

**Minutes  
Coventry Town Council Meeting  
August 15, 2016  
Town Hall Annex**

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.  
**Present:** Julie Blanchard, Andy Brodersen, Matthew O'Brien, Thomas Pope  
**Also present:** Beth Bauer, Finance Director/Acting Town Manager  
**Absent:** Hannah Pietrantonio, Lisa Thomas
2. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
3. **Audience of Citizens:** None.
4. **Acceptance of Minutes, August 1, 2015:**  
**Motion #16/17-18: Thomas Pope moved to accept the minutes of the August 1, 2016 meeting. The motion was seconded by Andy Brodersen.** The following corrections were requested:
  - Page 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph, 6<sup>th</sup> line: add the words, "a company like" prior to Kloter Farms.
  - Page 3, item 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> line: change "277 acres" to "272 acres."
  - Page 4, item 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> line: add the word "State's" prior to Attorney General. Line 4: change "necessary" to "necessarily."**The motion to accept the minutes as corrected carried on unanimous vote.**
5. **Consent Agenda:**  
**Motion #16/17-19: Thomas Pope moved to accept the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Matthew O'Brien and carried on unanimous vote.**
6. **Reports:**
  - A. **Council Chairwoman – Julie Blanchard:** Julie reported the sad news that Coventry lost our high school band director Ned Smith. She asked that the community keep him and his family in their prayers.
  - B. **Finance Committee – Matthew O'Brien** (*see full remarks attached to these minutes*): Matthew O'Brien gave an overview of the Town's property tax, general fund revenue collections and COVRA user fee collections, which are in line with or ahead of collections from last year. The Tax Assessor reports that we received a sizeable payment from a leasing company for vehicles which may be garaged in other towns and may need to be refunded. The amount could be as high as \$190,000. We have not received an update from the State regarding the impact of \$22 million in municipal grant cuts included in the 2016-17 budget. Final 2015-16 year-end numbers were not available as of the last Finance Committee meeting, nor were June reports from the Board of Education. Finance discussed the Town Council's request that we investigate any additional reports that the Board of Education produces that would meet the criteria set out at the Council meeting. Beth Bauer reported that the Board had not produced any additional reports in response to her request. The Finance Chair expressed frustration that the Board has not provided the information that has been requested. Finance reviewed and discussed the Disbursement Detail Report (provided by the Board of Education) and found that it appears to contain most of the information that was being sought by the Council. Finance recommends that the Council move forward with their request for the prior fiscal year's monthly reports, the report for July

2016 and the monthly report going forward. The Council may also want to make an additional request for the reports/information that the Board failed to provide. Finance would like to invite the Board of Education Finance Committee to attend our September or October meeting to discuss a variety of topics including 2015-16 information, monthly reports and their use by the Board, ongoing or upcoming projects and information the Council will want to receive in support of the Board's 2017-18 budget request.

Thomas Pope noted that the issue reported by the Assessor's office is a State DMV problem, not any mismanagement that happened in Coventry. Matthew said it is probably a result of the computer conversion by the State. Thomas also said it would be nice to get information from the Board of Education – he doesn't understand why we're getting roadblocks.

**E. COVRRRA – Beth Bauer for John Elsesser:** No report.

**F. Town Manager – Beth Bauer for John Elsesser:**

**1. Projects Update:** Beth Bauer noted that John Elsesser put together his written report at the beginning of last week. She has since talked with DPW Director Mark Kiefer and the roads in the southerly portion of Waterfront Heights, as referenced in the Public Works/Engineering section of the report, are done. She noted that the bottom of that paragraph in the report says 40 catchbasins and it is actually 50+. Under other construction projects, the Laidlaw playscape is complete. Matthew O'Brien asked if the fence has gone in at Laidlaw. Beth said no. Matthew asked if they got final bids for that. Beth said she does not know.

The lake gate project bid is going out tomorrow. We received a check in the mail from the Sunshot Initiative for \$2200 - the money has come to us from Greenbank. The description on the check indicates it is a prize – this was part of something we participated in where our building office gave monthly reports regarding solar installation status. They rewarded us with \$2200.

We had some very bad weather this weekend - they think lightning hit the Public Works well. That seems to be the only issue. It will be a minor repair. No insurance claim will be needed.

Matthew O'Brien mentioned he is very disappointed that the State has decided not to set up a study committee on the issue of crumbling concrete foundations. He thinks the State is not making it the priority it should be for Eastern Connecticut. He was pleased to see that Assessors are going to meet to develop consistent protocols but he thinks the State needs to step up.

Matthew O'Brien said we should note that the police station furnace manufacturer does not recommend replacement burners for the CNG natural gas conversion project so we may need to replace the furnace.

