Minutes
Coventry Town Council Meeting
January 7, 2019
Town Hall Annex

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.
   **Present:** Joan Lewis, Lisa Conant, Mike Sobol, Julie Blanchard, Jonathan Hand, Matthew O’Brien, Carolyn Arabolos
   **Also present:** John Elsesser, Town Manager; Amanda Backhaus, Finance Director

2. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. **Audience of Citizens:**

   Ryan Hastings, 123 Trowbridge Road, is concerned about safety with the plans for a disc golf course at Creaser Park. He doesn’t believe the usage or impact map is correct and a marked trail guide shows that a couple of the holes go down the trail around the pond in a highly-used area. He said that no one spoke to the people who walk there and feels there was no transparency with the approval process. He emailed the designer and is not sure where he came from - he can’t find him on any list of disc golf course designers. He also emailed a person named James Lane who has designed a couple of courses in CT and asked him about the safety of courses and what is looked at when they are designed. Mr. Lane emailed back and said without actually being here and seeing the layout of the land he can’t really suggest anything specific, but that the tee should start where throwing goes away from area, not toward it. The best design is to throw away from congregated areas.

   John Elsesser said that this issue is before the Parks & Recreation Commission and they are meeting Thursday night. Joan Lewis said she appreciates the research Mr. Hastings has done and hopes he will make the Recreation Commission aware of his concerns. The Council will wait for the Recreation Commission’s recommendation.

   Matthew O’Brien said that our Council approved the grant and we think in general that disc golf is a good idea. The final designs are up to the Recreation Commission and Public Works. John Elsesser said he has asked the designer to look at alternate plans. Matthew said he hopes we can do something that will make it good for everyone.

   Mr. Hastings asked why we are putting the course on State land that is leased. John Elsesser replied it is a 25-year lease and was just renewed. Part of making disc golf effective is we can’t spend a lot of time and money cutting down trees. Everything else we own is heavily wooded. We are also trying to make it an ADA accessible course. For now we have stopped all work on the project until the Recreation Commission has a chance to review it further and get broader input. Mr. Hastings said he is not against the course; he just doesn’t want anyone to get hurt.

4. **Acceptance of Minutes:**

   **Motion #18/19-152:** Lisa Conant moved and Jonathan Hand seconded to approve the minutes of the Town Council meeting on December 17, 2018. The following corrections were requested:
The motion to accept the minutes as corrected carried on unanimous vote.

5. Consent Agenda:
Motion #18/19-153: Jonathan Hand moved to accept the Consent Agenda, seconded by Lisa Conant. Matthew O’Brien requested to remove item 6.F.6 and Julie Blanchard requested to remove item 9.A. The motion to accept the Consent Agenda as amended carried on unanimous vote.

6. Reports:
A. Council Chairwoman – Joan Lewis: Joan Lewis reported that last Thursday, Joan along with Town Council members Jon Hand and Matthew O’Brien, as well as the Town Manager John Elsesser and many others attended the swearing in of a new police officer, Richard Grimaldi, who was previously with the Manchester Police Department, and the promotion of two of Coventry’s officers, Russell Iger and Jeff Spadjinski, to Sergeant. The ceremony was held at Mill Brook Place. The service records and qualifications of these officers were outstanding and Coventry should be proud of its Police Department. She also thanked Chief Palmer for his leadership.

Also last Thursday the Fire Transition Study Committee held its first meeting and Joan and the Town Manager attended. The Chair of the Council always starts off a new committee with the election of officers and discussion of the charge. Stephen Pacholski was elected as Chairman, Jodie Mitchell as Vice Chair and Craig Malan as Secretary. The other members of the committee are Jim McLoughlin, Fire Administrator; Ken Boutin, Chuck Beecher, and Josh Ziel. Minutes of the meeting can be found online. The committee got off to a very good start.

Also last Thursday, the Local Emergency Coordinating Committee (LECC) met. Joan chairs the committee and Jon Hand also represents the Town Council. Other members are the Town Manager, Chief of Police, Public Works Director, Fire Department Chiefs, Fire Department Presidents, Fire Marshal and the School Maintenance Director. We on the first Thursday of the month. Joan wanted Council members and the public to know that recent concerns raised about ambulance response time was added by Joan to this committee’s agenda. As Council members know, we had recently increased the hours that the ambulance would be staffed by paid personnel. Also, a sign-up schedule for volunteers had been initiated to cover weekends and non-staffed time. At the LECC meeting on Thursday, the Town Manager indicated that he had asked staff to get data on ambulance calls – how many are re-toned or going to mutual aid. Based on the data, the Council will be able to consider during the budget period if more temporary staffing is allocated, when the best time would be to do it. Joan thinks it is important for everyone to know that CVFA states that in November the ambulance responded to 76 out of 77 calls – with one going to mutual aid. One day they were able to handle three double calls. Also, at such times that a police officer or volunteer are the first on the scene, they are able to start emergency procedures. The Manager also requested that staff continue and increase efforts for recruitment and retention, and to continue to work on improving sign-ups for shifts. We want to evaluate how other volunteer towns are doing as a comparison to see what works and what doesn’t. LECC and staff will continue to keep the Council updated.

