

MINUTES
Town Council Steering Committee Meeting
May 23, 2022
7:00 PM
Town Hall Conf. B

Video Link to Meeting:

[5-23-2022 Town Council Steering Committee Meeting \(viefbit.com\)](https://viefbit.com)

Call to Order, Roll Call:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Matthew Kyer at 7:01 PM

Members Present:

Matthew Kyer, Jon Hand, John French, John Elsesser (Town Manager), Lisa Thomas (ex Officio, Council Chairwoman)

Also Present:

Members of the Veterans Memorial & Events Commission (Rick Nosch, Jaime Depeola, Peter Depeola, and Bill Glenney (remote), Nicole Archambault (Minutes Clerk-Remote)

Discussion: Concerns Regarding Scope of Veterans Memorial & Events Commission:

MK: Invited the Veterans Memorial & Events Commission in order to hear their scope of the commission and address concerns brought to Steering by Manny Rodrigues at the March Meeting regarding shift in roles. Not surprised by these concerns as this change is still new (only 1.5 yrs. in). Also wanted to hear about the progress of the commission, but are clearly doing great work. Previous minutes indicated Peter was instrumental in the changing of the charge of Veterans Memorial Commission to Veterans Memorial & Events Commission.

PD: Wanted to clear the air and put concerns to rest. Prior to the change, the commission was only in charge of erecting 2 monuments (one for Korean Era and one for Vietnam Era). There was nothing else that the commission did outside of erecting the monuments and maintaining them (which is still important). Veterans have needs. We want to find them, support them, and give them access to resources. CT has approx. 240,000 veterans, several are older veterans so we wanted to expand the commission to help and assist the veterans based on their needs. Has 2 sons that served and they are not aware of what is out there. Manny Rodrigues seems to be caught up on the "Events" part of the commission, and thinks that the VM&EC will try and take over the Memorial Day Parade and Senior Center Activities. Presented the proposed changes to American Legion, as good news and what the commission is and what it does. Thought it went over well with everyone. VM&EC does not want to, and will not handle the Memorial Day Parade. They want to assist veterans and let them know what is around. Explained we are a purple heart town, and not much happens with that but would like to get something started. There is a lot of work that needs to be done. Ask Jaime to speak about the work she has done with American Legion and projects she is working on.

JD: Explained she has done several press releases and aided in fundraising for the American Legion and VFW. She also listed all VSO she belongs to, and explained the work she has done for them in helping spread awareness of veteran resources and events. Has promoted the American Legion in the past, and is a member. Additionally, has given the American Legion credit for events that she has organized. Right now, a project the VM&EC is working on is a Veterans Resource Guide. Still in draft format, this pamphlet that will have veteran resources on it, including the American Legion Post 52, with Manny's contact information. Asked him for

VFW information, and Manny did not want to share it. Also explained that there are several Veterans Events within the State, within a 30-minute drive that any veteran regardless of age can access, and that is what they are trying to share and target.

JE recommended that the Human Services Administrator for the Town of Coventry should be listed in the resources book as they handle veteran affairs. LT suggested that they meet with the Human Services Administrator, Annmarie Sundgren, to review the pamphlet and add any resources she is familiar with that are not listed. JE also noted that it is state statute that a paid staff member is designated to do VSO work in every town, Annmarie is that person for Coventry.

JD: Explained further that as a Town Commission they have a partnership with the Town Government and report to them, where as separate organizations such as the VFW and American Legion do not. JE interjected that while the Town works well with these organizations, they are not accountable to them as the VM&EC is.

MK: Expressed his appreciation for the work that they are doing, as he has family history with the similar type of organization. He understands that Manny is getting hung up on the "Events" phrasing, but what he thinks is the more important word to focus on is "Collaborate". When you look at the redlined version of the charge for the commission, the only big changes are adding the word "Events", and the phrase "Organize and Collaborate with other Town Agencies.". VM&EC has provided evidence of their collaboration. MK appreciated that JD has done work on social media to credit and promote those other agencies. There were concerns with Memorial Day Parade and Vietnam Memorial Day events. There were feeling of being left out or excluded.

JD clarified to add that she has been the organizer for the Vietnam Memorial event for the past 5 years. In 2018 it was initiated to make the Vietnam Memorial Day known to honor the members. In 2018 and 2019 there was a smaller group that came to pay respects and remember with the Marine Corp League. In March of 2020 it was fully planned out and cancelled due to COVID. The first 2 years it was handled by the Marine Corps League that she is a part of. In 2021 she invited Manny to emcee the event. This year she asked if Manny Rodrigues wanted to organize it and he said yes, but did no work to do so, and with the date quickly approaching JD organized it and gave credit to the VM&EC. Made note that the American Legion Post 52 never handled the Vietnam Memorial, nor organized anything for it but they were asked to join and be a part of it. As an American Legion Post 52 member, she kept up with the minutes and nothing was mentioned as to the Vietnam Memorial Event in January, February, or March (the month of). Which is why she continued with her organizing of the event. However, when you look at current minutes there are whole pages to discuss the Memorial Day Parade. She did ask Manny to bring the flags and podium and he is always willing to give what is needed and help when asked. Since this year PD was asked to emcee, she decided to give the credit to the VM&EC as she did the organizing as part of the Veterans Memorial & Events Commission this year. She wanted to share that Coventry has more than the American Legion.

