

**MINUTES  
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING  
DECEMBER 20, 2021, 7:30 P.M.  
TOWN HALL ANNEX & VIRTUAL**

See a video of this meeting at this link:  
<https://coventryct.viebit.com/index.php?folder=ALL>

**1. Call To Order, Roll Call:**

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

Members present:

Julie Blanchard  
John French  
Robyn Gallagher  
Jonathan Hand - Secretary  
Matthew Kyer  
Marty Milkovic – Vice-Chair  
Lisa Thomas - Chair

Members absent:

Also present:

John Elsesser – Town Manager  
Amanda Backhaus – Finance Director

**2. Pledge Of Allegiance:**

Kyer: He is happy to start this new initiative in inviting community members to lead us in the Pledge. Tonight we have Manny Rodrigues, Commander, of American Legion Post 52. Rodrigues led the Council members and Staff as they stood to recite the pledge.

**3. Audience Of Citizens:**

(30 minutes – 5 minutes per person, 750-word count maximum)

Linda Blakesly, 27 Berry Avenue – Racism hurts everyone. The 2<sup>nd</sup> pandemic, which is racism, is being half-heartedly addressed and continues to still be relevant today. Coventry must declare racism is a health crisis. (Blakesly’s statement in its entirety is attached to this document.)

**3.A. Recognition of Retiring Employees: Linda Greenbacker, Joseph Callahan**

Tim Ackert spoke about seeing these employees over the 30 years he has been in town. Greenbacker has been a great steward for the community. Ackert presented a citation from the CT General Assembly to Greenbacker.

Ackert has known Callahan for twenty-five years. The value brought to the community and resources to contractors is greatly appreciated. Ackert presented a citation from the CT General Assembly to Callahan.

Thomas took a moment to recognize the retiring Town Staff with citations.

#### **4. New Business:**

##### **4.A. 21/22-42: Update From Congressman Joseph Courtney (7:45 p.m.)**

Thomas: Congressman Joseph Courtney was invited to the Town Council table. Courtney was asked to be present to tell the Town Council what the infrastructure bill and crumbling foundations means to Coventry.

Courtney: The COVID-19 relief funds have been spent very wisely in Coventry. Infrastructure is about 64% of the \$3 trill. package. The first funding allotment was received by the State last week. The STIP list will be worked through by the CT DOT. The CRCOG process is critical in this as well. Moving beyond transportation, there is water and waste water, coastal resiliency, clean energy tax credits, and airports and seaports. The current theme is these projects and monies will flow through State agencies.

Thomas: Thanked Courtney for his work on the crumbling foundations issue.

Elsesser: The LOTCIP projects are selected by CRCOG. Rural roads are how the funds are classified. This is a federal passthrough. We are getting over tens of millions of dollars through this program.

Milkovic: Thanked Courtney and asked if we can use the funds for local roads? Courtney said the CRCOG process is very important so you get into the ballpark with CT DOT. There are other programs you can take advantage of. It really matters to have good people vying in this competition which Coventry has.

#### **5. Acceptance Of Minutes:**

##### **o November 29, 2021, Special Meeting**

**Motion:** I move to accept the minutes of November 29, 2021, Special Meeting.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Gallagher

With the following corrections:

- Page 4, first paragraph, second sentence – change to read “And some staffing issues at Patriots Park with policing the rules of the park.”.

- Page 4, first paragraph, fourth sentence – change to read “Thomas thinks the maintenance of buildings and safety should not be covered by the recreation budget.”.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

○ **December 6, 2021, Regular Meeting**

**Motion:** I move to accept the minutes of December 6, 2021, Regular Meeting.

By: Hand

Seconded: Milkovic

With the following corrections:

- Page 2, item 3.A., second paragraph, first sentence – change “person” to “Mark Lavitt”.
- Page 2, item 3.A., third paragraph, first sentence – add “Lavitt” after “Mark”.
- Page 2, item 3.A., Motion: Voting: For: - add a ‘,’ after “Thomas”.
- Page 4, item 6.B., third paragraph, first sentence – change “across” to “Across”.
- Page 5, item 6.E., second paragraph, third sentence – add an “a” after “be”.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

