

Staff Meeting 12/22/21

Present: John Elsesser, Laura Stone, Jeff Spadjinske, Margaret Khan, Lesley Munshower, Bill Watkins, Linda Greenbacker, Eric Trott, Annemarie Sundgren, Pam Rochette, Mike D'Amicol, Joe Callahan, Mark Owens, Debbie Kratochvil

Town Council Recap:

John Elsesser provided a recap of the 12/20 Town Council meeting, minutes for which will be posted separately. Highlights include:

- Something new has been started by Council member Matthew Kyer – representatives from local service organizations will be invited to lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Monday's Pledge was led by Manny Rodrigues on behalf of American Legion Post 52. Other groups, such as the Scouts, etc. will participate from time to time.
- There was one person who spoke during Audience of Citizens. Linda Blakesley is still asking the Council to declare racism as a public health crisis. The Council had issued several declarations relating to racism this year, and several of these have action items, including refocusing the Human Rights Commission, which is getting new members. The Council is also looking at community conversations on race, as well as affirmative action, employee personnel and recruitment policies. The Council does not feel they have ignored this issue, although it appears Linda does not find these new initiatives to be satisfactory.
- Special recognition was given to Joe Callahan and Linda Greenbacker for their years of service with their pending retirements at the close of the year.
- Congressman Joe Courtney gave a presentation regarding federal money which we hope will be coming. We have a lot of irons in the fire, and Joe was very complimentary of our knowledge and pursuit of grants. His staff is excellent to work with.
- Financial reports were given by Robyn Gallagher, Chair of the Finance Committee. Munistat gave a presentation at the last Finance Committee meeting on a plan to issue bonds in March. We are hoping to beat interest rate increases. We can refinance some of our bonds in March at more favorable rates – which could save us up to \$280,000 in financing costs. This will help us long-term, and to absorb the cost of debt service. School roof and HVAC projects are coming and will create budget pressures.
- COVRRRA – we are in a solid waste crisis, and there is zero State leadership. The waste plant is tired, and towns are pulling out of MIRA, and it is projected to collapse in July. Our contract for solid waste disposal is up for renewal and we had a preliminary conversation with Cassella Waste Management, the new owners of Willimantic Waste. We are anticipating increases of \$20/ton, which will be a budgetary issue. We may look at ways to reduce our volume of solid waste disposal, which will not be easy. A new State bill passed charging five cents per nip bottle, which is estimated to generate \$15,000 in revenue. This may help us get a recycling coordinator to help educate the public and reduce disposal costs.
- Many projects were highlighted in the Manager's [project update](#). A few highlights:
 - The house at Swamp Road and Rt. 44 is gone. We are taking advantage of warmer weather to rough out roads and get utilities installed, with on-road work planned in the spring. There is a long lead time for parts.
 - We are getting lots of questions on the CT DOT tree removal project on Rt. 31. We have never seen CT DOT undertake a project of this extent. They are removing all dead or

dying Ash trees in the right of way, as well as other trees deemed hazardous to the roadway, such as large pines or oaks. This has saved us approximately \$8,000-\$10,000 on the tree removal component of the Main Street sidewalk project, so we may be able to extend the sidewalk a little further.

- We discussed the process for hiring the next police chief. We anticipate a March 2022 time frame. An updated job description was approved, and a community survey will go out soon on attributed people would like to see for the next chief.
- The Council amended and approved their [Standing Rules of Procedure](#).
- In Executive Session we discussed union contracts, pension and issues related to the opioid lawsuit.

Staff updates:

Town Manager – John Elsesser:

- COVID: The numbers are roaring back, with Omicron now the dominant strain. We don't know all the implications, it is more contagious but perhaps not as severe. Seventy-five percent of COVID patients in hospitals are not vaccinated. The courts have ruled that the OSHA vaccination requirements are valid – this may be appealed but we don't know. In the meantime, we have new deadlines for compliance which have been communicated to staff. Supervisors are directed to work with your staffs so they understand the importance of this. Proof of vaccination or weekly testing will be required. Fines are \$14,000 per day. Failing to participate is not an option for local governments. Testing is hard to get. Short of compliance, people will not be on our payroll.
- Mike Ruef has several projects underway. The slip-lining project of the pipe under Coventry Lake has been awarded. This will keep clean water out of the treatment plant. Another line under Woodland is planned in a year. Mike also put in additional information to seek money under the infrastructure plan for the treatment plant.
- John and Eric met with CT Water to look at infrastructure money. There are several water systems we would like to interconnect.

