

MINUTES

Coventry Town Council Meeting

January 17, 2023, 7:30 PM

Town Hall Annex & Virtual

1.Call To Order, Roll Call:

The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Thomas at 7:30 PM.

Members Present:

Lisa Thomas-Chairperson

Marty Milkovic-Vice-Chairperson

Matthew Kyer

Jonathan Hand-Secretary

Robyn Gallagher

John French

Julie Blanchard

Members Absent:

None

Also Present:

John Elsesser- Town Manager

Tim Ackert-State Representative

Amanda Backhaus-Finance Director (Remote)

2.Pledge Of Allegiance:

All members stood to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

3.Audience Of Citizens: (30 Minutes - 5 minutes per person.)

No citizens present, Thomas closed Audience of Citizens portion of the meeting.

4.Acceptance Of Minutes: January 3, 2023:

Motion: I move to accept the minutes of the January 3, 2023, Town Council meeting.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Blanchard

Discussion/Changes:

- Pg. 8, Last paragraph, 2nd line- change “low” to “below”.

- Pg. 8, Under 6.F., 3rd bullet, change spelling of the name “Weirschaleski” to “Wesoloskie”

Voting:

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

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: Julie asked to remove item 6.F.6. Minutes from January 4, 2023 Staff Meeting.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.Reports:

6.A. Council Chairwoman: Lisa Thomas:

Councilwoman Thomas read the following report:

- Thank you to Coventry voters for resoundingly passing the HVAC referendum. It is important to be able to move forward with bringing our high school up to healthy air quality standards. Hopefully next month we will receive a positive acceptance of our grant application for the project. I would like to note that a recent article in the Willimantic Chronicle states that “whether or not the Council gets the grant, they will execute the scope of the project.” This is incorrect and I have asked the reporter for a correction. The explanatory text - and Council vote - make it very clear that the full project will not move forward without the grant dollars.
- John Elsesser, Amanda Backhaus, Marty Milkovic and I attended the Council of Small Towns annual meeting on 1/11. The Coventry Table was the most vocal, as usual. We spoke in support of the COST legislative priorities regarding Educational Cost Sharing grants and regarding support for ambulance service and staffing. We also requested that additional funds be made available for school HVAC projects since there is such high demand evidenced by the number of grant applications submitted. It was a critical place to make our voices heard since the Governor, Lt Governor, and legislative caucus leaders were all present.

- Please note that both the Town News Winter 2023 edition and the Parks and Rec and Senior Center “06238” programs brochure are out. Hard copies of both should have been delivered to each household. In addition, they are available online.
- I’d like to note that Coventry participates in the regional Adult and Continuing Education programs that are typically held at Rockville High School, Vernon Center Middle School and online. There is information in the “06238” magazine, as well as in the adult and continuing education brochure delivered to households. There is plenty of room in the classes and the directors have specifically asked me to promote participation from Coventry. The classes are wide ranging to appeal to many interests.

6.B. Council Members:

Kyer reported he attended the Booth and Dimmock Board of Trustees Meeting on January 11th. There has been a lot of progress with construction, but they have had issues with water pipes leaking. There have been 2 instances within the past month/month and a half. Repairs have been made, but they are using this opportunity to look at other potential issues, with pipes, while things are open with construction. Elsesser clarified they were heating pipes.

Milkovic reported that there was an article in the Journal Inquirer about Project Choice, and on page 3., it stated, “Coventry, Vernon, and Somers lag behind in out-of-town students.” He explained it didn’t seem consistent with what was written in the article, and that we are pretty recent to Project Choice. He added we are involving ourselves in this, when there are other towns who do not, and we have a significant distance from Hartford compared to other towns. With this being said, he does not feel we are lagging at all. Elsesser agreed, and informed that we are not even in the region, and we chose to be in the region in addition to making offerings that were not accepted. He suggested the Superintendent be asked to respond. Kyer also added we are only in our second year, and it is called “Open Choice”, even though the JI called it “Project Choice”. He continued we had 1 student last year, and 2 students this year, so we are already seeing growth. Kyer stated that it takes time to build up a reputation as a town. Milkovic and Kyer agreed that the headline was out of context. Elsesser reiterated that we asked to be a part of this, even though we are not part of the Greater Hartford region that is required to participate, showing that we are going beyond what we need to. He also added to Kyer’s point that a student presence is built over time.

6.C. Finance Committee: Robyn Gallagher, Chairperson:

Gallagher thanked Fire Chief Bud Meyers and Fire/EMS Administrator Jimmy McLoughlin for coming to the Finance Meeting. We have been looking into, since budget season last year, how to address the rising costs for EMS services. This concern will continue into this budget season as well. Bud and Jimmy talked to us about the problems they are facing. The enlightened us to several issues that are out of their control, and placing increased pressure on the EMS. These problems include:

- Fewer volunteers.
- Longer ambulance trips, as nearby hospitals are offering fewer services, meaning patients need to be brought to Hartford.

- Increased training requirements.
- High EMT turnover.
- EMT shortage throughout the state.

They have also been informed that Vintech will be increasing their rate at 5% this year, and next year is looking at a 10% increase. Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates are low, and they account for a high percentage of our calls. On top of all this, our remaining ARPA funds are dwindling. There are concerns for both this year and future planning. Bud and Jimmy are looking at options to help, such as:

- Reducing Vintech hours, and relying more on volunteers
- Potential regionalization
- Establishing a special taxing district.