**6. 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.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Kyer

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

**7. Reports:**

**7.A. Council Chairwoman: Lisa Thomas**

Thomas read the following:

Chairwoman's Report 12/20/2021

1. Chairwoman's office hours will kick off on Thursday, January 6 at 6:30. The location has been moved to the Library where we can be more comfortable. In addition, if you have children, they can enjoy the library while you chat with the Chairwoman. Kids are also welcome of course to share their concerns and suggestions,
2. Congratulations to our Town Manager, John Elsesser, for his election to Chair the Eastern Highlands Health District Bd of Directors
3. Congratulations to our town staff for raising over \$300 for PJ Day for the Kids
4. I was recently appointed to the Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Advisory Board. The Board's role is to review applicants for CTGrown4CTKids grants and provide technical assistance to awardees. The program is through the CT Department of Agriculture. It's goal is to increase connections between CT agricultural producers and our children through farm-to-school and farm-to-childcare programs. The first grantees will be announced in early February. A second round of grants will open in July or August of 2022. This is a critical program for our northeast region farmers and kids.
5. Dick Brand spoke at our last Audience of Citizens with concerns and suggestions about polling places. Our registrar's office is in touch with him.
6. Thank you to the Coventry Cemetery Commission, our VFW and American Legion Posts, the local scout groups, Coventry High School band and chorus members, and all who worked together for a beautiful Wreaths Across America ceremony on Saturday (December 18). A special thank you to Claudine Vieten for all the heart she puts into arranging for this annual program.
7. A constituent contacted me about using more gender neutral language in our communications and town business. I am requesting that this request be taken up by our Human Rights Commission.

Lisa Thomas  
Chairwoman, Coventry Town Council  
Coventry, CT

**7.B. Council Members:**

Milkovic: Last night the Fire/EMS light parade was held. Human Services is serving 34 families during the holiday.

Gallagher: She enjoyed the PJ Day event; this took a lot of work to pull together. She mentioned the Book Fair at the high school on December 11.

Hand: Thank you and congratulations to the high school and 8<sup>th</sup> grade bands and choir for their concert. This community event was a great show. He is honored to have been part of Wreaths Across America. Thank you to the police department for being an active presence around the schools because of the TikTok event. Congratulations to the Fire/EMS department for the lights

parade around town. He gave a public thank you for the hosting of a vaccine clinic in town.

### **7.C. Finance Committee: Robyn Gallagher, Chairperson**

Gallagher read the following:

#### Finance Chair's Report

I want to start by noting that this is not an exhaustive overview of everything discussed during the last Finance Committee meeting and I encourage everyone who may be curious about what was discussed, including (and especially) members of the public to read the minutes and reach out with any questions or concerns.

Last week, on December 13, 2021, we had a meeting of the Finance Committee during which the following items were addressed:

- \* We had a presentation by Mr. Bill Lindsey with Munistat to discuss refinancing our debt and the impact that the level of Fund Balance has on the Town's debt rating.

- \* Regarding the refinancing, we discussed that the call date on the existing bonds is in March. Demand for Municipal Bonds continues to drive low rates. Refinancing the bonds could result in net present value savings of approximately \$230,000.

- \* Regarding the Town of Coventry's debt rating, this rating is based on a number of factors of which the fund balance level is just one. Other factors include the size of the grand list, and the economy. As to the fund balance, the rating agencies have not released exact information on what they are looking for. The Government Finance Officers Association ("GFOA") Best Practice is a minimum of 2 months of expenditures (16.6%). Currently we are below that level with only about 12.4% of unassigned fund balance. That said, while lower than the best practices, it is still higher than the Connecticut median of 11.41% and comparable to other similar towns. When asked if we should increase our fund balance, Mr. Lindsey referenced increases in extreme weather that are costly for towns and suggested that to the extent these patterns are likely to persist it makes sense for towns to ensure higher levels of fund balance.

