

**MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MAY 2, 2022, 7:30 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX & VIRTUAL**

See a video of this meeting at this link:

<https://coventryct.viebit.com/player.php?hash=82z8gRYRmshe>

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-Chairperson

Lisa Thomas - Chairperson

Members absent:

Also present:

John Elsesser – Town Manager

Amanda Backhaus – Finance Director

2. Pledge Of Allegiance:

All Council members and Staff stood to recite the Pledge.

3. Audience Of Citizens:

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

Karen Dowd, 302 Pine Lake Drive – Last two years Republicans were in charge on Town Council and they lowered the mil rate in 2019 and 2020. She is disappointed that no long term commitments were made to the town. Democrats are now faced with a very tight budget. The mil rate will increase slightly because we have to pay for the things residents want and need. Responsible governing means our town has resources to fund the needs of the citizens. The general fund was depleted under the Republicans' watch. The current Council is making sure our town has a realistic and hopeful future.

3.A. Coventry Department 18: Recognition/Life-Saving Award

Chief Meyers was present. Five people did a lifesaving at Highland Park on March

27, 2022. Elizabeth Poncheck, citizen, initiated CPR for a coworker who went into cardiac arrest. Katelyn, an ECHN representative of the hospital, is also recognizing those that helped in this medical emergency.

Also being recognized with the lifesaving award are Olivia Thomas, DJ Figiela, Josh, and Jerry. Josh and Olivia are Vintec contractors. Clayton’s mother thanked the EMS team for the quick response.

Thomas: This shows us again the importance of everyone taking CPR certification.

4. Acceptance Of Minutes:

Acceptance Of Minutes, April 18, 2022:

Motion: I move to accept the minutes of the April 18, 2022, meeting.

By: Hand

Seconded: Milkovic

Corrections:

- Page 8, second paragraph, second sentence – remove “mentioning”.
- Page 9, first paragraph – change “detention” to “retention” throughout.

Voting:

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

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.

By: Hand

Seconded: Milkovic

Discussion: Milkovic: Would like item 6.F.4. removed from the Consent Agenda.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

6. Reports:

6.A. Council Chairwoman: Lisa Thomas

Thomas read the following:

Chairwoman's Report 5/2/2022

I want to extend my thanks to Jeff Longo and the Coventry Youth Baseball Association for inviting me to throw an opening day pitch. They have an excellent program that truly focuses on the growth of Coventry's kids. Like all of our youth recreation leagues, Coventry Youth Baseball is fueled by volunteers and generous donors. Speaking of generous donors, the league also held a food drive for the Coventry Food bank as part of opening day and kicked it off with a \$500 donation presented to our Human Services Director Annemarie Sundgren. I'm sure I speak for all of us when I extend appreciation to Coventry Baseball for their generosity.

Earlier today Congressman Joe Courtney came to Coventry to see how we have used our American Rescue Plan funds and our plans for moving forward with the remaining funds. This is something we will discuss later on our agenda. The Congressman was impressed by the careful planning to use the funds in intended and meaningful ways. It was also an opportunity for us to share with him some of the pressing concerns we face, including budgeting for ambulance staffing.

I am so proud of the staff and residents who were part of today's time with Congressman Courtney. John and team pulled together a schedule of stops and meetings that truly highlighted our community's magic. We started with a visit to the fire station to talk about the ambulance we purchased with ARPA funds, as well as special equipment for underwater rescues. The Congressman was deeply impressed by our fire/EMS work, including the regional dive team. Thanks to Jimmy and Bud for their professionalism answering questions. Next we visited our police department where Chief Spadjinske and the dispatch staff talked about improvements to equipment and the challenges of keeping a staffed department. That was followed by light lunch at Bidwell where Johnny talked about the benefits of the PPE grants and our use of ARPA funds to reimburse our local businesses for their food service licenses. Arts Guild members Ruth O'Neil and Richard White joined us there to talk about the value of the cultural arts grants we provided through ARPA - 2 more of which we will vote on later this evening. Eric Trott joined us there as well to talk about how these investments benefit our economic development goals. Then we stopped at the library to talk about making sure we invest well in maintaining our library by repairing part of the roof and windows. And our last stop was at Miller Richardson where we talked about the efficiency and benefits of using ARPA funds to move the transfer station over to our DPW complex. One of the things this is going to allow us to do is better manage our recycling program and reduce costs that we now need to cover since the loss of recycling markets. Of course, the best benefit is that we will be moving forward with constructing the girls softball field that our community approved in November. Many thanks to Bill Watkins and Lesley Munshower for meeting us there to review the plans for the transfer station and the softball field

