it doesn't change the budget. He believes when a bill comes in he has the authority to allocate it to the appropriate account. Every bill that comes in has to be allocated to an account and he thought this allocation was more transparent. If the Council wants to, they could make a policy change. Matthew said he is not saying he wants to re-do it. He would just like to get clarity. We had a statement earlier that the amount was going to be \$7,000 but it looks like it will be over \$9,000. John replied that the Finance Director will need to clarify this as she prepared the report. He will check with her.

E. Town Manager – John Elsesser:

1. Projects update: A written memo is contained in the Council packet. Updates include:

- The tax sale is tomorrow. We are down to only two properties. We started with 21. The two that are remaining are estates with probate/heir issues. We are addressing community issues where properties would remain vacant.
- Last week we held a crumbling concrete foundations meeting with four towns. State officials were present. 300 people attended. This is a very significant and emotional issue. In tonight's folders is a draft resolution that towns are talking about asking their Councils to adopt. If the Council could look at it then we will put it on a future agenda for consideration. A lot of people feel local officials aren't getting involved and they are all alone. We are looking at interim needs for testing and repairs, as well as potential abuses by insurance companies to raise rates or banks that may foreclose on home equity lines of credit if the value of a property goes down. We are waiting for the Governor's signature on a bill that will allow people to come in and reduce their assessments. The resolution talks about towns seeking guidance to establish those new values. We are worried that towns will be played against each other and we need to be consistent. People should understand the implications of lowering tax values because everyone else's will go up. We sent out letters to 1515 people and if only a quarter come in for reduced assessments it will be very damaging to the community. We are already getting emails. The resolution also calls for an economic impact statement for the region to be developed. Right now the State is only talking about doing loans. If this were a hurricane or blizzard it would be different. Thomas Pope asked if there is anything from CCM to establish standards for assessors so we can all be on the same page. John said yes, we are working with CRCOG and the Assessor's Association. The method should be uniform and we may need help from the national association. It is not just the cost of repair. We don't know what the formula is. We are seeing a lot of towns that are worse than us that are already seeing short sales. A \$450,000 home sold for \$150,000 last week. The impact to our grand list would be dramatic. Generally a foreclosure doesn't count because it is a distressed sale. This has not been defined and could lead to a lot of legal issues. The meeting was fairly productive although somewhat loud and violent. The resolution also calls for emotional support. Matthew O'Brien said he hears they may have found the issue in another state and that may impact federal assistance. John replied yes, the situation definitely goes into Massachusetts. There is no magic number for FEMA assistance. Federal emergencies have been declared at less than 563 homes and denied in cases of more than that. Our senators and congressmen are working to address it at the federal level. There are certain State programs that could be reallocated, like STEAP or CDBG. The Governor could issue an executive order. Other things would suffer but this has to rise to the top level of priority issues. Sometimes Eastern Connecticut gets lost in the shuffle when setting priorities. Lisa Thomas asked about next steps. John said over the next couple of weeks towns will be looking at the resolution and trying to get it adopted. We are trying to get it done by the first Council meeting in June. Lisa asked if it should go to Steering. John

replied that Steering does have a meeting between now and then. Thomas Pope said it could get killed in Steering very quickly by not having enough time to get it done. He suggested we do it as a full Council. John suggested that Council members could send ideas individually and he will edit the document, which can then be discussed at the next meeting. Lisa urged an initial review at Steering. Julie Blanchard decided that Council members should send their ideas to John and we will do it at the Council table on 6/6/16 so all members are involved.