- \* Overall, the take away impression was that while fund balance is important it does not need to be our top priority. Coventry can continue to increase the fund balance through conservative and realistic budgeting. \* We reviewed the monthly fiscal reports. In terms of revenue collection we are right where we should be, if not a smidge ahead. In terms of expenditures, we are similarly on a good track. With regard to special fund balances, we continue to face likely shortfalls in COVRRA, sewer, recreation, and EMS. The Finance Committee will meet with the Fire/EMS administrator at a future meeting.

- \* We briefly discussed areas in which continuing expenditures had been previously covered by one-time revenue sources. Understanding these areas will assist in the budgeting process as we try to craft a sustainable budget.

- \* We talked about waste management, including the Town's meeting with Casella. Unfortunately, while they said they would apply the same rates they will give Willimantic, Casella will increase our per tonnage waste disposal rates to between \$20-25/ton. In response to that increase, we discussed methodologies to try and decrease materials going into the waste stream. We discussed a prior program in place that allowed the town to subsidize compost bins. We also discussed the fact that we will receive revenues from the bottle charges on Nips bottles. One option is to use that revenue to reinstate the compost bin program in the hopes that encouraging composting makes waste disposal more affordable for our residents. We also talked about the possibility of using some of the Nips bottle funding for a Recycling Coordinator.

\* We discussed the current status of our American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") funding and what has been tentatively earmarked for future projects. In particular we focused on a list promulgated by the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities that includes items that they feel would permissibly fall within the scope of ARPA funding. The important point here is that we have time to discuss how best to utilize this one time source of funding in a way that better serves Coventry as a whole.

\* We discussed whether or not to submit a letter of interest for the UConn internship program. Indicating interest now is not a firm commitment to move forward with the program, which costs \$16,000. While Coventry has greatly benefited from participation in the past, and this should not be seen as any sort of criticism for the work performed by all the wonderful interns to date, should we decide to hire an Assistant Town Manager we may not move forward with the program.

Again, I encourage everyone to review the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting as this last meeting was full of information.

Milkovic: Refinancing could save \$2 mill. Composting is one way to relieve the waste stream.

French: Is there a date for a meeting with the Library Board? Is Finance going to be looking at the contract structure? Thomas: The full Council will have a contract discussion in Executive Session. Gallagher: French or Blanchard should provide the extent of their concern about the library contract and how they feel it will be best to proceed.

#### **7.C.1. \* Monthly Financial Reports**

#### **7.C.2. \* Minutes, December 13, 2021**

#### **7.C.3. \* Munistat Presentation**

#### **7.D. \* Steering Committee: Matthew Kyer, Chairperson**

#### **7.E. COVRRRA – John Elsesser**

COVRRRA is being covered with overtime from Public Works due to staff changes. Roadside inspections and tagging of waste with an orange sticker that indicates items that are not being disposed of properly are taking place. The nip bottles surcharge will bring in \$15k annually. We have talked about funding a Recycling Coordinator with that surcharge. Hand: Suggested possibly having an 'explainer' video about various subjects for those living in town. Elsesser: We don't have the staff capacity or time to produce a video but we can have information on the town website. Kyer: What is the next step for a resident if an orange sticker is placed on items at the curbside that are not supposed to be there? Does the sticker have the contact information of someone that may be able to help? Elsesser: If tagged items are left at the curb the resident can be ticketed. Metals are accepted at the Transfer Station at no charge. Mattresses are the most noxious use; those are free unless they become contaminated by the weather. Then they cannot be collected and they are no longer accepted free of charge. Hand: Residents can have old mattresses taken away by a vendor when

a new mattress is delivered or steps must be taken when leaving mattresses at the curb so they do not get wet.

## **7.F. Town Manager – John Elsesser**

### **7.F.1. Projects Update**

Elsesser reported:

- Three firms were interviewed for helping with the Affordable Housing grants. Over the next four months the selected firm will work with the PZC and gather community input to meet the deadline in May.
- Walls Committee had a walk-through to finalize the techniques that will be used on the various walls.
- The house is coming down at the end of Swamp Road for the realignment project.

Blanchard: What is the amount of the grant for hydrilla treatment? Are there issues or the standard conditions for the new Farmer's Market lease? Elsesser: He recalls the hydrilla grant amount to be \$40k; Mansfield's amount for Eagleville Lake is \$15k. The CT Landmarks people are cordial about the new lease for the Farmer's Market but they are not wanting to talk about it at this time. That causes us to be reactive instead of proactive.

