

MINUTES

Coventry Town Council Meeting September 19, 2022, 7:30 PM Town Hall Annex & Virtual

Video Link Of Meeting:

[9-19-2022 Town Council Meeting \(viebit.com\)](https://viebit.com)

1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

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

Members Present:

Lisa Thomas-Chairperson
Marty Milkovic-Vice-Chairperson
Matthew Kyer
Jonathan Hand-Secretary
Robyn Gallagher
John French
Julie Blanchard (Remote)

Members Absent:

Also Present:

Amanda Backhaus-Finance Director & Acting Town Manager
Nicole Archambault-Minutes Clerk (Remote)

2. Pledge Of Allegiance:

All members stood to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Audience Of Citizens:

(30 Minutes - 5 minutes per person.)

No citizens present, Thomas closed Audience of Citizens portion of the meeting.

4. Acceptance Of Minutes:

A. Acceptance of Minutes, September 6, 2022

Motion: I move to accept the minutes of the September 6, 2022 meeting, with the edits suggested by Thomas.

By: Hand

Seconded: Milkovic

Corrections:

Pg. 7, 4th line from the bottom, change "Bill Zanko" to "Bill Zenko" and "Carolyn Arbolous" to "Carolyn Arabolos"

Pg. 1, Item 1, change “Carolyn” to “Caroline”, and add “Pine” to address to read “302 Pine Lake Dr.”

Pg. 3 (bottom), same change as above, “Carolyn” to “Caroline”

Pg. 6, 2nd paragraph, change “Power Point” to “Powerpoint”, and the “P” in presentation does not need to be capitalized, change to “p”

Pg. 6, paragraph 9, beginning with “Hand”, to change it to read as follows, in between the words “introduced” and “Watkins”: *Jon Hand added that when the pavement project was first introduced, it was emphasized that we should not let our roads fall below a certain threshold of maintenance, or it becomes super expensive.*

Pg. 8, under members absent, “Best Wishes” does not need to be capitalized, change to “best wishes”

Pg. 11, 4th paragraph from bottom, add \$ in front of .5 Mil.

Pg. 13, item 7.B., under Milkovic, last line, change mental health services number from “989” to “988”

Pg. 13, item 7.A., 3rd bullet, change “Lake Advisory Committee” to “Coventry Lake Advisory and Monitoring Committee”

Vote:

For: Hand, Thomas, Milkovic, Kyer, Gallagher, Blanchard, French

Against: None

Abstain: None

5. Consent Agenda:

All items listed with an asterisk (*) will be acted on by one motion. There will be no separate discussion on these items unless a Council member so requests, in which case, the item will be removed from the consent agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the agenda.

Motion: I move to accept the Consent Agenda, with item 9.A. removed.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Milkovic wants to remove item 9.A. from the consent agenda to discuss further.

Vote:

For: Hand, Thomas, Milkovic, Kyer, Gallagher, Blanchard, French,

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.Reports:

6.A. Council Chairwoman: Lisa Thomas

Thomas reported on the following:

- Fall Newsletter has been online for a few weeks now, but hardcopies have gone out and every household should have received one. Thanked Laura Stone for designing, publishing and getting this out. She also thanked all those who contribute content to the Newsletter. This is a great resource for the Community.
- Wants everyone to help spread the word about the special question that will be on the ballot in November, regarding the road bond recently approved. Noted that there is additional information about this on the back of the Fall Newsletter.

- Those who are filing for special property tax exemptions, there are several available, need to check on their filings prior to October 1, 2022. Some residents who may qualify are veterans, seniors, farm or forest owners, and those with certain disabilities. If you need to do so, contact the Assessor's office, as these programs are in place to help out residents.
- If you need home heating assistance, please contact the Human Services Department as there are various programs available to assist with this. Thomas spoke directly with Governor Lamont on the concerns of high costs with home heating fuel oil, as we are all concerned with this. Lamont has assured that he and his administration are closely monitoring the costs. If it looks like the funds that are currently available are not going to be available throughout the winter, then he will ask the Legislature to address it in January. There should be enough funds to get to that point.
- Thomas thanked those involved with Arts on Main. It was a beautiful day and attendance looked steady when she arrived. The Coventry Arts Guild did a wonderful job, and having events like this help grow attention to arts in the community.
- Received news today that we received the STEAP grant to build second softball field at Miller Richardson. Acknowledged that the staff that did a great job getting this put together and submitted. This grant, with the addition of the \$.5 million State bonding funds, will allow us to be able to build the 2 softball fields, add amenities to the baseball fields, and pursue other things that we want (pickle ball courts, hiking trail, playground, etc.) at Miller Richardson. Thomas noted that this is what the community did by being willing to passing the bond last November for the softball field. We were able to turn the \$350,000 into an additional \$1 million dollars to make Miller Richardson a fantastic facility. Thomas thanked the voters for getting the ball rolling, and the softball committee for being persistent on expanding and moving forward with this project.