- Laidlaw Park soccer field irrigation will finish up tomorrow. We are cleaning the water tank and seeding on Friday.
- The train that recycles pavement is coming to the South Street area next week. It chews up road, adds aggregate and paves at same time. It can be used on certain types of roads without underground utilities or catchbasins. It is a more economical approach in some areas. Roads will be drivable throughout the process. South Street will get full amosite on top. Case Road will get cold mix. That is cheaper and ok for lower volume roads. Every road is getting a slightly different treatment depending on conditions.
- Village drainage work finished this week. Loaming and seeding at Mt. Ridge will be done next week.
- The Flyboard legislation did pass and is waiting for the Governor's signature. It does prevent flyboard use in no-wake zones.
- The building committee meetings are this week with natural gas a priority.
- We got word that the Bond Commission will be approving the MSRA money at their meeting this week.
- Hannah Pietrantonio said she has been approached by people about the Rt. 31 project and asked if there is a way to see the plans so people can see the vision of what it will be like. John will check.
- Hannah also asked about the meeting with CT Water that was mentioned in the Manager's update, and the statement that maybe this is a shrinking project. John replied he met with them today. They withdrew for a year - they have a well they are going to bring online. The water tower here would be after that and the question is whether we want to stay on the list for State money because the project is convoluted. CT Water's priority is to do the Village first and then come up here. The Housing Authority has not come on to the project yet but we can go with or without them.

2. Update - Public Hearing: Proposed Beach Rate Increases: The hearing for the beach rate fee increase was held last week and the attachments included with the agenda clarify the outcome. The senior citizen pass was broadened to offer weekday discounts. Most of the increases will impact out-of-town visitors. Local impact could be either an increase or decrease depending how many cars get stickers. Lisa Thomas noted that the one-day \$5 pass is new with a credit if the person decides to go to a full season pass. John said there was a great deal of discussion at the hearing about ability to pay, mostly for senior citizens. The Commission discussed resources that are available for people who have difficulties to pay. The Commission will be doing an education effort on that.

3. Reminder, Memorial Day Parade: The parade is Monday, 5/30. If you are marching be at Robertson School by 9:45AM at the latest. The parade starts at 10.

8. New Business:

A. 15/16-95: Board of Education: Request to Transfer \$50,000 of FY 16 Funds to Non-Lapsing Account: Matthew O'Brien indicated that the Finance Committee recommends approval of this request. In his report he put in the actual name of the account and he thinks we should start using it. The correct name is the Board of Education Reserve Fund for Capital Expenditures. **Motion #15/16-379: Matthew O'Brien moved to authorize a transfer of \$50,000 from the Board of Education's operating budget of FY 2015/16 to the Board of Education Reserve Fund for Capital**

Expenditures. Thomas Pope seconded the motion. Matthew noted these transfers can only come from budget surplus. **The motion carried on unanimous vote.**

B. 15/16-96: Establishment of mil rate for FY 2016/17: Motion #15/16-380: Matthew O'Brien moved to set the mil rate for the Town of Coventry at the same rate as last year: 31.2 mils. Thomas Pope seconded the motion. Matthew said that Beth Bauer put forward an idea of where some of the offsetting funds (to cover State aid reductions) might come from, i.e. tax sales. Is the estimate of \$335,000 fairly accurate? John replied yes. There are two sources of revenue we are hoping to use to make up the difference – CIRMA, due to stock market gains last quarter, will be able to issue us a dividend check. Last year it was about \$20,000 and we believe it will be in that neighborhood. Regarding the tax sale properties – he assigned that project to the Assessor to get it done. Beth's initial estimate was approximately \$300,000 and if we are frugal through the budget process and spending we should be ok. Using one-time revenue puts more pressure on matching it the following year but he believes we are fortunate it is not worse than that. If we aren't able to bring in the whole amount it will have to come out of fund balance. That was done once before when a mid-year cut was made to Town Aid. Matthew said it was suggested to hold back on some capital items in case funds are needed. John said that could be discussed and prioritized at Finance – it would be helpful to know what to order as some of the timelines to build the trucks can be lengthy. **Motion #15/16-380 carried on unanimous vote.**

C. 15/16-97: Invitation to provide input to negotiation process, Coventry Board of Education and Education Association of Coventry, and possible selection of Council representative: Julie Blanchard said she would like Matthew O'Brien to serve as the Council's representative. Matthew asked if there is any way to get information as to when they plan to hold their meetings. He can't do it if they meet during the day. Jennifer Beausoleil of the Board of Education was present at the meeting and said she sat on 4 of these negotiations, and we need a quorum so we meet at night. Matthew said he needs to have an idea of the commitment level. Is it only one Council representative? John replied we were hoping it would be one person so we would have the flow of negotiations. Matthew said he would be interested if we can get more details. Julie will follow up.