**2. Police Chief Mark Palmer - White House visit:** Chief Palmer said in May 2015 the President's Task Force on Multidisciplinary Policing report came out. The report addressed how police departments could more effectively connect with the community. The report was released to police departments throughout the country to do with what they will. Since then the White House decided to have a series of briefings to share the implementation of components of the report. He was invited and did a one-day trip to Washington to participate, along with 48 other police chiefs and command staff throughout the country. It

was a good discussion and exchange of ideas. Chief Palmer was very impressed with the briefing and came away with good information and contacts from around the country. One other chief from Connecticut was there, Chief McNamara from Fairfield. Matthew O'Brien asked Chief Palmer if the organizers of the event indicated why he was invited. Chief Palmer replied that all the chiefs were wondering that. It could be his involvement in a visit from the White House to Connecticut for a summit on drug policy that he participated in. Matthew said it is a nice honor and congratulated the Chief on being selected.

**3. Coventry Police Department – 2016 CALEA Assessment Report:** Chief Palmer said that two weeks ago he and Kevin Roberto traveled to the CALEA conference in Baltimore. Coventry Police Department was awarded reaccreditation, and in addition, accreditation with excellence. Accreditation with excellence is a very limited distinction. Chief Palmer thanked the Town Council for supporting CPD's involvement in the reaccreditation process. It has very little budget impact but does require staff time. Less than 4% of agencies nationwide are CALEA accredited. It is voluntary but adds distinction. There are only 15 accredited police departments in Connecticut, and only 1 is accredited with excellence. The State Capitol Police and two universities are also accredited. There are 484 standards we have to meet. In order to achieve excellence it has to be at least a department's third award and there couldn't be any noncompliance issues. You have to have done advanced accreditation and another 100 standards that are not mandatory – and must comply with over 90% for excellence. We had over 95%. This process makes us a better agency and we hope it gives the community faith that we meet the highest professional standards. CALEA is the gold standard when comes to accreditation. It demonstrates that the organization strives to do more than just get by. Chief Palmer gave credit to his staff, especially Kevin Roberto for coordinating the department's participation. He also thanked Thomas Pope and John Elsesser for participating in the accreditation public hearing earlier this year. When we receive the certificate we will plan to bring it to the Council for a presentation. Thomas Pope congratulated Chief Palmer and the Coventry Police Department. When he was at the public hearing, as a resident of Coventry and a Town Council member, it was a proud moment to sit there and hear other departments stand up and speak for Coventry. There were glowing remarks for the Chief's leadership and the department's professionalism. He wishes the hearing had been recorded. The Chief indicated the hearing was recorded. Laura Stone will send Mr. Pope a link to the video.

**4. Eversource 900 line rebuild:** Beth Bauer indicated the document provided is for informational purposes. Andy Brodersen asked about the 40 structures that are to be rebuilt. Matthew O'Brien said they are wooden towers that will now be metal. Beth said the project overview gives a summary of what Eversource is doing. It is a local project but they have to have a hearing with PURA. They are informing the Town of the project and people have an opportunity to participate in the hearing if they want. Our recommendation is to let it go forward without objection because it needs to be done. Thomas Pope said he has had experience with similar projects adjacent to right-of-ways they have done. It is not earth-shattering in terms of a difference once it is done.

## **7. Unfinished Business:**

**A. 15/16-113: Discussion/possible action: Request for financial information from the Coventry Board of Education:** Julie Blanchard said this matter was discussed at the last Finance Committee meeting. Richard Williams made the original request and he has seen the Disbursement Detail report and was satisfied it answered some of what he was asking for. Matthew O'Brien said the Finance Committee recommends going ahead with a request

