

Manager's project update: April 19, 2021 meeting

Below please find a brief summary and update of on-going projects. Highlights:

- The spring newsletter is at the printer and we hope for delivery next week before the annual town meeting on April 24. A budget in brief is included in the newsletter.
- The LED beacon crosswalk lights at Main and Ripley have been installed. They catch your attention.
- Two Community Funding Projects grants were submitted before last week's deadline. We also were notified that we received grants for both Coventry Lake and the river study above Eagleville Lake.
- We are almost ready on the Watershed Health Pledge campaign and will share at the April 29 Consortium.
- DPW is making progress on sweeping and has finished the lake area. They are also doing on prep work for summer roads and have fields ready. The pad for the water tank is in place and we are getting ready to move the tank into place.
- The School Building Committee architect for the school roof projects has started and is working on setting up the project with the State. It appears that the project estimate for the High School is not adequate to cover the project, due to some unanticipated chimney removal, drainage, a \$7 per square foot cost increase and estimates of square footage. We are waiting for an updated estimate from the architect, but it is clear that the High School roof will need to wait a year. We did get the architect's estimate for GHR, which also far exceeded the Board's estimate. It does not look likely that State reviews will be in place in time to allow summer construction at either school for this summer. Hopefully construction prices will come down, but it is likely we will need to ask for more money. We continue to work with the selected engineering firm for the High/Middle school ventilation project. We will need to see how Federal Aid may help cover costs for that project. This also will likely be a summer 2022 project.
- We have submitted the State paperwork for the Library grant for the final State historical review. They asked for some inside photos and are still waiting for a response. We can't proceed and sign the architect's contract without this approval. The Library fundraising is underway with a target deadline of April 6th just passed. They appear to have raised over \$100,000 so far.
- On Friday April 30, Human Services will have a fourth drive-through food distribution event in the Town Hall driveway loop.

- We continue to evaluate our COVID response plans for staffing due to the significant rise in cases in our Town, Region, and State. We are also working with our Health District and Region on vaccination plans. We continue to work assisting with information for the 16+ aged group now.
- Swamp/Rt. 44 intersection final plans are edging closer to bidding in May. There is a long production delay for the traffic signal poles, which may require that portion of the project to lag over into spring of 2022. We finally received CTDOT's traffic control review.
- The State replacement of the culvert crossing RT 44 in front of Highland Park Market is underway. They are renting space where Swiss Cleaners was as a project office. There will be some construction delays, but we successfully argued to widen the crossing to allow two lanes of traffic during most times.
- The forestry management project on drier sections of the former Route 6 corridor in the northern section of town has started. Informational brochures and posting are complete. The proceeds of the timber sale will be deposited into the Forestry Management fund.
- The memorial trees funded by donations in honor of Chuck Conkling have been planted, and the Arbor Day dedication program is set for Thursday April 29 at 11 at the Veterans Green

Public Works/Engineering

- 1) LOTCIP grants: The Swamp Rd/Rt. 44 intersection project plans have been submitted for final review. We have all the rights of way squared away. The project is currently planned to be bid out in May due to State review delays, with construction starting in July and a spring 2022 completion. The mast poles for the traffic signals have a very long manufacturing lead time, which will delay the signals until spring of 2022. This will delay use of the new intersection until the signals are in place.
- 2) Folly Lane Bridge is now open. Finish work will start on April 15 with paving on April 19. The expansion joint will be installed April 26. The project construction will be complete except the paperwork.
- 3) We continue to work on the load rating of Pucker Street Bridge. The recalculations were submitted, and CTDOT has already responded seeking a few additional items. We started to get some Safe Routes to School project funds and are getting closer to close-out.
- 4) We have preliminary design work completed for the Community Connectivity grant for sidewalks on Main from Hemlock Point Lane to approximately Winterberry Lane. We hope this will be a summer project. We are advertising a public involvement

meeting for April 27 at 7:00. We submitted a Federal grant request to get the sidewalk extended to Daly Road. Likely will not hear a yes until October. If the answer is no we would hear sooner.