At the LECC meeting, the Town Manager also reported on work planned for Daly Road. He indicated that he had received phone calls from residents regarding the road since the tragic accident and death of United States Navy Petty Officer Benjamin Norman that occurred on New Year’s Eve on Daly Road. The road is scheduled for rubberized chip seal this upcoming season and we are re-doing the line striping including side white lines. The need for additional curve signs will be evaluated at that time. We will ask the Capital Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) to consider Daly Road in its safety improvement project study that is just starting; and
we will also ask CRCOG to reclassify the road to allow it to qualify for a LOTCIP grant. The Police Department will be asked to monitor speed with their speed sign.

Joan said that in her role as Co-Chair of Coventry’s Scholarship Foundation, that a scholarship will be established in Ben Norman’s memory. Besides being a naval officer, he was a graduate of Coventry High School and a former Boy Scout. Donations may be mailed to Coventry High School.

Mike Sobol asked about ambulance staffing. He wants to know if there has been a significant change - what has happened that we suddenly have this gap. John Elsesser replied that staffing waxes and wanes. It is better than where we were several years ago. Some people want staff to be at the station and never have to go to mutual aid. Every town is having an issue with volunteerism. Mike asked if this is a new issue. John replied no. It is why we have Vintech paid staffing now. Joan said we are also looking at reducing to half shifts to increase volunteer sign-ups. John said as some of the older volunteers age out we have to get new people in. This last budget year we added two hours per day Monday through Friday for paid staff and are evaluating that. We have some data in from Tolland County Dispatch to see what periods of time have the highest call frequency. We will look at that to see if we can make adjustments. That is only part of the issue. We need to look at motivation, the point system, and getting members to be more engaged. Mike asked if there are membership requirements. John said we don’t have that but some other towns do. We do have an expense. We have 40 volunteers - we pay for their equipment, their certifications, and training, and taxpayers should feel there is a return on their investment. We have asked for a commitment from volunteers to take a certain number of shifts. We are also looking at the transition to one fire department and have had to take some interim steps in leadership, but we don’t want to do too much before that process is completed by the Fire Transition Study Committee. We hope to have further discussions at budget time along with further recommendations for consideration.

B. Committee members:
Matthew O’Brien noted that with the addition of the new officer we are fully staffed for the first time at the police force. Also the hiring of the latest person at the Town has the Town fully staffed. That is not often the case. The people who were promoted are of the highest caliber.

D.1.A. Appointments:
Motion #18/19-154: Jonathan Hand moved to appoint Jennifer Bynes from an alternate to a full member of the Parks & Recreation Commission, term to expire 1/1/2021. The motion was seconded by Matthew O’Brien and carried on unanimous vote.

E. COVRRRA – John Elsesser:
John Elsesser said that we had a request to have a second trash barrel at a residential address – the resident is willing to pay. The extra volume is medical related. It is a special circumstance but we don’t want to set a general precedent. Carolyn Arabelos asked if there are any concerns about the nature of the waste. John replied no. Mike Sobol asked if extra barrels are allowed now. John replied no – that is contrary to our goals to reduce solid waste in favor of recycling. There are options for peak periods at Public Works and the transfer station. Council consensus was to allow this exception. John said that the tax office will handle the billing.

John Elsesser said we belong to Mid-Neroc for regional recycling. They run the Willington hazardous waste center for us. It has been a long time but they put out to bid for the electronics recycling. There is a new vendor who came in with slightly more rebates. The difference in money is not significant and we have been happy with the company we have. DPW Director
Mark Kiefer is out ill so we haven’t been able to finish the reference checks. He asked if the Council wants us to bring it back if we are not taking the low bid. We do not have a firm recommendation at this point. The new vendor does some things the old one doesn’t do. About half of the towns are going to change, and half are not. He feels like we could go ahead and take the bid per our purchasing policy. If he comes back that means we will be requesting to stay with our current vendor. Otherwise we will proceed with the new vendor.