6.B. Council Members:

Milkovic: Reminded everyone of the upcoming Lake Forum on Tuesday, September 20th at 7 PM in the Coventry High School auditorium. DEEP will be present and it will be a very informative meeting. Discussed that Elsesser eluded to the road bond that is coming up on November 8th. In addition to that being in the Newsletter this month, residents can also look up the pavement management study that was done in January of 2020 on the town website, under the Public Works section. It helps give a deep understanding of the backlog of repairs we have on our roads.

Gallagher: Reported that Fall sports have started for the Rec. Department and competitive leagues. She expressed that it takes a lot of work from volunteers to get them up and running. Gallagher thanked those volunteers and emphasized she wanted them to receive recognition.

Hand: Reported that he saw an article in The Chronicle that 39 students from Coventry High School were named Advanced Placement Scholars by the College Board. Hand gave them praise and added that this was quite an accomplishment and impressive as this is a pretty good percentage of the graduating class. "Bravo! and Brava!".

French: Discussed that it was nice to have Council member Blanchard back at the meeting. Also reported that Saturday AM, he noticed some political signs were stolen from his property. Of the various political signs that

were on his lawn, the only ones that were taken were those supporting Jeff Gordon. French wanted to remind everyone that this is against the law to trespass and take signs, and this goes both ways. Thomas echoed French's comments. Thomas also added that she recognizes that Jeff Gordon is her opponent in the current campaign and that she does not want to see the campaign ran that way. She expressed that, if any of her supporters were responsible for this, that they need to return the signs. Hand thanked French for bringing that up and added that he has also had signs on his property been defaced, stolen, or run over in the past. He does not believe that either person (Thomas or Gordon) would stand for these types of actions. Thomas informed that they have a responsibility to inform people to not do this, and that it is not OK.

Kyer: Wanted to tie together the comments Thomas made regarding the Arts on Main event and the comments that were made by Hand and French, and that these types of events show what kind of community we are, not a community of people who steal signs. Gave thanks to the Coventry Art Guild, Coventry Cares, and all the volunteers. Hand added thanks and recognition to the Fire Police and the Fire Department on keeping the event safe for everyone and aiding with street crossings, etc. He explained that it seems like a small thing, but its part of the grease that makes these events happen. It takes a lot of commitment for them to do, and they continue to do so time after time.

6.C. Finance Committee: Robyn Gallagher, Chairperson

Gallagher thanked Fire Chief Bud Meyers and Fire/EMS Director Jimmy McLoughlin for meeting with her to have constructive communication about the EMS fund, where we stand, what steps we are taking, planning for the future and focusing on strategic planning. We were preparing to take funds out of AARP to cover a hole that was made in the EMS budget and she does not want to see us in a position where we are back in that hole. She recognizes that both of them have very busy schedules and appreciated them taking the time to talk to her. She presented a 5-year strategic plan for the Town of Coventry Fire/EMS Department, and asked everyone to look it over before next meeting as Bud and Jimmy will be at the next meeting to discuss it with the Council. Thomas added that she wanted Council Members to be ready to ask questions for them when they are here.

Gallagher also noted that the Finance Committee discussed a property tax credit for daycare providers. She emphasized how important and needed daycares are, as there is a State-wide shortage as more workers are trying to return to the workforce and work less from home. Will be discussed later in the agenda.

Gallagher added that the committee talked about the possibility of hiring and funding a project manager to help Town Manager, John Elsesser. Noted that the funding could come from the specific projects that they would be overseeing and not have a direct impact on the budget. It was also discussed on reconciling this position with another we have open. Elsesser is going to be looking into this further and will provide more information in the near future. Milkovic confirmed that this person would be managing grants as well. Thomas added that this is not being looked at as something that is a permanent, ongoing position but rather one that is temporary (3 to 4 years). Thomas stressed the importance of this position as we do not want to miss out on federal dollars. We want to have someone that can apply for these grants, as many as possible, as well as monitor the projects without overwhelming our already short staff.

Hand reiterated that this position would be funded by the projects and their allocated funds, as a temporary commitment during this grant heavy period. Noted it was worth restating.