Sometimes we lose sight of all the wonderful things we are able to do in our community by carefully planning the use of grant dollars. I'm not sure what we would have done during these times if didn't have these federal dollars during the pandemic. It is critical that we make sure we use them wisely. This is something I spoke about during the prior Council term. We made decisions to use some of the federal dollars for ongoing operating expenses like funding a frozen police officer position and staffing our ambulance service. At that time, I supported those decisions based on the promise from then leadership that in the next budget year we would begin to move some of those operating costs into our general budget. That is exactly what the current proposed budget seeks to do. I am reminded of the Northeastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce legislators breakfast I recently attended. Both our Republican State Rep Tim Ackert and our Republican State Senator joined all the legislators in attendance to warn against using American Rescue funds for ongoing operating expenses due to the huge budget holes that creates. Every single legislator there cautioned us not to.

While we have allocated another \$50,000 to ambulance service we have also moved more of the

cost into our regular operating budget. When I see flyers and signs around town suggesting we should redirect hundreds of thousands of additional ARPA dollars to ambulance staffing I wonder how those folks think we are going to fill the even bigger hole that will leave in next year's budget. And which ARPA dollars would they like us to redirect? The dollars for moving the transfer station which means we lose that efficiency and can't build our softball field? The dollars we are reserving to fix the HVAC for healthy air quality in our schools? I think we all need to think very carefully about the implications moving forward.

On the topic of signs around town. The Council has received a couple of emails and I've received several phone calls about the vote no signs taped onto people's mailboxes. There have also been concerns expressed on social media. I want to first say that the Town has no authority to manage the situation since mailboxes are considered postal service property. Taping things to them is illegal, and of course dangerous if the material covers the house number. I ask that those people who engaged in taping literature to mailboxes remove it and not do so again - not only because doing so is illegal, but because our constituents are asking us not to.

Lisa Thomas
Chairwoman, Coventry Town Council
Coventry, CT

6.B. Council Members:

Milkovic: Is happy to see the Daly Road project grant is going forward. The State budget agreement between the Governor and Legislature has some positive items for families and taxpayers, such as, child tax credits, property tax credits will go from \$200 to \$330, the gas tax holiday has been extended to December 1, 2022, annuity and pension earnings will be dropped from state tax, and a new income tax credit for student loans.

Gallagher: Thanked everyone who spoke at the annual town meeting; it is great to hear from constituents. There was some questioning about the softball fields. At the last Council meeting the decision was made to allocate \$500k to move the transfer station to make room for the softball fields. Any delays at this point will delay the bid for the softball field. This is meeting the desires of the town. She has seen some misinformation on Facebook pages on why we don't use ARPA money to address the deficit in the EMS fund. The reason we are in a deficit is the last Council spent more money than had been approved. We are planning on using \$400k to offset that deficit.

French: The fund balance grew during the COVID period of two years. It is illegal for a town council to spend more than what was approved. Do you want to mention exactly where Gallagher thinks that happened? Gallagher: The EMS fund plunged into a deficit and while that was raised repeatedly during Finance meetings there was no plan to address it as she understands it. That is being addressed now. French: You said they spent more money than they were allowed to. That would be illegal. He does not support that statement whatsoever. The ambulance situation occurred because of COVID. The money was to be used for COVID expenses. We should be looking at many communities getting together and have a centralized EMS service. We should not tax the taxpayers in one year for that amount of money for the EMS deficit. We should make some sort of statement or law that non-profits cannot hang

bags off or flyers off of a mailbox. This has been done in the past. This is not just being done now. Thomas: We have learned that something should not be hanged from the mailbox flag. Some have been taped over the house number which may cause a problem in an emergency. French: Even the mailbox post cannot be used. We should make a clear case that the mailbox should not be used in any way.