10. **Executive session:**

Motion #15/16-381: Matthew O'Brien moved that the Town Council enter into Executive Session 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 with the following people in attendance: Town Council members present and the Town Manager. The motion was seconded by Lisa Thomas and carried on unanimous vote.

Motion #15/16-382: Matthew O'Brien moved that the Town Council enter into Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 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 present and the Town Manager. The motion was seconded by Andy Brodersen and carried on unanimous vote.

Executive Session commenced at 8:45 PM.

Motion #15/16-383: Hannah Pietrantonio moved to leave Executive Session at 9:10 PM. The

motion was seconded by Matthew O'Brien and carried on unanimous vote.

11. Adjournment:

Motion #15/16-384: Matthew O'Brien moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:11 PM. The motion was seconded by Thomas Pope and carried on unanimous vote.

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.

ATTACHMENTS

May 16, 2016

“Silence is the voice of complicity.” (Author unknown) This phrase quoted so often has been running through my head.

At the last town council meeting, Councilman Pope raised the issue about the Parks and Recreation committee and the parking fees for the town beaches. But it wasn't a comment or an announcement about the upcoming Public Hearing, it was an angry accusatory diatribe attacking the Recreation Director and staff. .

What concerns me, is not whether or not fees must be increased but the inappropriate, intimidating and insulting attack on a professional town staff member. I worked for the town of Coventry for more than twenty six years. I know how hard it is to predict in December when the department budget is developed the exact costs for the budget year eighteen months out. The budget is a plan for the department and throughout the year adjustments are made. Attacking staff members and commission members is just plain wrong. Clearly a councilman can ask the Town Manager to respond to concerns with the staff or the Council could meet in executive session if some personnel concerns or disciplinary actions need to be discussed. The staff should be told in advance if there is an issue or question so that they can provide an explanation or clarify the issue.

In Coventry, unfortunately, this kind of attack is not new. In the Willimantic Chronicle dated 2-14-06, there is a LTE addressing the tenor of the meetings and asking for civility. The writer is a long time resident and WW II veteran who outlined a meeting. I am attaching that letter to my comments for the record as a reminder.

Town Council members represent the town and everyone who lives and works in the town. Please be respectful to one another, to the staff, the volunteers and the residents. We all care about our community.

Dorothy Grady
42 Cornwall Drive
Coventry, CT 06238



Council Meetings Lacking In Civility

As a citizen of Coventry, I have become increasingly dismayed over the tenor of recent meetings among the newly elected town council members. The meetings are beginning to be tinged with harsh rhetoric, and there seems to be an increasing atmosphere of distrust at the table. This will hardly be conducive to the council being able to conduct the town's business in a positive and constructive manner.

At the Feb. 6 meeting, one of the council members, Tom Pope, harshly criticized the "Winter 2006 Coventry Town Council Newsletter." He was extremely incensed that, despite the title being town council newsletter, the newly elected council had not been given the opportunity to review the contents before it was distributed townwide. Then he read a lengthy statement he had prepared to enumerate what he considered to be the problems with the publication, much of which was his opinion. I, for one, found this newsletter to be extremely informative and well done. I thought his remarks were nit-picking minutiae while overlooking the fact that it was chock-full of important updates and information for its citizens.

If Mr. Pope's intent was to suggest a change to standard operating procedure by involving the council in the publication, it would have been far more constructive had he made a motion to that effect. In fact, because he didn't make such a motion, the issue remains in limbo. Instead, he launched a harsh, angry attack that was highly critical of, and directed at, Town Manager John Elsesser.

Mr. Elsesser is a very dedicated and hard-working town manager and has provided Coventry with many years of knowledgeable, strong leadership. He deserves to be treated fairly and with respect. The practice of blind-siding him at public, televised meetings is unfair and counter-productive.

2.14.06 PAUL JATKOWSKI
COVENTRY

*The writer is a member of the
Democratic town committee*

**Nomination: Windham Chamber of Commerce
Law Enforcement Officer of the Year 2016: Chief Mark Palmer, Coventry CT**

It is the Town of Coventry's pleasure to nominate Chief Mark Palmer for the Windham Chamber of Commerce's Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.