6.C.1. * Monthly Financial Report

6.D. * Steering Committee: Matthew Kyer, Chairperson

6.E. *COVRRRA - John A. Elsesser:

6.F. Town Manager - John Elsesser:

6.F.1. Projects Update:

Thomas asked if there were any questions on the project update.

Hand: Commented that on Pg. 2, 4th paragraph, 2nd line towards end, where it lists a couple of the bridge projects, it lists Brigham Hill as one of them. He corrected that it was Depot Road and Bunker Hill.

Acting Town Manager Backhaus, added we would be discussing it later in the agenda. *****This change was corrected under item 6.F.4. in the agenda. Hand amended his requested change to “change Brigham Hill to Brigham Tavern, not Bunker Hill.”*****

Milkovic: Asked if there was a timeframe for completion on the Swamp Road interchange now that the poles have come in. Backhaus informed that she does not know off the top of her head when this will be completed. She added that they were not expecting to get the poles in, and that they showed up as a surprise. Now that we do have them, the construction will resume to wrap that up as soon as they can. Hand added that the masts and cross-arms were up as of recent and wiring was being worked on.

Backhaus informed everyone that they had the first meeting with the construction contractor for the softball field, and work did begin this past week. They will also be scheduling a ground-breaking ceremony soon, so that this can be celebrated. Milkovic commented that he recently went to Public Works and they have gotten far with the new Transfer Station project. Backhaus added that the scale was set to be moved this week to the best of her knowledge.

6.F.2. COVID-19 Update:

- o **Vaccine Booster Clinic: Coventry Town Hall Annex, September 21st, from 3:00PM to 6:00PM. This will be a *walk-in* clinic for anyone 12 years or older. Both the Moderna (18+) and Pfizer (12+) bivalent vaccine will be available.**

Thomas added to the update that people are coming back from illnesses, and noted that the Town Manager and the Eastern Highland Health District worked to get the above Vaccine Clinic to Town.

Gallagher asked for clarification that the bivalent vaccine is applicable to take care of the Omicron variant. Thomas informed that it is like the “regular” flu vaccine and that the research looked at the current strains and this vaccine was created for that. She added she spoke to a research scientist who explained why we see a covid-19 vaccine every 6 months, whereas the flu is given yearly. It was explained that the flu is typically only a concern during the colder months, not a concern during the warmer months too. Even with the flu vaccine, it is not the same vaccine every year and it changes based on what is anticipated to be the strain of the flu for the season. Thomas hopes we move to a direction where the covid-19 vaccine is twice a year, as mutations hopefully slow down.

Kyer pointed out that we have families who are struggling to find child care, and this may result in drawing more child care businesses into Coventry. Thomas added, or the existing ones can expand, therefore increasing the number of slots they have. Gallaher commented that during the discussion at the Finance Committee meeting it was discussed that in order to qualify for this abatement, the in-home daycares would need to be licensed. It serves as a good regulatory purpose and encourage other in-home daycares to get the appropriate licensing, improving safety for the children.

Hand echoed that he fully supports this. Having affordable and safe daycares allow people to be in the work force or go back to work. Businesses complain about not having people, or difficulties finding people, but in order to work people need to have somewhere for their kids to go. Hopes that this will help a little bit. Thomas informed that a lot of our daycares and in-home care centers were open during the pandemic, putting themselves on the line.

Blanchard commented that she loves to see people not have to pay more taxes, but wants to look out for the town, as we need those tax dollars. She has concerns that those that are run like a business should not be privileged to tax credits as much as an in-home daycare facility. She added that there are plenty of other businesses in town that would also like a break in their taxes too. Thomas noted that there are other tax abatements available for businesses. She also added that in-home child care centers are a business, as they still have to file, be licensed, and go through the appropriate processes. Milkovic reiterated that of the 4 currently applicable for this abatement in town, 3 of them are in-home daycares, not daycare centers.

French had concerns on how this may be taken advantage of, as it does not go by actual number of kids in the daycare but by square footage of the home in use. Kyer stated that the State has requirements of how many square feet allowed per child. He added that he was not aware of the specifications, but there are limits in place.

Thomas informed everyone that first steps will be to develop an application process. She added on to Kyer's comment, that there are specific requirements for these facilities. She does not imagine that a facility would go through the costs and hassle to be a licensed child care center to only have minimal children in their care. She added that it would be an extensive waste of time, effort, and money. She emphasized that the benefit to the community outweighs the slim chance that someone would take advantage of this system. Thomas made a comment that they were not even sure if one of the child care centers was still operational, and if that was the case, only 3 facilities would be eligible. She emphasized the tax loss is so minimal to the town, and that with this relief the daycares could increase staffing or increase the number of slots they have. Backhaus informed that on the application, we could have it as a requirement they list how many children were in their care if the Council was interested in that knowledge. Thomas asked Backhaus to put something together that can be presented to the Finance Committee.