Hand: What he read people were upset that a statement was placed on a mailbox that may not be the opinion of the homeowner.

Kyer: He has received bags on his mailbox for Scouting for Food many times. Looking to collect for food for those in need from the community is different from turning someone's mailbox into a political statement.

6.C. Steering Committee: Matthew Kyer, Chairperson

Kyer reported we interviewed several candidates wishing to serve on Land Use boards. The committee accepted the resignation of William Glenney from the Protected Space Stewardship Committee. The Steering Committee thanked him for his service to our community.

6.C.1. Reappointments

6.C.1.a. CoventryVision: Butler

Motion: Steering recommends and I move that the Council reappoint Gregory Butler to CoventryVision, new term to expire 5/3/25.

By: Kyer

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Blanchard: It is good to have someone step forward. We've looked for a long time.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.C.1.b. CoventryVision: Stone

Motion: Steering recommends and I move that the Council reappoint Laura Stone to CoventryVision, new term to expire 5/3/25.

By: Kyer

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Hand: Thank you for your continued service.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.C.1.c. Economic Development Commission: Jobbagy

Motion: Steering recommends and I move that the Council reappoint William Jobbagy to the Economic Development Commission, new term to expire 2/1/2027.

By: Kyer

Seconded: Hand

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.C.1.d. Economic Development Commission: Pollansky

Motion: Steering recommends and I move that the Council reappoint Darby Pollansky to the Economic Development Commission, new term to expire 2/1/2027.

By: Kyer

Seconded: French

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.C.1.e. Planning & Zoning Commission Alt: Burrington

Motion: Steering recommends and I move that the Council reappoint Robert Burrington to the Planning & Zoning Commission Alt., new term to expire 11/1/2024.

By: Kyer

Seconded: Hand

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

Thomas: Regarding the interviewing of interested candidates – it is a policy to interview for positions of Land Use with regulatory issues.

6.C.2. Appointments

6.C.2.a. Ad-Hoc Coventry Lake Advisory & Monitoring Committee: Slater

Kyer: Contacted Ms. Slater to let her know there are currently no open positions on this committee; we do appreciate her interest.

6.C.2.b. Economic Development Commission: Mitchell

Motion: Steering recommends and I move that the Council appoint Cathy Mitchell to the Economic Development Commission, term to expire 2/1/2023.

By: Kyer

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Hand: Thanked her for keeping her hat in the ring.
Thomas: She is one of the owners of Daniel Rust B&B.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.C.2.c. Planning & Zoning Commission Alt.: Murray

Motion: Steering recommends and I move that the Council appoint Brian Murray to the Planning & Zoning Commission Alt., term to expire 11/1/2025.

By: Kyer

Seconded: Hand

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

Milkovic: Re: The conflict of interest portion of the Statement of Interest Form – Is that explained in the Volunteer Handbook. Kyer: Yes.

6.D. * Finance Committee: Robyn Gallagher, Chairperson

6.D.1. * Minutes, 4/14/2022

6.E. COVRRRA – John Elsesser

Elsesser: Transfer station is the biggest topic. Hope to get the project out to bid within the next week.

6.F. Town Manager – John Elsesser

6.F.1. Projects Update

Elsesser reported on the highlights:

- We are in the home stretch of the police chief interviews. Hope to have a candidate for ratification by the Council for the June 6, 2022, meeting.
- We did not have to pay for any engineering costs for the Daly Road project. The project goes from Main Street to past Bellevue and will include sidewalks.

Blanchard: Regarding upgrades to the annex - is there a plan, is there a company we are consulting with? Backhaus: Yes. Elsesser: We did not get all we asked for the last time. A lot of the equipment is very old for electronics. They originally dismissed our application; the BOE received \$23k. Backhaus: BOE is key in this upgrade.

Hand: Can you tell us anything about the fiber being installed around town? Elsesser: Got a call from Frontier. They were choosing to upgrade Coventry next and there will be a meeting coming up. This is a very secretive business because they want to jump on the market. Coaxial cable has limits and gets saturated. Frontier is left over from AT&T. This will be a higher level of service. Milkovic: Is there also the potential from 5G towers? Elsesser: There is a significant difference between 5G and fiber.