Milkovic: Is there more information available about the pavement management study? He noted in the report that there may be a delay in snowplowing this year – why is this? Elsesser: The pavement management study information will be available in a couple of months once we get the GIS systems to talk to each other. Two Public Works employees are out with injuries. Both will be back soon on half-days for light duty assignments but they cannot be on plows. One is helping the Town Engineer. The Roads Foreman is back part-time. We are still down one employee in that department. His Christmas wish is for the snow to hold off as people want to be home on Christmas. DPW will do their best but there may be some issues. There are five plow routes and we have one contractor.

Kyer: Requested more detail about the original plan to fix the cabins at Creaser Park and the change in plan to demolish them. Will demolishing the cabins possibly leave the town short on storage space? Elsesser: We plan to take down two to three this year. Major repairs would be needed for something that does not have a dedicated use. The foundations will be saved. Sustainable CT is looking for crowd source funding to erect a greenhouse on a foundation. The town has other storage spaces including a little known about house that we are looking at making a two-story house into a warehouse. There are reasons we cannot sell the house.

**7.F.2. COVID-19 Update**

Thomas: Coventry is number one in cases within the health district.

Elsesser: We will work with the health district to create awareness of its services. People can go to their website for information. The health district is trying to gear up for more testing by looking at test kit availability and staffing. Gallagher: Testing is done at Recreation Park in Windham. She went there for a test and got the results 30 hours later. She believes it is there every day.

Elsesser: The lower courts struck down the vaccine mandate stay. We are back to getting information requirements from Staff. We have until January 10, 2022 before fines are levied. The case goes to the Supreme Court next. The next three to four weeks are going to be significant with the holidays. Backhaus: CT OSHA has a part in this – we have to see if they will go with the federal mandate or with something more stringent.

**7.F.3. Process For Hiring Police Chief**

Elsesser: a tentative optimistic schedule is attached to the agenda. The earliest is February but that can easily slip into March.

**7.F.4. \* Detective Assignment**

**7.F.5. \* Staffing Meeting Minutes, 12/9/21**

**8. Unfinished Business:**

**8.A. 21/22-39: Review, Discussion, And Possible Action On Council Rules Of Procedures**

Thomas: The revisions in red were discussed at the last meeting.

Section 10.04.D. was removed after discussion. A consistency in punctuation was made in Section 9.02. A spelling error was corrected in Section 10.01.

**Motion:** I move that the Council accept the changes made this evening and adopt the Council Rules of Procedures.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Hand

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

**9. New Business:**



**9.A. 21/22-41: Consideration/Possible Action: Adoption Of Revisions To Chief Of Police Job Description**

Kim: She received some updates from the state and a survey with three questions provided community input. Elsesser: The results of the survey will go to the panel to help them in screening applicants. The department will be going through an accreditation survey in March.

Gallagher: The third paragraph under Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities uses “is desirable” which seems to weaker language. Is there a reason less mandatory language was chosen there? Elsesser: That is in our language. Thomas: It makes sense to use “is necessary” there.

Thomas: Tools and Equipment Used section should include body cameras.

Backhaus: Education and Experience suggested three years instead of ten years. Elsesser: Without this change we would have a hard time finding someone within the department that would qualify. Kyer: What do other towns our size require? Elsesser: That is a difficult comparison based on town size.

Thomas: Sometime in the future we can write it the way we want it when we may be needing a Police Chief in the future. Gallagher: Is there an accredited body or best practices for a Police Chief position?

Backhaus: There is not a lot of opportunity for people in the current department that are in Captain positions.

Thomas: How do we feel about item B of Education and Experience? French: Looking at it from public safety he is secure with being a sergeant or above for four years. Thomas: It sounds like that is what comparable departments are using. Blanchard: We have to be sure we have someone extremely qualified for the position on the other points; we don’t want to accept a candidate just because they have the right number of years of experience.