- 5) The girls' softball committee has submitted their recommendation directly to the Council, selecting the gravel pit site over the former landfill site. Anchor Engineering did a side-by-side cost comparison for the locations, and one or two initial fields, and core facilities versus a fully built out facility. The Finance Committee has given some feedback on the report and will be meeting with the committee on May 10. Still waiting on news on potential Federal grants. Wendy Rubin is monitoring, and Lisa Conant has offered to assist in a grant application when they become available. It is still at the Finance Committee level.
- 6) The crosswalk light on Main at Ripley Hill was installed this week.
- 7) Laidlaw Park deep hole tests were conducted, and the soils look good. It should be possible to install a septic system using the toilet trailer, which we acquired through State surplus. Permits to allow the existing irrigation well to be used for the bathrooms were submitted to the State Department of Public Health in June 2020. We are in a slow-moving well permit process. Coventry Soccer is now on board with the concept and wants input into the location.
- 8) LOCIP-funded field irrigation of the Miller Richardson baseball infield on the major league field is complete. The first step on moving the water tank has started and contractor is lined up to finish once the tank is cleaned and moved. It is on the pre-season list to complete.
- 9) We have signed a contract to use LOCIP funds to start fixing one of the cabins at Camp Creaser. It is likely the remaining cabins will need to be torn down if the State allows. They have rotten floors inside. We are fixing the crawl space on this cabin, which is now delayed until May.
- 10) We are still waiting for authorization to proceed on the LOTCIP grant for the intersection of Swamp and South, including the South Street curves, and a dip in Swamp Road. We have hired Jacobson Engineering to respond to a couple of construction questions needed to get grant moving. Construction is hoped for the summer of 2022. A reminder that the engineering expense is on the Town and funds will need to be approved by the Council. We may be able to split it into two phases: preliminary and bidding/construction to fund over two fiscal years. It is expected to be a significant amount since this is a \$3,000,000 grant.
- 11) We have submitted the 90 percent design for review on the South Street road reconstruction and sidewalks near the Homestead. Per a State demand, we have hired a firm to conduct an archaeological survey of the area of the proposed sidewalk. After a winter shut down it is almost wrapped up. Inland Wetlands asked for

impervious sidewalks, so we are seeking additional funds and were told we will get an answer this week.

- 12) To repair the turf issue at the Miller Richardson football field, we were awarded a STEAP grant based on Anchor Engineering's report. We have State permits and have Anchor Engineering's bid specs, but we are still waiting for a contract with CT DEEP for the grant and any mandatory language required in the bid. The award still has not been received, but we now have a contact person at DEEP. Understand the draft contract is in the Attorney General's office. Hopefully soon.
- 13) The State is looking at curve warning sign changes on State roads. We participated in a public information meeting on January 14 with no opposition. This will be a three-year project. They are also proposing some better traction pavement on Rt. 31 at the Birch Bend curve.
- 14) The State preliminary design of the Hop River Road Bridge is almost complete. The December 15 public information meeting went well. The main issue was concern for the history of the area. The project will now go into final design and in spring/summer seek permits, with bids in late fall of 2021 for summer 2022 construction. The Town of Columbia granted a design exception for a curve issue on the Columbia side of the River.
- 15) We are looking at a couple of culverts for the next Local Bridge grant round in fall. We have two expensive culverts in need of repair on Bunker Hill and Parker Bridge Road, which are in our CIP budget. This grant pays 50%. We hired Jacobson Engineering for concept plans and applications for an anticipated fall grant round. Funds for these plans are coming from Town Aid for Roads.
- 16) The DEEP Microgrid project (\$4,000,000 grant) continues to move forward. We received the necessary PURA approvals and had a good meeting with the Office of Consumer Counsel as required. We are still a bit away from a point where pricing can be finalized. We are waiting for DEEP to finish the review of the revised plans. All parties will then need to reach an agreement for the power purchase. We continue our weekly conference calls with all parties. A virtual net metering application for the two school solar arrays was accepted as complete, and is in the queue with the likelihood of a spring award. The Town will need to have ownership interest in at least the power line crossing Route 31. We submitted a grant request for this too.
- 17) In a surprise development, we learned that the State has found money to replace the Hop River Trail Bridge over the Hop River in the vicinity of Kings Road. Funds will be available this April, with a year to be spent on design and permitting. Construction is envisioned starting in 2022 and completion in 2024. There is no Town funding or oversight of this project. We may obtain sections of cast concrete culverts currently under Flanders River Road for repurposing.