Chief Palmer joined the Coventry Police Department in November 2006 after 28 years with the Norwalk Police Department where he rose to the rank of Deputy Chief. During his tenure with the Town of Coventry, Chief Palmer has brought a modern focus to community policing with an emphasis on personal interaction. He was instrumental in the Department's successful application for national accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA). Obtaining this accreditation is an extensive process designed to improve the delivery of public service agencies through adherence to a set of 484 standards which address all aspects of professional law enforcement. When the accreditation was awarded in 2010, Coventry Police Department was one of only 28 departments in the country with less than 25 employees to receive such distinction. The Department successfully achieved CALEA re-accreditation in 2013 under Chief Palmer's leadership and is applying for re-accreditation under CALEA's Gold Standard – an even more stringent set of requirements – in 2016.

On the local front, Chief Palmer is well respected in the field and serves as a member of the Emergency Medical Services Advisory Board of the Connecticut Chiefs of Police Association, an appointment made by the Governor of Connecticut. He also serves as the Treasurer for the Capitol Region Chiefs of Police Association. He is actively involved in programs to improve public safety at the local level, serving on the Town's Emergency Coordinating Committee, helping Coventry Public Schools with the development of school security initiatives and participating in the development of numerous programs to address domestic violence, traffic safety and youth mentoring.

Chief Palmer participated on the Town's Website Redesign Committee during a recent upgrade, improving the Police Department's [website](#) to provide greater interactivity and ease of use by community residents. He has also been successful in obtaining funding through numerous grant programs to expand the Department's technological resources at no increase to Coventry taxpayers, including the use of tablet devices in police cruisers which provides access to information more rapidly during enforcement operations.

A recent grant initiative spearheaded by Chief Palmer equipped Coventry Police officers with body cameras and the ability to dispense Naloxone, a potentially life-saving intervention, in the event of a drug overdose. In February 2016, Chief Palmer presented an Award of Meritorious Commendation to one of Coventry's Police Officers for the successful administration of Naloxone on two separate incidents during December 2015. During the presentation, Chief Palmer noted that a trained officer's actions at the scene of an overdose can make the difference between life and death. Chief Palmer has been invited to sit on a statewide forum regarding opiate use and he is pleased that elected officials are discussing it as the epidemic knows no boundaries. Another grant program implemented by Chief Palmer recently provided a prescription drug drop-off box, located in the lobby of the Coventry Police Department, that helps keep prescription drugs off the street – and through proper disposal, out of our rivers and streams.

Town Manager John Elsesser considers Chief Palmer to be a star employee and integral member of the Town's leadership team, noting that "he handles tough situations with grace and resolve."

April 11, 2016

Comments for May 16 TC Meeting - Lisa Thomas

An article in last Friday's *Chronicle* newspaper has rekindled my concern over members of this Town Council publicly berating volunteer members of town commissions, town staff, and even entire town commissions. The Parks and Rec Commission and our Parks and Rec Director are the most recent victims. The vitriol directed at these town residents and at our staff has more times than not been based on unfounded accusations and misrepresentations. Such behavior indicates not just poor judgment on the part of those Council members, but - I believe - unethical conduct. Whether we, as elected officials, are speaking "officially" or as private citizens, we are always viewed through a lens that holds us to a higher standard. Our Town of Coventry "Handbook for Elected and Appointed Officials and Volunteers" mandates we follow a code of conduct that includes:

1. Acting professionally and in the best interest of the Town of Coventry at all times
2. Treating people with respect, even when they disagree
3. Avoiding discourteous or abusive language or conduct toward others while representing the Town of Coventry

I believe each of these have been violated both at this table and away from this table during public statements.

This behavior is especially disturbing when it comes from the Chairman of the Steering Committee. Steering is tasked with finding and appointing members to our volunteer commissions. I have to wonder which residents will want to volunteer when they know they will be working under threat of being publicly demeaned by a Town Council member.