**Motion:** I move that the Council adopt the job description as revised.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: There was no further discussion.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

**10. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:**

**10.A. \* Notification Of Charter Honorary Memberships: Coventry Fire & EMS**

**10.B. \* Board Of Education: 12/9/21 Agenda**

**11. Executive Session:**

**Motion:** I move 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 the seven members of the Town Council, John Elsesser, and Amanda Backhaus.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: French

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

**Motion:** I move that the Town Council enter into Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1-200(6)(E)-discussion of any matter which would result in the disclosure of public records or the information therein contained described in sub-section (b) of Section 1-210 with the following people in attendance the seven members of the Town Council, John Elsesser, and Amanda Backhaus.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: French

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

The Council entered Executive Session at 9:46 p.m.

The Council exited Executive Session at \_\_\_\_ p.m.

**12. Adjournment:**

**Motion:** I move that the Council adjourn at \_\_\_\_ p.m.

By:

Seconded:

Voting:

For:

Against: None  
Abstain: None

Respectfully Submitted,

Yvonne B. Filip

Yvonne B. Filip, Town Council 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.***

Remarks from Linda Blakesley.

Monday, December 20, 2021  
Audience of Citizens Coventry Town Council

My name is Linda Blakesley and I live at 27 Berry Avenue.

Racism hurts everyone.

Nearly two years into the COVID pandemic, the second pandemic, racism, continues to be only half heartedly addressed by town and government officials and agencies in this town.

What follows is much of what I spoke about last February 16, 2021. Some of you may find it familiar. It is still relevant today.

The Town of Coventry must declare racism a public health crisis. As local PowerUp Connecticut CEO and founder, Keren Prescott, says, 'you cannot cure what you cannot diagnose.'

Just because we live in a predominantly white town, does not mean that racism is not impacting all of our residents. We owe it to all the children in this town, who will one day be global citizens, to create equitable systems in which all children can thrive and outcomes are not determined by race. They are watching. They are learning. One day they will be making decisions in the world that impact all people including the most marginalized and disenfranchised populations.

Health inequities affect millions of BIPOC through systemic barriers and social determinants. We are all a part of this system. If we are not doing everything we can to dismantle it, then we are upholding it and perpetuating it.

Following this statement last February, it seems many of our residents could use a basic definition and understanding of racism.

Racism comes in many forms. It can be blatant, targeted, overt racism seen in single incidents. Racism also comes in the form of microaggressions that are learned through our own racial socialization and show up in many ways both consciously and unconsciously. Racist messages are embedded in our culture through education, media, and the dominant white culture, for example. Racism is also built into public and government policy, which has been proven in such historic cases such as redlining and banking discrimination, to name two. Racism does indeed exist in Coventry. It absolutely affects the citizens of this town every day. There is no doubt that all of these methods of racism are happening here every day.

There is a message on the fences of Coventry Grammar School that states - 'We Are All Equal' This message is a lie. We are not all equal. Government policies have been designed to ensure just that: that we are not all equal. A sign such as this tells me that Coventry does not get it. Maybe this sign makes the white people in town feel good, but the message it sends is that the work here is done or is not necessary. The sign is a lie. We are not even close to equal. And we are far from done.

Tonight, once again, I am asking the Town Council to Declare Racism a Public Health Crisis. This declaration will serve as a commitment by this Town to dismantle racism and foster a community that is equitable to all stakeholders. Unless this declaration is made, all other actions are disingenuous from my point of view. Having a community conversation is a huge deal, but does not do anything to address the health and social inequities that exist and plague BIPOC community members. A statement from the town council denouncing racism carries no clout without a declaration and commitment to critically and objectively examine current policies through a racial equity lens. It is not reasonable or realistic to expect a defunct, inactive Human Rights Commission with newly recruited volunteers to take on such an enormous task of auditing

policies and making recommendations from a racial equity standpoint. To me, all of this is merely checking a box. To me, all of this is passing the charge on to someone else. Prove me wrong. First, declare racism a public health crisis.

I request that this be reconsidered by Steering and then voted on by the Town Council within a few meeting cycles. I look forward to hearing your discussion and vote on this pertinent matter.

Thank you.

Linda Blakesley  
27 Berry Avenue  
Coventry, CT 06238

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