18) CTDOT has awarded the bid for the replacement of the culvert going under Rt. 44 in front of Meadowbrook Plaza this season. The road will be widened to allow two lanes of traffic during much of the construction. We were able to convince them to include stone facing on the parking lot side of the outlet structure. The project is starting and should be complete by October.

Public Safety:

Police: The department is working on the changes required by the Police Accountability Act. Chief Palmer has put together a tracking plan including expenses. Our two new officers are both in training. Officer Provost has completed field training.

Fire EMS: We continue working on rebranding issues for Department 18, focusing on modifying existing uniforms. The Association contracts are now under review. I have just received one back, so we are nearing submission to the Town Attorney. The replacement of the small rescue truck is in final stages lighting and signage. Hoping to have in service by the end of May. The old rescue truck will be converted to a brush truck to replace the current vehicle, which is having electrical problems. The old brush truck will be sold. Work by the transition committee is pretty much completed, but they will remain in place to serve the fire team and Council. We are setting up interviews for the Fire Chief selection in early May, followed by Council ratification. This will give time to have the rest of the officers selected by June. An AFG grant was submitted last month for radios. They are very competitive so here is hoping!

Finance: Budget is now done and ready for Town Meeting. We worked with Munistat to confirm pricing estimates for upcoming bonding and to review possible refinancing at the same time. The banking RFP will be restarted soon, but the banks keep merging. We have made significant progress with the grant final reimbursement for Safe Routes to School, and still have some issues with the Pucker Street Bridge engineering review, which is also making progress. Looking into applying for the GFOA budget award this year. FEMA grant work is underway and almost complete. We will be getting more than expected, and President Biden retroactively waived the 25% match.

Development group: EDC continues working on follow up to several business visits and outreach to landowners and interested developers. Several Nichols College interns are back working with new businesses to help with marketing, social media, and financial planning. It has been suggested that we have an unveiling of the web sites as a ZOOM event. We are still a couple weeks away from that being ready. I have had further discussions with CT DEEP's concerns regarding the proposed connection to the Bolton Lakes sewer system. It appears that we will have a dual track approach of finishing the process and seeing whether the law passes. Either path will lead to a June decision. The four-town Economic Vitality group is starting meeting to work out a regional events calendar. Dollar General and Courtside Nutrition are open. A nail salon is being worked on next to Courtside. We have reached out to the developer of the Dollar General, who originally also mentioned an auto

parts store, to see if there is interest in the property next door. They now have an option on the house next door. CLCC has opened their farm stand, and they have gone back to Planning and Zoning to share potential plan changes to reduce construction costs and create a more village-style complex or small hamlets. Hytone Farm had a positive decision with the Planning and Zoning Commission, and will start working on any necessary regulation changes and permitting.

Husky Pizza is open where Bea's Country Kitchen was. Reid's has been leased to an out-of-town restaurant owner, but no permits have been pulled. We had discussions with the owner of Meadowbrook Plaza who has plans for some reshuffling, but may end up looking for a new tenant or two. An appraiser has signed a lease for where Nailed It was on Main St. Staff has reached out to owners and there are only a couple vacant places seeking renters. These include one upper unit and the downstairs at Vinton Village, Coventry Fitness (has interest) and the ribbon place underneath. The Penalty Box building is in a pause due to COVID, with decisions on next steps in a few months. Final environmental testing is being done this month at the former Coventry Antiques site, which will help market that parcel. In exciting news, Sanborn Garage has a purchase agreement from a family-owned Japanese car repair and sales company. Commercial land is now on the market on Woodland Road near Lake Street. The house next door to the School Admin Building is supposed to be scheduled for demolition, which will make it more marketable. They are not moving fast enough so we will need to start formal enforcement.