At our May 2 Town Council meeting Councilman Pope commented that (see page 8 of the minutes) the Parks and Rec department didn't start to examine their numbers until after we met with them on March 28 for budget discussions. He commented that increasing fees puts an undue burden on taxpayers. He also stated that nothing in the minutes of the March 28 meeting with parks and Rec reflects that a fee increase is needed. I stated that the fees most definitely have come up before with consistent conversation about restructuring the beach sticker price.

Then, at the May 4 Parks and Rec public hearing, Councilmen Pope, Broderson and Williams each spoke. I would like to quote the *Chronicle's* reporting on Councilman Pope's comments to the Commission:

From *The Chronicle*:

Thomas Pope, a town council member who spoke as an individual during the recent public hearing, was outraged the recreation commission is seeking a fee increase the day after the budget passed.

"You wait until a day after taxpayers approve it, now you're putting a new tax on their back," Pope said. "This sounds like the Malloy administration. Thank God our debt isn't as deep as his."

Pope said the recreation commission presented its budget to the town council March 28 and at that time there was "no problems and no shortage of funds."

"There wasn't a problem because you didn't do the work or your representative didn't do the work," Pope said to Rubin, further stating the board could have requested more money if needed.

Pope also referenced minutes from the April 6 recreation commission meeting that stated through research and "number crunching," more revenue would be needed for the town beaches.

"The town council sets aside times to discuss budgets, to adequately fund, so there's not a problem for the community," Pope said.

I would like to make a side note here that whether the cost of running our parks facilities, including the beaches, is funded through direct user fees or through the town budget, the funds are coming from taxpayers. Mr. Pope can not have his cake and eat it, too. He can not say at our May 2 Council meeting that raising fees is an undue burden, and then state at the public hearing that the Parks Director could have requested more money from the Council in the budget.

Regarding Mr. Pope's statements at the May 2 Town Council meeting and then again at the May 4 public hearing that the Parks Commission and our Parks and Recreation staff did not do their due diligence to provide information about a need for additional funding and that they were looking to restructure fees, let me note the following times when they did exactly that:

In the Parks and Rec Transmittal Letter that was attached to our agenda for our March 28 special budget meeting with the Parks and Staff:

Goal 2: To oversee the Town's investments by maintaining all Town equipment, buildings and infrastructure. Risk reduction and minimizing our liability exposure is accomplished by maintaining our town's assets (facilities/ parks) at a proper operating level to meet the needs and demands of public use. Regular communication and coordination with DPW is required for on-going routine maintenance and special projects. The Department of Public Works had a Facilities Maintenance Division in prior years that supported our infrastructure with a more dedicated work force and operating budget than we have today. The shift away from DPW support has created a need to hire our own seasonal park maintainers. In FY 2009/2010, in response to the economic downturn, the Department absorbed all operational costs, except for a Lifeguard payroll subsidy and the Director's salary by transferring the burden from the General Fund to the Special Revenue Fund totaling \$19,000. Due to inflation, increased use of facilities, and expanding programs, costs continue to rise. In FY 14/15, the operational costs have increased to approximately \$86,000 per year. When we made the shift, it was agreed upon that the issue would be revisited once the economy rebounded. We have spent down our fund balance for major maintenance and repairs of our aging infrastructure. In order to remain competitive and attract renters, the facilities must be aesthetically pleasing and provide basic services needed to serve as a function hall.

2. Departmental activities of financial impact

Parks & Recreation staff is constantly looking for new and different ways of engaging the public, thusly impacting our financial bottom line. A major area of financial impact that we have continued to bear over the last few years, and will continue to feel the effects of, is the rising minimum wage. As of January 1, 2016, minimum wage rose .45 to \$9.60, and will rise once again on January 1, 2017, .50 to \$10.10. To say this will impact our Camp, After School, and

Aquatics budget would be an understatement. **As a result of these changes, staff is currently researching appropriate fee increases for these core services, to accommodate the increase in payroll. Spending went up this year as increased charges were incurred,**