PD: Brought up that Manny continues to bring up the concerns with "Events". In the VM&EC minutes it notes that the new business is working on Veterans Resource Book, State is to honor Korean War Veterans, Honor Flight for Vietnam and Korean Veterans in D.C. coming up in June, and a Veterans Rally with several free services to veterans that they want to share with those who are unaware. Nothing is mentioned regarding the Memorial Day Parade. Explained that the goal of this newly expanded commission is to set a foundation for the next generation to come in and handle moving forward. They want to get the Veterans Resource Book finalized, handle the Korean Memorial, find and organize veteran rally points and relay coffee hours. They also want to share other events in neighboring towns for them to go honor, remember and gather. The younger veterans are busy and don't have time to be apart of these organizations, but should be able to partake in events. Working on getting Facebook page up and running.

LT: Mentioned that town can help with a list of veterans for the VM&EC.

JE: Noted that the town can assist in getting things on the webpage, town eblasts, post community updates, include things in the newsletter, and include activities organized by the American Legion Post as well.

LT: Brought up an event from the past weekend, take a Veteran Fishing, and noted that it was a wonderful event and so peaceful. Thinks that the VM&EC should keep it on their radar to promote or include with their 'events' to share with Veterans. TAVF.org is their website and they do 8 events across the state, and provide transport for those who need it. The program provides chairs, cleaning station, and stocked the pond. JD mentioned events like that would be posted on their Facebook page.

JH: Commented that he can tell both organizations have the heart and passion in this and they both have the same goal, which is to help and serve the veterans. It seems that a higher level of communication is needed. He is proud of the town for the efforts put forth to help the citizens, especially the veterans. Understands where Manny is coming from as he has done organizing for many years and feels a sense of ownership.

RN: Questioned whether other American Legion Post 52 members had issues with what was going on, or if it was just Manny. MK informed that he has yet to hear from any other members. JH mentioned that he is the commander of the post, so he may be speaking for others.

PD: Added that when this first came about, it was because he saw his sons struggling with finding resources and wanted to try and help figure this out for the town's veterans. He has come forward to American Legion twice to explain what it is, what they are doing, and what it means. Explained what they were/are working on and wanted to provide information. Thinks that everything is good after meeting with them and then hears more concerns about the events, specifically Memorial Day Parade, which they are not touching.

JF: Thanked everyone for the valuable assets to community. The VFW in Windham that he helps with seems to miss these resources that this group is trying to provide for Coventry. What has worked in the past is to have both groups come in to sit down and resolve issues with Steering to get all on the same page and in a place of collaboration.

The events that the American Legion Post handles was discussed as it was attached to the agenda and it included various youth activities and mentioned the national veterans' holidays that are observed, but none were specific events related to any one holiday.

JD: Mentioned that the VM&EC has never done or been involved with any youth activities and that is something that is and will be handled by the American Legion.

MK: Summarized that it seems that the "events" is about finding new events for veterans to attend and participate in and resources for them to use. Appreciates all that they are doing.

LT: Wished that Events wasn't included in the new charge and it referenced resources instead to defer some of the conflicts with the change. Urged them to contact Annmarie Sundgren.

PD: Indicated they do much more than resources, that it really is events too. There are long-standing veteran's organizations that help and serve older veterans. The younger generation of veterans are signing up elsewhere, mainly outdoor events, as they feel they don't belong or fit in at the older veteran's organizations. Doesn't want new generation to miss out on being involved with these events, or going to D.C. to see monuments like the older generation struggles to do. The foundation that the VM&EC is trying to build is important to remember the older generation and honor them. Events that are found and organized will allow the younger generation to belong and give them places to go, come together and connect.

MK: Thanked the VM&EC for all they do and for being here. Understands that it is not a new organization but a new commission process of collaboration. Instead of the events being handled separately, hopes that one day

the groups work on the many events together for the entire community. Looks forward to seeing everyone at the Memorial Day Parade.

JE: Commented that he was glad to hear they are working on something for the Purple Heart Veterans as it is important work and the Town struggles to give it the attention it needs during the month of August.

JH: Thanked them for serving their local community with their work, as well as serving their country.