Fire/EMS/Emergency Management – Jim McLoughlin:

- We are developing a survey to seek input from the Town Council and the public about expectations for the fire department.
- We are trying to identify funding sources for the EMS fund, which has solvency issues as a result of moving to 24/7 paid ambulance staff coverage. Reimbursement for most patients covered by Medicare/Medicaid is dismal at best. The number of COVID responses has gone up from 11 in 2020 to 21 in 2021. The number of unknowns and positives have also increased, as well as cardiac arrests and psych calls. We are keeping an eye on these trends to try and avoid staff burnout.
- We participated in Wreaths Across America with traffic detail and the ladder truck. We also staged a successful town parade to wish the town residents a happy holiday.
- We continue to meet with OSHA to create policies and training, and the process has gone well. More meetings are planned for January.
- We did training at the Swamp Road house before it was demolished.
- Kudos to DPW for their landscaping work at the stations.

- Jim has been attending peer support meetings to develop peer-related programs.

Human Services – Annemarie Sundgren:

- Annemarie attended the community call meeting for the Vernon Response Team to work on asset mapping, which we will do for Coventry. It was a beneficial session.
- Annemarie also attended the Hunger Action Team meetings – this initiative has extra food and offers financial help, so it will be another resource for our residents.
- Youth Services will be offering some parent education classes in the spring. There are six ongoing juvenile review board cases, which is a high number.
- The Senior Center is busy with the Choices program and open enrollment for Medicare. There has been a delay in the touchless bathroom upgrades due to shipping issues. The Center has been designated as a recipient of funds from the estate of Dawn Tremills. We received the first distribution and it was \$82,000. John Elsesser said he thinks it may have been Dawn's sister who lived in town – she passed about four years ago. First Church has also been notified that they will be receiving some funds, which could be a big help with their renovation project. Annemarie said the Tremills estate was \$1.7 million, and the Senior Center is slated to receive 6%. John said we will try to use the funding in the most advantageous way while honoring the sisters.
- There have been lots and complaints and management regarding the eviction process. The eviction process must go through the Department of Housing's [UniteCT](#) program.
- Annemarie is attending ECAN meetings for cold weather protocols for the homeless population.
- We received a lot of donations to the Food Bank and our holiday program, which was successful in serving 55 families, with a total of 109 people/68 kids. 35 families were supported in the Adopt-a-Family program. Thanks for Eric Trott for his assistance with the deliveries at Orchard Hills.
- Annemarie was interviewed by the Associated Press in relation to our community conversations process. The initiative will begin in the spring of 2022. The next meeting will take place on January 17, and a website has been set up for minutes/agendas, etc.
- The first re-institution of the Human Services Advisory Board candidate meeting was held. There was good response, and the first formal meetings will begin in 2022.

Recreation – Lesley Munshower:

- The Holiday Lights contest had 18 houses participate, with 26 votes. It was popular, with social media posts reaching 8,476.
- The pavilion construction has started at Laidlaw Park. There has been a lot of chatter and excitement, with social media posts reaching 3,360. Delivery of the pavilion is anticipated in 6-8 weeks, and updates will continue to be shared.
- In collaboration with the fire department, we are offering CPR and Stop the Bleed classes monthly. Town staff-only classes for CPR will be held on 1/11, and Stop the Bleed on 1/13, at a cost of \$30. Call the Rec office if you want to participate.
- Basketball session 1 was completed at it went well. The Rec League starts 1/18, and it was voted that we will continue to continue the facemask requirement. The Travel League has not made consistent regulations, so the facemask requirement will vary from town to town. Requests have been made for consistency. New staff has been hired.

- We are working on our operating budget, and are creating nine new revenue account lines for transparency.
- We are seeing some effects of COVID with rentals, with some canceling at the last minute, and other cancellations into next year. We are providing DPW with a calendar of rentals for snow removal.
- We are painting the interior of the Lodge at the end of January. Manny Rodrigues is leading the process and assisting Town staff.
- The 06238 recreation program brochure is going to print this week and will be in homes the first week of January.
- We are starting the recruitment process for 2022 seasonal staff.
- There have been a lot of COVID notifications and contact tracing requirements in the department.

Administration – Laura Stone:

- The winter newsletter is at the printer and will be in homes by mid-January.
- The January e-blast has been finalized and will be distributed on 12/27.
- Laura will be out of the office from December 24-January 4.

Booth & Dimock Memorial Library – Margaret Khan:

- Our membership mailing has gone out – it was later than usual due to supply chain issues for card stock. We hope the campaign will finalize the Sondra Stave match.
- Margaret attended the Library Association’s Legislative Committee meeting regarding book challenges. Individuals are trying to press charges against LGBTQ content. We have tightened our policies. The integrity and intent of libraries are being challenged across the nation.
- An architect has been hired for the renovation project. SHPO approval is required and their staff is away until after the holidays.
- We have applied for a State grant for fiber network and it looks promising. It may help the renovation project.

TM Intern – Pam Rochette:

- Pam has finished up the revised police chief job description and a community survey about desirable attributes for our next police chief.
- Pam is working on an update to the Municipal action Plan and recertification for SustainableCT.
- She is also working with EDC on an employee recognition program that will launch on January 1. A flyer with a QR code has been created for people to vote. She has also reached out to local businesses about the program. Laura Stone mentioned that a notice about this program will appear on the back cover of the Town’s winter newsletter.