4. Revenue Estimates (fees, grants, other sources):

In addition to user fees, Parks & Recreation is constantly looking for other sources of income to help subsidize our activities and initiatives. This past year, we were able to secure the following from various sources: \$4,000 Sponsorship from the United Bank Foundation (Summer Concerts) \$6,000 Catalyst Grant (Arts Guild) \$1,200 in Crowdsourcing (Laidlaw Playscape Project) In anticipation of FY 16-17, staff is continuing to innovate and expand those programs that have proven successful for the Department, and the community: **A cost comparison study is underway with other Lake communities, to determine an appropriate rate increase on Resident Beach Stickers. Resident sticker fees have remained at \$10 since the inception of the program back in 2009 and with rising costs (i.e. minimum wage, supplies), revenues are simply not covering the costs effectively.**

5. Significant increases, decreases and changes in Budget from Past Years: Although we did not implement any new strategies for cost-savings, our thorough review and implementation of a variety of cost cutting measures from the past few years continue to be our ongoing mode of operation. These include increasing fees, reducing services, increased fundraising, sponsorships and grants, reducing overtime, etc.

The minutes 3/28 special budget meeting do, indeed, indicate that Ms. Rubin and Ms. Merriam discussed the needs and action plans presented in the transmittal letter. At our May 2 meeting we voted to approve those minutes, presumably after all Council members had carefully reviewed them. The video of the March 28 meeting is especially helpful, mostly at these points:

@48:22 discussion of restructuring lifeguard hours to meet actual need

@49:55 Ms. Rubin comments that the biggest challenge is cost recovery rate; she reviews how much Parks and Rec needs to raise in order to self-fund 87% of their budget; she warns that the cost of facilities maintenance is coming to a head;

- The Council actually revised its proposed budget to help address some of the facility needs

@50:00 questions from Council members and discussion of how to find further efficiencies, increase revenues, etc. This discussion lasted for over 8 minutes

@1:00:19 Richard Williams asks "So how do you increase revenues?" Ms Rubin replies they are in the process of reviewing fees; notes that our fees for summer camp are lower than surrounding towns; try to keep that fee lower; other programs and fees we can increase more readily;

@1:06:00 Hannah Pietrantonio asks about increasing facility rental fees

@ 1:08:30 Ms. Merriam states that it is on the next Parks and Rec Commission agenda to continue discussion of fee structures and increases to cover costs, including fees for parking at Patriots Park and at Lisicke Beach during the summer season.. A male voice- can't see on camera - states praise for the department, saying: "You're right on it!"

@1:08:55 Ms. Rubin talks about beach parking fees vs. taxes and the fact that some residents feel that the parks and rec costs should be addressed through the budget rather than through parking stickers; they don't necessarily agree with the user fee vs. spreading across all taxpayers so we do get comments about this; she notes the Parks and Recreation Commission will most likely be holding a public hearing to address the proposed fee changes; **(as an aside here - it is difficult to hear this exchange on video because there are, again, people at the Council table talking over the speaker, however a male member's voice says, regarding the complaints about parking sticker fees - "Just forward those phone calls to John")**

Finally, I would like to return to Mr. Pope's comments at the public hearing. When Mr. Pope began his comments, he claimed to be speaking as a private citizen. However, the nature of his words - which I quoted from the Chronicle earlier but will again - says otherwise:

Thomas Pope . . . was outraged the recreation commission is seeking a fee increase the day after the budget passed.

Pope said the recreation commission presented its budget to the town council March 28 and at that time there was "no problems and no shortage of funds."

"There wasn't a problem because you didn't do the work or your representative didn't do the work," Pope said to Rubin, further stating the board could have requested more money if needed.

"The town council sets aside times to discuss budgets, to adequately fund, so there's not a problem for the community," Pope said.

It seems to me that only a Town Council member can make promises about adding more money to the town budget. Furthermore, when Mr. Pope began to speak, he cited his own comments at the May 2 Town Council meeting questioning the parks fees - including where they could be found in video of that meeting. What were members of the commission and of the audience supposed to presume from this? That he was speaking as a private individual or that he was trying to exert undue influence as a Town Councilman? And what did it mean that three other members of this Council also stood to speak in opposition to the proposal? Well, we can have some sense of what the Parks and Rec Commissioners thought. Here is how they are quoted in the *Chronicle* article in response to Mr. Pope's ire:

Recreation Chairman Todd Messier said they are all volunteers on the board and the commission was not "ill-prepared." Following Pope's hammering of the board, he said the commission "doesn't really need to be talked to like that ... ever again."