Hull Forestry has started the forestry management project in several sections of the Nathan Hale Greenway (Rt. 6 parcel). This should bring in limited funding for signage and minor amenities, but no trail development beyond the skid road, which would allow emergency access. Hull Forestry has prepared a brochure on the whys and hows of forestry management similar to one they used with a recent Joshua Trust project.

The Annual Lake Forum was skipped this year since the committee doesn't like the ZOOM format. Eric Trott has submitted a grant application for treatment costs and was awarded \$50,000. We are also worked with Mansfield on a river management plan for the Willimantic River and Eagleville Lake to develop a long-term plan on Fanwort treatment, and they were also funded. That project will look at reducing the areas for chemical treatment to critical use areas. The match for this grant proposal will be in-kind services. A brief update will be held for all at the upcoming consortium meeting (April 29). We are working to release an online version of the Watershed Health Pledge to the community, and to produce a window cling decal for those who complete it.

The Senior Housing task force has finished their survey and first draft of a report. They were given more time for completion due to staffing changes and COVID issues. They continue to meet and make progress. They are conducting site visits. I also have inquired where the Orchard Hills grant is and it should be here in a few more weeks.

Farmers' Market planning for the summer season is underway, with hopes of an open market maybe with some limits on numbers of folks.

HR issues:

Personnel rules appendices are still being worked on. We have conducted several negotiations sessions for all Town and School AFSCME groups for pension and are waiting for cost estimates. We are in the interview stage for the vacant PW Maintainer I position and have started the recruitment for Recreation Director. We will also soon start the recruitment for the part time position in the Town Clerk's office with reduced hours. Many issues on COVID-19 leave and travel policies are being digested and information distributed.

Other projects:

DiBlasi Engineering is working on corrective plans with the results of the CHS walls scanned during Christmas break. The Media Center will be scanned during spring break. This may allow some summer corrective work. The School Building Committee has approved bids for the fire door projects, which are underway.

We interviewed and selected ICDS as the HVAC engineering firm for the high school/middle school project. Due to new COVID air standards, we will not have enough money unless grants become available. We have awarded bids for just the middle school gym HVAC units and CHS front office controls to be replaced. The controls should be done soon, but heating units will be delayed until summer. The units were backordered and won't arrive until after the end of the heating season.

Quisenberry was selected as the architect for school roofs. They also did our last roofing project, and they are underway and having discussions with the State. They have recommended that we stop pushing ahead with GHR, since it will not be likely to get good bids for this summer, and instead seek late fall bids for next summer. Pricing is also exceeding our funding due to rapid price increases. The high school roof appears to be much more expensive than anticipated due to other issues such as pitch, chimney removal, drainage and square footage, as well as a major cost increase per square foot. We are waiting for a budget estimate and will need to consider next steps when that is received.

The State paperwork for the Library was received and has been submitted. The Committee has accepted a scope of work from Ken Best of DRA. We are waiting for the State Historic Preservation Office to sign off on the project once again so we can execute the agreement with the State Library for the grant. In related good news, the Library did get a 100% grant to fund the engineering for the joist replacements.

Bill Trudelle is talking to several firms on the State bid for the fire alarm work at the High/Middle school complex, which could save time and money on the bid process and allow summer work.

We are working with UCONN to determine if we have any land suitable for a research center on autonomous vehicles. Received the concept plans and reaching out to interested parties who may be able to help. It may well end up in Mansfield but will be a regional asset.

We are seeking permission to use some CDBG re-spending funds to install touchless bathrooms at the Senior Center and Community buildings at Orchard Hills. We also are looking at ADA funds for our museums in Town.

We submitted two Community Funding Projects grants selected by the Council for consideration by Congressman Courtney. We should learn by fall. It is extremely doubtful we will get both and should feel very lucky if we get one.

A ceremony in honor of Chuck Conkling is planned for Arbor Day, April 29 at 11 AM, to dedicate the planting of four plum trees on the Veteran's Memorial Green as the start of a replanting program. These are being paid for by donations made in Chuck's honor.

Plans are underway for a ceremony in front of the Town Hall on Flag Day, and a scaled-back Memorial Day Parade. Laura Stone has arranged the military flyover and parade road permits.