Hand added that he believes the license puts a max capacity of the differently aged kids that could be in care at one time based on the number of staff members. Square footage is a part of it, but the children's ages and number of staff are more important for maintaining the correct ratio. The reality is that there are no daycare slots available right now. The goal for these centers is to offer as many slots that their licensing would allow, not the other way around.

Thomas reiterated that there is a 5-year limit, and after that time period it would be revisited.

French added to what Blanchard had mentioned earlier that we need to consider, it is a business. We will run into problems with why one specific business would receive tax break, and not others. French also questioned that if they were given a tax break, but continue to charge the same amount per person, what benefit are we seeing, and is it more bottom line profit to the organization? How do we know it is really going to help? How are we going to see a direct benefit to residents in this community from them getting a break on taxes?

Kyer questioned/confirmed the purpose of this discussion as the Council is reacting to the Public Act presented and in section 13, it specifically references child care centers. That is why we are discussing these specific businesses.

Thomas felt that with what was being expressed that there was a lack of trust with people in the town, especially those who run child care facilities. She added that her perception is that the potential of some one manipulating this is far outweighed by the public interest of having daycare slots available and having well qualified people working in those daycare centers or providing in-home care. We are in a really tough situation now, not only in our State, but the country as well, where people are looking for daycare for their kids. She added that she would rather try this 5-year experiment and make sure that we are doing everything we can to benefit the people who live in this town, and their kids, than to just say “no” to something that has minimal impact on the town. She also noted that we gave money back to some businesses with the AARP funds.

Backhaus informed that abatements have been offered to bring new businesses in. They are offered over a certain time period as an incentive to come to town.

Milkovic questioned if this was passed, who would check their claims, or inspect this. Backhaus indicated that with the application process they would be required to provide their tax documentation, and they would be required to do so every year. Milkovic continued that he remembered an argument that happened a while back regarding Nathan Hale Early Education Center being a non-profit, and not being taxed, making it so they had an unfair advantage over the other for-profit daycare centers. This would level the playing field between them.

Gallagher commented she respects the comments that Councilman French shared, but when you look at taxes at different levels, the credits or abatements that are available are used to encourage certain behaviors. Added that there are several available for certain groups/reasons. She also noted that when you look to give these certain benefits, you have to look at what is available. That is why it is important we have the Public Act, as well as a societal good that needs to be incentivized at the moment. Right now, based on daycare and childcare shortages, and their impact on the economy, this is largely affecting women from being able to return to the workforce. This abatement is not 100% a solution, only part of a solution to that problem, but it is a start. She feels that it is something that we should support, but agrees with we need to be careful when allowing these exceptions.

Milkovic noted that he looked at the State regulations on daycare centers and there seem to be high restrictions and requirements. Hand added that these facilities are monitored closely as is the whole industry.

Thomas asked if Kyer would amend his motion as the legislature indicates that it is up to 100%, and we want to make sure we are making a motion on that full amount.

Amended Motion: I move to provide a 100% property tax abatement to licensed child care providers as described in Public Act 22-81

By: Kyer

Seconded: Hand

Vote:

For: Hand, Thomas, Kyer, Milkovic, Gallagher

Against: French, Blanchard

Abstain: None

8.C. 22/23-17: Consideration/Possible Action: Town Manager Compensation (Following Executive Session)

Motion: To give Town Manager, John Elsesser, a 2.25% raise retroactive to July 1, 2022 with no changes to additional benefits.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Kyer

Discussion: None

Vote:

For: Hand, Thomas, Kyer, Milkovic, Gallagher, French, Blanchard

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.D. 22/23-18: Consideration/Possible Action: Ratification Of Appointment, Coventry Building Official

Motion: I move to ratify the appointment of Coventry Building Official, Timothy Brendon

By: Hand

Seconded: Milkovic

Discussion: Blanchard commented that he has an impressive resume with a lot of experience. She hopes it works out well and he sticks around. Backhaus added that he seems pretty excited to join our staff. Thomas commented that we are very happy to have him.