F. Town Manager – John Elsesser:
1. Projects Update:
   a. We are asking for guidance about the snowflake lights in the Village. We bought snowflakes because they are winter not Christmas decorations. When would the Council like to take them down? Consensus was to leave them up through Valentine’s Day.
   b. We went out to bid through CRCOG for gas and got $1.57 per gallon plus gross receipts so our costs will be less than last year.
   c. CBDG starting is starting their Small Cities grant process. We are out to bid for consulting services. John has to attend a mandatory training. We are looking at doing additional renovation work at Orchard Hills, including kitchen work and other work within the units. The Housing Rehab program has money available and crumbling foundations money is still available. Since Orchard Hills has a need we are going to step aside and let them go ahead. The application is due in March.
   d. Salvation Army bell ringing pulled in $5602 for the 2018 season. The Town will keep $5105 of these funds. It is slightly more than last year but we had a lot less hours. We think people donated more generously. Carolyn Arabolos said she rang twice and people didn’t know what it was because there was no signage. John replied that the sign got damaged late in the year and there was not enough time to replace it. Matthew O’Brien said that the Tolland volunteers wear vests which might help. Carolyn said she was at Highland and the kettle was not on a tripod like people are used to seeing. She said it is also good for people to know that the money stays in town. John said that information is usually on the sign, which will be back in place next year.
   e. The new truck is in at DPW.
   f. The audit is in and will be presented at the joint Finance Committee/Fiscal Committee meeting next Monday. At the following Council meeting you will be asked to adopt the audit. We will be sending out the letter electronically.
   g. The Human Services Christmas distribution served 65 families for food, for a total of 173 people. There were 39 adopted families with 71 children.
   h. Does the Council want to try to schedule a land use consortium meeting on February 28th, which is the night of the Economic Development Commission’s regular meeting? We would hold it at 7 PM either at the Lodge or Mill Brook Place. Consensus was yes.
   i. Folly Lane Bridge – we got eight proposals in with a wide range of costs. We are evaluating them - under engineering we don’t always take the lowest bid but we anticipate it will be near the average of $143,000.

Joan Lewis said that the Federal Government shutdown continues and people can’t get food stamps. She asked if the Town will be prepared to handle it. John replied that we can help for a limited time. We are starting conversations about that along with other food delivery services that can help. The Food Bank is still fairly well stocked.

Matthew O’Brien asked about the LOCIP grant for the four-way intersection at Swamp and Northfield. Is that just a change in turn lanes? Then we are closing the other lane at our expense? Can that be coordinated? John replied that it depends on if the bond goes through. It is a 2020 project at the earliest. We will know about bonding before that. One
option might be a bid alternate for a left-in left-out turn lane on Northfields. We are starting discussion but it is a little far out for now. For State purposes we are still leaving the right-in right-out lane at this point.

Matthew O’Brien asked about item #7, the DPW radios. John replied that we are taking that cost out of bonding.

Jonathan Hand asked about the status of the micro grid application. John replied that he went to a meeting on November 9th and was told it should be all set by mid-December, but we haven’t heard. CT DEEP staffing has been dramatically reduced. Things are going slowly. They are using consultants all over the country and it is a slow process. It was supposed to be done 6 months ago. Matthew asked about the solar installations at the high school and whether they can be made to operate in an outage. John replied if they are built to work with the micro grid it would be possible. Solar operating independently cannot be done.

Hydrilla: John has asked Eric Trott to reach out for the report and information for budgeting. CT DEEP does not have the report from Solitude yet but said they would have it in two weeks. That was a week ago. Carolyn Arabolos asked how water level and temperatures affect where we start next year. John replied that the water is coming down. We expect the lake will freeze at some point and we will be back on track. Solitude has initially said to plan on doing the same thing next year. We will have to ask our legislators for help in getting funding. It is not just a local issue. It is a problem for everyone if it spreads. We hope to have more information by the next meeting. We want to start treatment in June.

2. Historic perseverance grant award: We received a $4500 grant for the Town Clerk to continue digitizing records.

3. Public Hearing – Demolition of Caretaker’s House: Prior to the next Council meeting on January 22 at 7 PM, there will be a public hearing on the Park & Recreation Commission’s recommendation to demolish the caretakers house at Patriots Park.

4. Appointment of Youth Services Coordinator: John Elsesser shared the credentials of Sneha Patidar who has been hired as Youth Services Coordinator. She has been working in various social service capacities since 2013. She has done a lot of prevention projects with a drug avoidance group and is working to become a licensed social worker. She already has school credentials and passenger driving credentials. She knows the full spectrum of human services operations and will start on January 22.