Thomas: Elsesser and Staff spend a crazy amount of time writing and submitting major grant applications. This work highlights what staff is needed, such as Assistant Town Manager, to get these grants in place. Elsesser: Yes, recently we have submitted grant applications for the Bolton/Vernon sewer line extension, the water tower, and we've reapplied through Senator Murphy's office for the Emergency Operation Center.

6.F.2. COVID-19 Update

Elsesser: The CDC has recalculated how they do numbers. We are in safe zone but it does not feel that way. Be smart.

6.F.3. * Spring 2022 Town

6.F.4. * Library Board Of Trustees: Notification Of Transfer From Endowment For Renovation Project

Milkovic: Library Board of Trustees President Jankowski indicated there is a gap between the money that is available and the lower bid costs. Elsesser: The options are to leave the stairs and the elevator in place as well as the carpet. With these options the bottom line is the library would not gain usable floor space. Thomas: The Library board explained the funds in the endowment are for emergency situations. Milkovic: The endowment is invested to produce income to be able to leave the principal alone. French: What do you project as the figure needed? Backhaus: \$172k to complete the project. Blanchard: The citizens approved a \$1.7 mill. project. The library is going to give the town \$172k with the fundraised amount of \$150k included in that figure to complete the project.

6.F.5. * Staff Meeting Minutes, 4/20/22

7. Unfinished Business:

7.A. 21/22-18: Consideration/Possible Action: Assignment Of American Rescue Plan Funding

Thomas: The Council does not need to take additional action since we did at the last meeting. There has been some confusion what is happening with these funds. Some allowable expenses changed partway through the program. The library windows are not part of the renovation project. This is a repair for a building that we will own; it is a wise investment up front to yield better returns. There are also the potential for other uses. We have \$1.5 mill. left and a good chunk of that will go to HVAC systems in the schools.

Gallagher: Wants to talk about those projects over \$100k. The \$105k for Nutanix would otherwise be an operational expense over three years. The moving of the transfer station with \$500k is important to move forward with because of the softball fields. The library roof needs to be replaced. High School/Middle School HVAC is \$766k for air quality. There is the potential of transferring \$400k to the EMS fund to get us out of the hole. Milkovic: The hole from the current year? Gallagher: Yes, FY 2021/22 to address an issue that we inherited. Elsesser: The State is passing legislation for schools HVAC systems to meet temperature and humidity requirements, otherwise the students have to be sent home. As a compromise they need to certify the status of the systems. This would come from school board funds as there is no state funding.

French: On Nutanix, what is the BOE's amount? Backhaus: It is based on the number of servers. French: We gave them \$52k back from the \$100k. Library roof and windows at \$100k how did the windows decline and the roof jump? Elsesser: Some of the windows were pulled out and the architect got a different type of window. The roof jumped because we have to go beyond the roof edging now and go back a ways to tie the two roofs together.

Hand: Recalls conversation about the favorable relationship we have with the BOE with use of the network. Backhaus: Back up/recovery is replicated for the Town and BOE servers. This adds a huge layer of safety for the town. The savings could be \$230k for going from one to three years. Elsesser: This type of back up for a town this size is unusual. Small towns can do big things. This is the software that makes it all work. We have had an attack and that was very expensive.

8. New Business:

8.A. 21/22-68: Consideration/Possible Action: Appointment Of Town Auditor Motion: I move that the Council adopt this proposal.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Blanchard: There is mention of an additional cost; is that included in bid? Gallagher: The Council recommended to go out to bid on the auditors.

Presentation was fine of the town's auditors while we were less than happy with some changes. We received one bid. Elseser: We have a good relationship with this firm. Backhaus: There are only 3 - 4 firms. Her old firm cannot take new clients. There is saturation in the market right now.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: Milkovic

8.B. 21/22-69: Consideration/Possible Action: Approval Of Revised Fiscal Management Policy

Motion: I move that the Council approve the revised fiscal management policy.