Acceptance of Minutes: April 25, 2022

JH: Moved to accept the minutes of April 25, 2022, JF seconds

Vote: Unanimously all in favor

Reports:

Chairperson: MK reported that he was excited for the Memorial Day event, and made note that they will be gathering at the GHR School for 9 am, and important to get there early for the parade. JE: Indicated the parade steps off at 10, not 9.

Committee Members: No report

* Review/Possible Recommendations: Board & Commission Monthly Reports: MK indicated that this item was asterisked but was not supposed to be as Steering does not pull things from the consent agenda. Asked if there were any questions regarding the reports.

JE: Pointed out that it has been communicated but not corrected regarding the new auditors on the vacancy report. Will be fixed.

MK: Noticed that it appeared a column was missing from the far right of the report. Without a column explaining the vacancy, the report can be confusing with the calculated terms listed. JE explained that it is a database that can't have fields added, so the software will need to be looked at.

LT: Made comment that it is safe to assume that the position is on the report as it is vacant or they have not responded to the Town Clerk about being reappointed.

JE: Added that there are 2 positions on the vacancy report that may or may not be vacant because they are currently active members, but have yet to respond to the Town Clerk regarding their interest in reappointment. Town Clerk will reach back out.

Resignations/Not Wishing to Be Reappointed:

Ad-Hoc Lake Advisory & Monitoring Committee: Felix

JH: Moved to accept resignation from Laurie Felix from the Ad-Hoc Lake Advisory Committee and thanks her for her service, JF seconds.

Vote: Unanimously all in favor

Reappointments:

CRCOG Regional Planning Commission: Marek

JH: Moves to recommend to full council the reappointment of Stephen Ed Marek to the CRCOG Regional Planning Commission for a term expiring 1-1-2023, JF seconds.

Term End date was uncertain, motion was amended

JH: Moves to recommend to full council the reappointment of Stephen Ed Marek to the CRCOG Regional Planning Commission for another term, JF seconds amended motion.

Discussion occurred regarding the scope of the CRCOG Regional Planning Commission:

JE: Informed the Steering Committee that there are issues that need to be looked at Regionally with Councils of Government (COG). This Commission adopts a regional plan of conservation, and communicates with neighboring towns. State has been pushing more matters through the COGs rather than dealing with them at a State level, including the AARP spending and Regional Planning & Zoning.

JH: Thanked Stephen Ed Marek for his continued service.

Vote: Unanimously all in favor

Appointments:

Ad-Hoc Lake Advisory & Monitoring Committee: Slater

JH: Moved to recommend to Full Council the appointment of Amanda Slater to fulfil remaining term of newly vacated position, JF seconds.

MK: commented that he was happy young members want to be involved. It was serendipitous circumstance that at first there wasn't an opening to this committee and now with new resignation a spot was open for Amanda Slater to serve and participate.

Vote: Unanimously all in favor

Consideration/Possible Action: Revisions To Volunteer Handbook:

JF: Moves to accept the Volunteer Handbook for the Town of Coventry with the 2022 edits, JH seconds

Discussion:

LT-wanted to confirm that the gender neutrality edits were included.

MK: Indicated all changes were included on the redlined version received, 29 pg. document, which addressed the gender neutrality issues. Thanked Jon Hand and Laura Stone for the work that was put into this.

JH: Liked that on page 5, all statements are now in alignment. Indicated he was happy with end result as this handbook will be looked at for clarity in certain situations, and now it is more 'readable'. Had question on whether or not any appointed or elected positions are exempt from this handbook. If so, should be verbiage be added? If none, we would expect that it applies to everyone.

JE: Doesn't think any additions should be made to the Handbook indicating on whom it applies to and leave it as is. This handbook should apply to all. If a situation ever arises where this would need clarification, it would be a legal issue and then the State Attorney would handle it at that time. The Board of Ed has their own code of ethics to adhere too, but the handbook is for the Town as a whole, and can be used for those elected officials as

well. The Council can use this handbook to refer that any volunteer or elected official is in violation of “their” code if need be.

JH: So, it sounds as though it applies to all, but does it leave a door open for each group of elected officials to have their own code of conduct?

JE: Not every group would have their own code. Thinks that it should be left as is for a tool that may apply.

MK: Mentioned at the top of pg. 5, it indicates “all volunteers”. If needed, this handbook can hold up a dismissal if it applies.

JE: These matters would only arise under extreme circumstances with extreme consequences, and will most likely never happen. Substance in handbook is not changed.

JH: Also questioned what happened to # 11?

MK: Noted that there was never a #11, and it was a product of editing. The item under # 11 was moved to #2, and all rules shifted. # 11 was there to reflect the move of the item that was previously # 10, to spot # 2. There were only ever 10 items listed.

Vote: Unanimously all in favor

Will be brought to Town Council in 2 weeks for approval.

Adjournment:

JF moves to adjourn at 8:17 PM, JH seconds

Submitted by,

Nicole Archambault

Nicole Archambault

Steering Committee Minutes Clerk

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