Vote:

For: Hand, Thomas, Kyer, Milkovic, Gallagher, French, Blanchard

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.E. 22/23-19: Consideration/Possible Action: Resolution Authorizing The Town Of Coventry To Enter Into A Personal Service Agreement/Grant Contract With The Connecticut Department Of Energy And Environmental Protection In The Amount Of \$500,000 For The Miller Richardson Park Improvements And Authorization Of The Town Manager To Execute

Motion: I move that John A. Elsesser, Town Manager of the Town of Coventry, be and hereby is authorized to execute on behalf of the Town of Coventry a Personal Service Agreement/Grant Contract

under the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection with the State of Connecticut for a \$500,000 grant for the Miller Richardson Park Improvements. IN ADDITION, that John A. Elsesser, Town Manager, is hereby authorized to enter into such agreements, contracts and execute all documents necessary to said grant with the State of Connecticut.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: None

Vote:

For: Hand, Thomas, Kyer, Milkovic, Gallagher, French, Blanchard

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.F. 22/23-20: Consideration/Possible Action: Engineering Technician Job Description

Not ready for discussion, will be continued on agenda for next meeting.

8.G.22/23-21: Consideration/Possible Action: Decew Dam Funding Request

Motion: I move the Town Council authorize up to \$15,000 from CNREF for the completion of the Decew Dam Repair

By: Hand

Seconded: Milkovic

Discussion: None

Vote:

For: Hand, Thomas, Kyer, Milkovic, Gallagher, French, Blanchard

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.H. 22/23-22 Federal Local Bridge Program Preliminary Application Review Scope

Backhaus informed that we had an engineer review all the bridges in town. Normally the federal bridge program has a town match, but with federal money that is now available, they are offering 100% grant funded programs. Elsesser wanted to make sure that Backhaus informed everyone that the funding will run out eventually and there will be more requests than there are bridges to be repaired, and it is first come, first serve. It was stressed that it is important that we get our applications in as soon as we can. The applications are estimated to be \$4,000-\$6,000 each. Backhaus requested up to \$12,000 from CNREF for the 2 federal bridge applications.

Motion: I move that we approve the use of up to \$12,000 from CNREF for the two federal bridge applications as corrected and as described in the Jacobson Engineering letter.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Gallagher

Discussion: None

Vote:

For: Hand, Thomas, Kyer, Milkovic, Gallagher, French, Blanchard

Against: None

Abstain: None

9.Miscellaneous/Correspondence:

9.A.* Letter Of Condolence To Coventry UK, Death Of Queen Elizabeth

Milkovic asked for this to be removed from consent agenda. Wanted to appreciate the well written letter and thought it was nice to be sent to the Coventry, UK Mayor. Thomas informed that she did not write it, Laura Stone did, and she did a wonderful job typing it up. Milkovic added that it was a very moving funeral that was held, and while we opted to not have a Queen, the people of England have done it for years and seem to want to continue to do so.

Thomas felt that it was important to send condolences and make a connection with our sister city.

Hand agreed with all that had been said, and felt the letter was very moving. Hand also explained some connections he has/had with England, and how we have a connection with them here in Coventry and that we mourn with them.

Kyer explained he also listened to the coverage and elaborated with his connections to Scotland and the UK. He reflected on those memories today as well as reflected on how much the Queen meant to the citizens of the UK. He appreciated the fact that we are sending this letter.

9.B.* Board Of Education: Minutes, 8/25/22, 9/1/22, 9/8/22

10.Executive Session:

For purpose of discussing:

1. 1. Town Manager Performance Review and salary

Motion: I move that the Town Council enter into Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1-200(6)(A): discussion concerning the employment, appointment, performance, evaluation, health or dismissal of a public officer or employee with the following in attendance Council Members Matthew Kyer, Jon Hand, Robyn Gallagher, Lisa Thomas, John French, Julie Blanchard, Marty Milkovic, and Town Finance Director Amanda Backhaus.

By: Hand

Seconded: French

Vote:

For: Hand, Thomas, Milkovic, Kyer, Gallagher, Blanchard, French

Against: None

Abstain: None

The Council entered Executive Session at 8:32 PM.

Motion: I move to exit Executive Session.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Hand

Vote:

For: Hand, Thomas, Milkovic, Kyer, Gallagher, French, Blanchard

Against: None

Abstain: None

The Council exited Executive Session at 8:40 PM

11.Adjournment:

Motion: I move that the council adjourn this meeting at 8:42 PM.

By: Gallagher

Seconded: French

Vote:

For: Hand, Thomas, Milkovic, Kyer, Gallagher, French, Blanchard

Against: None

Abstain: None

Meeting adjourned at 8:42 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicole Archambault

Nicole Archambault, Minutes Clerk

***PLEASE NOTE: These minutes are not official until approved by the Council at the next Council meeting.
Please see the next Council meeting minutes for approval or changes to these minutes.***