By: Gallagher

Seconded: Kyer

Discussion: Backhaus: A lot of this was cleaning up of the policy. Elseser: We will be sharing this with Standard's & Poor. What happens in the general market is slightly different from the bond market.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.C. 21/22-70: Consideration/Possible Action: Authorization Of FY 2021-22 Budget Transfers

Motion: I move that the Council authorize the budget transfer of:

- \$22,000 from 3102-53160 to 3110-52130 from the Snow Removal budget to Trees budget.

By: Gallagher

Seconded: Milkovic

Discussion: Elseser: While the amount is under that in the policy even so we thought it best to bring to the Council for approval. Backhaus: The Tree Warden has attached a spreadsheet showing the substantial tree work needed. Kyer: The spreadsheet points out the need for tree work; it is extensive.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.D. 21/22-71: Consideration/Possible Action: Authorization Of Appropriation For Summer Camp Enrichment Grant Match

Lesley Munshower was present.

Munshower: A couple of weeks ago the second year of the camp enrichment 1:1 grant was announced. This gives us the opportunity to serve more families. The match cannot come from camper fees that are collected. A breakdown of the request is attached to the agenda. We are asking the Council for \$5k in kind if we are awarded the \$9k grant. Of the \$18k, \$10k would go to staff members for training and hours, \$3k in scholarships would be offered, and \$1k for supplies from various businesses who will donate their time and services. We plan to offer AM and PM care that was not offered last year and increasing the daytime camp slots from 60-80. Elsetter: Only towns have to match in kind; private organizations do not have this requirement. The time to act is now.

Backhaus: \$1,200 can be used from the longevity line in Parks & Rec; the remaining \$3.8k can come from a few options. Thomas: Do we anticipate needing that money from the contingency fund? Backhaus: Feels comfortable with that being one of the options for funding. Kyer: This will impact a lot of kids for the eight week season.

Milkovic: How are the scholarships determined? Munshower: That is run through Human Services. We've already awarded \$1,400 in scholarships with an average total of \$2k to \$4k for the past years. There is no week that is completely full for each age group yet. For the kindergarten through fifth grade group four out of the eight weeks are full. Slots are filled by the demand of each age group. We move counselors around depending on the age group demand for each session.

Thomas: Received consensus from the Members of using the longevity budget line. Gallagher: Is okay with the \$3,800 coming out of the contingency fund since Backhaus feels comfortable with that. Other Members agreed with this.

Motion: I move that the Council authorize to appropriate money for summer camp enrichment grant match as discussed.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Hand

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.E. 21/22-72: Consideration/Possible Action: Ratification Of Town Assessor Appointment

This item is not ready for action until after Executive Session.

Motion: I move that the Council ratify the appointment of John Preisner as Town Assessor.

By: Hand

Seconded: French

Discussion: The salary would be in line with what was presented.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.F. 21/22-73: Consideration/Possible Action: Authorization Of Revisions To Operating Agreement, Booth & Dimock Memorial Library/Town Of Coventry

This item is not ready for action until after Executive Session.

No action was taken on this matter after Executive Session.

8.G. 21/22-74: Consideration/Possible Action: Appropriation Of \$5,000 For Remaining Funds Needed For Purchase Of Conway Property On South River Road

Backhaus: There are four options for the funding to come out of.

Gallagher: Her preference is to use CNREF. Hand agrees.

Motion: I move that the Council authorize the appropriation of \$4,763.50 from CNREF.

By: Hand

Seconded: Milkovic

Voting:

For: Hand, Thomas, Milkovic, Kyer, Gallagher

Against: Blanchard, French

Abstain: None

8.H. 21/22-75: Consideration/Possible Action: ARP Cultural & Arts Grant Funding Awards

Motion: I move that the Council approve a grant of \$5,000 to Song-A-Day Music Center and \$5,000 to The Glass Museum.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Blanchard: Will we be receiving reports at the end of the period?

Elsesser: Yes.

Voting:

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

Motion: I move that the Town Council exit Executive Session.

By: Hand

Seconded: French

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

The Council exited Executive Session at 10:10 p.m.

11. Adjournment:

Motion: I move that the Council adjourn at 10:12 p.m.

By: Kyer

Seconded: Milkovic

Voting:

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

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.