to officially receive this report. He doesn't believe Richard feels they have satisfied his initial request. It is our understanding the Board doesn't use this report so we would like to see what they do use. Richard said he attended the Board of Education's Fiscal Committee meeting as well as the Board of Education meeting last week. This report is great, but his request was to see what reports are generated because then we can determine what we want. It was his understanding this report would be locked when the Board provides it so we wouldn't be able to sort the information. This is public information, and this is public money, and the lack of ability to see how it is spent is frustrating and it has been going on for a long time. To provide a year's worth of reports without the ability to sort limits their usefulness. The Board of Education's fear that the reports would be manipulated is not valid. If we want to be able to see how much we spent at the Apple Store, how much we spent on oil, etc., we should be able to see that. He asked Beth Bauer if she gets that information. Beth replied not at that level. We get the summary reports that the Finance Committee already sees. Matthew O'Brien said that staff must have detail reports that allow them to generate these summaries. Beth said the summary reports are what we get. Richard said he is baffled by the lack of transparency. He would like to have the report, but he wants to be able to sort it. All of us at this table have run a business - and he can tell you where he spent every dollar. Why can't we as a Town Council get this information? Richard asked if Beth as Finance Director could help us get it. Julie asked if they print their own checks. Beth replied yes and they come to us to be signed. We get a check register, but it sounds like the Council wants something other than paper. Richard said the Board said at their meeting they would be happy to provide in Excel format but would lock it so it couldn't be manipulated in any way. Thomas Pope said we could request the information through the Freedom of Information Act. He noted a \$775 line item for pizzas. Richard said he is sure there is a valid reason for the pizzas. But without the report we wouldn't know. We should be able to see it. It is not transparent and it is not the way we should be doing business. Julie said she thought when we offered to pay for the Board to get on the OpenGov platform it would address this concern. Thomas said it is amazing they wouldn't allow us to have the information but we are the ones who approve their budget. Richard said it is just not right we should have to go line by line over 600 pages to see how they spent their money. Matthew said it seems to suggest they feel we are dishonest that they would not give us the information in a format that can be sorted. That is ludicrous and insulting. Thomas asked Beth if it is common to get an invoice with no balances on them. Throughout the Disbursement Detail report there are invoice numbers with no balances. Beth said she would have to see how their system works. They might have a default set up for a particular vendor - that would be a question for them. Richard asked if anybody feels we should steer this matter in a different direction. Andy Brodersen said he thinks we should keep asking until we get the information. **Motion #16/17-20: Richard Williams moved to accept the Cash Disbursement Detail Report from the Board of Education, but ask that it be unlocked and sortable, as well as to ask for other detailed reports that are generated in-house that the school staff uses to create the monthly summary reports that are given to the Board of Education and the Town Council. The Town Council requests a year's worth of Cash Disbursement Detail Report for Fiscal Year 2015/16, the July 2016 reports and other reports going forward. Matthew O'Brien seconded the motion, which carried on unanimous vote.** Julie Blanchard will put the request in writing to the Chairman of the Board of Education and all members. Andy Brodersen said he also thinks we should continue to push for the Board of Education's participation in Opengov. Thomas noted we asked the Board of Education for salary information during the budget process and they refused to provide it. Richard said during the Board of Education meeting apparently they had a number of teachers that were replaced. If he recalls correctly the number was 18 but you wouldn't know it because the minutes do not reflect it. During the meeting they made some budgetary transfers out of this

current year from salary to contracted expenses, to put more money into the autism program in kindergarten. Matthew asked if this means they are already identifying surplus in the certified salary line item. Richard said yes. Matthew said he doesn't know how they identified that because the monthly reports do not reflect it. Also their June 30th report shows an additional identified surplus. Richard said they spent down to \$7,000. Matthew said hopefully this information will be in their meeting minutes. Thomas asked to clarify if this surplus is over and above what they already transferred. Matthew said it should be because they already transferred the other amount. He would like to know all unexpended funds and how they were spent because it may impact the budget for next year. He is waiting for these reports so he can formulate questions for the Board of Education. He would like to have the information for our next Council meeting rather than waiting for the next Finance Committee meeting. Julie agreed. Richard said on a good note, at their meeting the Board went through their NEASC accreditation report and it was really cool to see how they have improved their high school standards over the years. He is proud as a citizen to see the improvements made since 12 years ago.

**8. Adjournment:**

**Motion #16/17-21: Thomas Pope moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:22 PM. The motion was seconded by Matthew O'Brien 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.*



# ATTACHMENT

Finance Committee Report (8/15/16 meeting)

Beth Bauer reported that as of July 31<sup>st</sup> the Town 's property tax, general fund revenue collections and COVRRRA user fee collections are in line with or ahead of collections last year.

The Tax Assessor's reported that we received a sizeable payment from a leasing company for vehicles which may be garaged in other towns and may need to be refunded. The Assessor estimates that the refund could be as high as \$190,000. John, Beth and the Tax Assessor are investigating this matter.

We have not received any update from the State as to the impact of the \$22m of municipal grant cuts included in the 2016-2017 state budget.

Final 2015 - 2016 year end numbers were not available as of our Finance Committee meeting.

The Board of Education June reports were not available as of our Finance Committee meeting.

Finance discussed the Town Council's request that we investigate any additional reports that the Board of Education produces that would meet the criteria set out at the Council meeting. Beth reported that the Board had not produced any additional reports in response to her request and John reported that the Board staff had let him know that they have been instructed not to work with John to provide any additional information to the Council until a formal request is submitted by the Council Chair to the Board Chair. The Finance Chair expressed his frustration that the Board continues to play games rather than provide the Council with the information that has been requested.

We did review and discuss the Disbursement Detail Report and Finance and found that it appears to contain electronic transfers and most of the information that was being sought by the Council. Finance recommends that the Council move forward with their request for the prior year's monthly reports, the report for July 2016 and the monthly report going forward.

The Council may also want to make an additional request for the reports/information that the Board failed to provide.

Finance would like to invite the Board of Education Finance Committee to attend our September or October meeting to discuss year end 2015-2016 information, board of education monthly reports and their use by the board, any updates that the Board would like to provide about ongoing projects or upcoming projects and a discussion about the information that the Council will want to receive in support of the Board's budget request for 2017-2018.

Matthew O'Brien  
Chairman, Finance Committee