Also:

"We were instructed to keep our costs down," said recreation commission member Marie Gallo-Hall. "We were told there was the desire to keep the budget at a 0-percent growth."

“It’s a little disingenuous for those individuals on the town council to say you should have come to the town council and we could have given more to you,” she said.

I know that neither Mr. Pope nor Mr. Broderson nor Mr. Williams represented me at the public hearing. At the Council’s May 2 meeting, the Town Manager explained to the Council that we could choose to send a letter to the Parks Commission regarding the proposed restructuring of fees, or individuals could speak at the hearing as private citizens. This Council did not choose to write a letter. I think the Commission is owed an apology.

Finance Committee Report (5/9/16 meeting)

Beth Bauer reported that as of April 30th the Town has collected 100.44% of anticipated property tax revenue and ahead of last year's collections.

Our general fund revenue collections are at 99.63% of anticipated.

Our anticipated revenues from the State of Connecticut have been reduced, as previously reported, have been reduced by \$64,852.

The Conveyance tax and Building department revenues are on pace to exceed the budgeted amount by \$67,000 and on another good note, the final ECS payment as adjusted was \$20,187 higher than expected.

COVRAA revenue collections are now at 106.4% of anticipated revenues and are on track with collections from last year. The projected end of the year balance is now \$515,772 AFTER accounting for the Transfer Station study and the allocation of ½ year if ¼ of the DPW Assistant's salary to COVRAA (done by the Manager on January 1, 2016).

Beth Bauer discussed her projections for Budget Transfers that she is anticipating (as of our meeting) that will be needed to be made by the Town Council to address shortfalls in some accounts in the 2015-2016 year. The current total is about \$63,000. Beth presented a plan on what line item surpluses could be used to satisfy the projected shortfalls. Beth suggested and the committee agreed that she will bring back updated numbers with an updated plan to address them at the June meeting and recommend the Council make transfers after that.

We discussed the history of salary allocations to the COVRAA funds from 2002 – 2003 to the present and the Manager pointed out that they have been reasonably similar over all of that time – fluctuating from a low of \$33,000 in 2002-2003 to a high of \$79,000 in 2010-2011. Projected salaries for the current year will be approximately \$68,000 (not precisely calculated).

John Elsesser described how he had decided at the January 2016 staff meeting to allocate ¼ of the DPW's Assistant to COVRAA and resulting in a surplus in the salary account for DPW. We discussed whether the Town Manager is authorized to approve such a transfer without discussion with the Council. It was decided that the Council should discuss and address this issue, particularly for such decisions in the future.

We received and briefly discussed the preliminary draft of state grants for the 2016-2017 year. That draft showed a projected shortfall (from information at the time the budget was approved) of \$334,643. Beth and John presented some ideas on how we can consider offsetting some of that shortfall in next year's budget.

We should have updated projected state grant information for 2016-2017 and will have a more detailed discussion when the Town Council considers setting the mil rate.

The Board of Education requested that the Council transfer \$50,000 from the 2016 general fund of the Board of Education's operating budget surplus to their non-lapsing account (BOE Reserve fund for Capital Expenditures). The Committee unanimously recommended to the Council that we make this transfer.

We also discussed the 2015-2016 Council Unencumbered Report and it was noted that the 3/31/16 settlement for Heart & Hypertension was settled at \$75,000 (saving \$8,000 from the appropriation) and that it is anticipated that none of the \$38,640 2/29/16 appropriation for the Town Hall Boiler will not be needed (saving \$38,640 from the appropriation) and we are waiting for final numbers for the other expenses made for the Town Hall Boiler from the 10/19/15 appropriation. The current total of all appropriations made is \$193,868.87. The above adjustments will reduce the total appropriation by at least \$46,640.

The Finance Committee requested that a joint session with the Board of Education's Finance committee be scheduled for our next scheduled committee meeting, if possible.

Matthew O'Brien
Chairman, Finance Committee