6. Facility Rental Income: Matthew O’Brien removed this item from the Consent Agenda and asked if can we get costs associated along with the rental. John replied yes, noting that year one expenses are usually much higher.

8. New Business:
   A. 18/19-30: Authorization for Town Manager to Execute Farm Viability Grant to Expand Friends of the Market Program:
   John Elsesser said that the Farmers’ Market is going into their 15th year and has applied for another grant focusing on developing a stronger Friends of the Market program. We need authorization to execute. We were fortunate to get this grant. It helps us cover some of the marketing expenses.
Motion #18/19-155: Lisa Conant moved the following:

BE IT RESOLVED that it is in the best interest of the Town of Coventry to enter into contracts with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

IN FUTHERANCE OF THIS RESOLUTION, the Honorable John A. Elsesser, Town Manager, is duly authorized to enter into and sign said contracts on behalf of the Town of Coventry. The Honorable John A. Elsesser, Town Manager, is further authorized to provide such additional information and execute such other documents as may be required by the State of Connecticut in connection with said contracts and to execute any amendments, rescission, and revisions thereto.

THE TOWN CLERK IS AUTHORIZED to impress the seal of the Town of Coventry on any such document, amendment, rescission or revision.

ADOPTED BY THE COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL, this 7th day of January, 2019.

The motion was seconded by Jonathan Hand.

Julie Blanchard asked if the in-kind match is our market director’s salary and if there is any additional money involved. John Elsesser replied that we subsidize with time, i.e. staff member Eric Trott, but no cash.

Motion #18/19-155 carried on unanimous vote.

B. 18/19-40: Consideration of Authorizing the Town Manager to Execute a Memorandum of Understanding by and Between the CT Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection and the Town of Coventry to Allow use of the CT Land Mobile Radio Network:

John Elsesser said that for a State MOU this document is surprisingly small. There are two sections he wanted to point out. Under Section 3 item D, where it says the Town shall purchase consoles, we will change purchase to provide. Under Item G we want you to be aware of this requirement: “Once the Town has joined the CLMRN, any additional changes or upgrades to Town equipment or facilities that are required by DESPP costing in excess of $10,000 shall require DESPP to provide six months’ notice, unless such change or upgrade is the result of exigent circumstances.” Matthew O’Brien said he would like to see more clarification of this language. He noted that the MOU is limited to public safety. John replied that the number includes Public Works and they know that. Public Works is considered public safety. Motion #18/19-156: Jonathan Hand move to authorize the Memorandum of Understanding between the Town of Coventry and the CT Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection to allow use of the CT Land Mobile Network, with the correction under item D and further clarification under item G. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and carried on unanimous vote.

9. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:

9A. Support For Legislation: Local Option for Land Conservation Funding: Julie Blanchard removed this item from the Consent Agenda. She said we discussed this and now you are sending a letter to the State Representative. Joan Lewis replied that we did this last year, and she and John testified. It was authorized last year. Julie said she doesn’t remember if we voted. John noted that all it does is get you on the list of towns to be considered for the pilot. It would require an
ordinance. Matthew O’Brien said that he Julie and were opposed when this matter was discussed.

10. Executive session:

Motion #18/19-157: Matthew O’Brien moved and Lisa Conant seconded that the Town Council enter into Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1-200(6)(D)-discussion of the selection of a site or the lease, sale or purchase of real estate by a political subdivision of the state when publicity regarding such a site, lease, sale, purchase or construction would cause a likelihood of an increased price until such time as all of the property has been acquired or all proceedings or transactions concerning same have been terminated or abandoned with the following people in attendance: Town Council members, the Town Manager and the Finance Director. The motion carried on unanimous vote.

Motion #18/19-158: Matthew O’Brien moved and Julie Blanchard seconded that the Town Council enter into Executive Session at 8:34 PM 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: Town Council members, the Town Manager and the Finance Director. The motion carried on unanimous vote.

Executive Session commenced at 8:40 PM.

Motion #18/19-159: Matthew O’Brien moved to leave Executive Session at 9:01 PM. The motion was seconded by Carolyn Arabolos and carried on unanimous vote.

11. Adjournment:

Motion #18/19-160: Matthew O’Brien moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:02 PM. The motion was seconded by Jonathan Hand and carried on unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone
Town Council Clerk

Note: These minutes are not official until acted upon by the Town Council at its next regular meeting. Those meeting minutes will reflect approval or changes to these minutes.