Land Use/Development – Eric Trott:

- We interviewed potential candidates for consulting services for the Affordable Housing Plan and made a selection. A reference check is underway, with an announcement anticipated this week.
- We got confirmation from CT DEEP for the Coventry Lake aquatic invasives management plan for 2022. We await confirmation for Eagleville Lake.

- We are working with the Bolton Lakes Watershed to finish up the Bolton Lakes Management Plan. This will go out for public comment in February.
- We have gotten a few applications for the 1% ARP funding for the arts, which are due by the end of the year. We will review.
- The 4-Town Economic Development group is looking to connect UConn interns to assist municipalities and local businesses.
- The Farmers' Market is beginning the 2022 planning process, including longevity planning to address future staffing. We are also having conversations with CT Landmarks for the lease renewal at the Homestead.
- We are revising the Rec Tails grant application at the request of CT DEEP to reduce the cost of our project. Our application was rated highly among those received. There is a lot of competition for this funding.
- Work is in progress with PZC, Wetlands, and DOT for a dentist and oral surgeon office at the property near Walgreens on Rt. 44.
- PZC is setting up subcommittees for cannabis and affordable housing, and will be looking at zoning regulations for accessory dwellings.
- We are looking at the potential acquisition of a property on South River Road for open space, in collaboration with Joshua's Trust. John Elsesser noted that this would be a highly desirable parcel. It was offered by a previous owner several years ago but we didn't have the funds.
- We are working with a vendor to get a new Village sign at Rt. 275 at the Town line.

Building Office – Joe Callahan:

- The office is very busy with inspections. The work on First church in the Village is incredible. They have the suspended ceiling grid up and have removed the old knob and tube wiring. It is quite a monumental task. John Elsesser said they had hoped to be done in time for Easter, but this is unlikely.
- Joe gave thanks to everyone for their kind words upon his retirement. It has been a pleasure working with everyone.

Public Works – Bill Watkins/Mark Owens:

- Bill got the DERA grant application submitted for a possible diesel truck replacement.
- Annual hearing testing for staff was completed a couple of weeks ago.
- We are taking advantage of good weather to address culvert repairs and sightline issues.
- Bill and Mark are going to be looking at our software for project tracking and cost evaluation.
- Tree removal at Patriots Park is underway today.
- Interviews for Public Works Maintainer 1 are being held next week.
- The Lake is finally at winter level.
- We continue to address complaints as they come in.
- Two employees are still on light duty. They are assisting Todd Penney.
- We finished leaf cleanup at Patriots Park, and still need to do the PD.
- We are looking at the pavement study. A grade of 75 is pretty good.
- We are ready for snow. We are down three people right now, so we are hoping there are no further COVID absences. Everyone in the department has a vital role. Jim McLoughlin mentioned

that he talked to a contractor who is willing to do snowplowing. We will send the information to Mark.

- We have a new arborist representative at Eversource. We hope to address more tree work. John Elsesser noted we should see some major work in the second half of the year.

Tax Office – Linda Greenbacker:

- Supplemental motor vehicles was received from the Assessor's office on 12/13. Address changes have been updated, and it was sent to the printer to be mailed out as we speak. There are 2490 bills.
- An installment from Core Logic for those wanting to make real estate tax payments by the end of the year was received.
- Thanks to all who Linda has worked with over the years. It has been a pleasure.

Police – Jeff Spadjinske:

- We are finishing up the operating budget, including funds for DUI enforcement.
- Kelsey Carpenter is moving into the detective position at the first of the year. There are a lot of responsibilities in this position.
- New officer Pansini is starting in January, with a tentative swearing in on January 3.
- Jeff attended the Capitol Chiefs regional meeting and got some training for the regional response team. He also went to the CT Chiefs regional meeting. There were a lot of notable speakers.
- The new cruiser is in and pending equipment installation.

Finance Office – Debbie Kratochvil for Amanda Backhaus:

- A reminder that operating budgets are due by December 31.

Assessing Office – Mike D'Amicol:

- The supplemental grand list was updated. We are up about 20% from 2019.
- We are working on the 2021 grand list.
- Rachel is working on personal property and Mike is finishing up real estate.
- Income level limits have been adjusted.
- We have a new member of the Board of Assessment Appeals. They are setting meeting dates for 2022.
- John Elsesser noted that we are preparing for next year's car tax bill to be a big surprise, as values have increased significantly. Fortunately we are not in a revaluation cycle, because house values have also gone up. A Bidwell Village property just sold for \$500,000. Joe noted that the first of these properties sold for \$147,000.

John Elsesser closed the meeting by saying a number of years ago, staff used to share things that made them happy. He said his cousin's son is a prodigy from Cal Tech and is in charge of the Webb system they are launching. It is a \$15 billion system that is getting launched on December 24 and will replace Hubble. It is called the [James Webb Telescope Project](#) and will look at the origins of the universe. It is amazing what a difference one or two people can make.