Each of the solutions come with their own concerns. Concerns include adding stress to our volunteers and longer ambulance response times. Having a special taxing district, still requires more funding from the taxpayers. Gallagher expressed there is no perfect solution, and we have to find balance. In addition to that, we are not the only town dealing with these issues. She noted a WFSB article that informed Woodstock residents are at risk of losing EMS services. She added she recognized the struggles that are being faced and appreciates the work Bud and Jimmy are doing to try and come up with solutions.

Gallagher also reported on the repairs that need to be made to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Green cannon wheel, as well as the recruitment costs and allocation of ARPA funds for the Town Manager search, that will be discussed further on in the agenda.

She informed the Town Council that next month's finance meeting will be a joint meeting with the Board of Education, to meet with our auditors. Gallagher continued we have a good audit report that fairly represents our financial standing. She looks forward to hearing from the auditors. The meeting will be on February 13th, and be held in the annex.

Blanchard questioned when the Town Council will see the Grand List, and if it needs to go to Finance, before coming to the Town Council. Elsesser informed that it will be signed around January 30th, and since we are not seeking an extension, it should be available at the end of the month. Backhaus informed the Town Council will have it for their first meeting in February.

French questioned Vintech's percentage of increase. He noted the minutes stated 20%, but Gallagher said 10%. It was confirmed it would be 20%.

Thomas also wanted to include a point that Jimmy and Bud had mentioned. When an ambulance is called out, it is out of commission longer as they take someone to Windham Hospital, only to find out that they no longer have the service the patient needs, meaning they then have to go to Hartford. We then have to rely more on volunteers. She noted this was talked about on previous councils and a letter of unanimous testimony was sent to Certificate of Need Hearing, but this loss of service continues to take a toll in so many ways. Thomas continued that we need to continue keeping up on this matter and sharing our voice, because the problem is only going to get worse and hospitals are already inundated and people in need have waited 5+ hours for a bed to become available.

6.C.1. * Monthly Financial Report:

6.C.2. * Minutes, Finance Committee 1/9/2023:

6.D.* Steering Committee: Matthew Kyer, Chairperson:

6.D.1.* Minutes, Steering Committee 12/27/2022

6.E.* COVRRRA - John A. Elsesser

6.F. Town Manager - John Elsesser:

6.F.1. Projects Update:

Elsesser highlighted the following items:

- Starting a part-time engineering tech, as budgeted for, to help aid with some backlogged inspections and other routine matters. This will help free up time for our Town Engineer, and keep him on important tasks and projects.
- Part time Senior Center aid has been hired
- Swearing in a patrol officer, tomorrow
- Looking at the project manager position, as there will be a lot of paperwork for all the upcoming projects. This would be a temporary position, funded through the projects, not from our operating budget.
- Interview with a transfer for a position of Mechanic II. We have been down a third of our mechanic staff, which has been difficult. We are trying to back fill this, and will then have an opening for our Public Works Highway crew.
- We are making good progress, but there has never been the amount of openings and turnover like what we have had in the past year. We are not the only ones experiencing this problem.
- CHS walls project is complete, as all materials testing lab reports have come back satisfactory. Elsesser thanked all Council Members who have been involved in this through the years.
- Started Lotcip design on South and Swamp Street, which includes the removal of an impeding sightline hump on Swamp St. We have continued to use 100% of the Lotcip funding and have been successful with these projects.
- Still waiting for permission from CRCOG to go out and hire design engineers for the Daly Road project, through a competitive process. Meanwhile, Jacobson Engineering has been hired to prepare an application for the second part of the Daly Rd. Project, which is due the middle of next month. This will include the completion of the project and the roundabout.

Pending matters, in terms of grants:

- State bonding for Miller Richardson. Has final contract documents that have been worked on with the State for the second softball field. We expect to be out to bid, and award a bid by late February, for Spring construction.

- TRIP program, which is a 100% grant that will help make pedestrian safety better in our community. We are looking for ADA accessibility for the sidewalks on South Street and on the sidewalks and pedestrian crosswalks, at Bidwell Tavern, the library, Lake Street, and Robertson School. It is a scoring grant, with a complex application, and we think we can be competitive. There is a limited amount of money, and you have to be a rural community. There are only 8 towns in the capital region that meet the criteria and are competing for this, some of whom may not have the capacity to complete the application.
- Working on a recreational Trails grant at the request of DEEP, to bring fishing access back to Skungamaug, and have a direct line from South Street, to the river on our land. A side benefit is when the State took away the fishing easement access from a CHRO complaint, we, nor the state, have access down there and we haven't been able to mow our trails in the forested area. It will be designed so that we can get our Kubota tractor in there for mowing and brush cutting.
- Preparing a second round for Lotcip program for Daly Road, which will get us to the roundabout. This will be the next round, which is being done by Jacobson Engineering, as mentioned.
- BRIC grant for the microgrid. Today, we were made aware they have 3 questions on our application, that we will need to clarify. They did not forward it to the federal government, so it may be a good sign that they are going to use the state funding set aside for us which is \$1.2M for the microgrid, on top of \$4M from DEEP. We are continuing to work on this.
- Waiting on the HVAC grant
- There are 2 local bridge programs pending with the state.
- We are also working on the other Trails grant to the forest.

Another update, is the new fire truck is in town. They are putting radios and some other equipment on it. Before the next council meeting, we will have it up here for viewing.

Milkovic questioned what will happen to the rotary on Daly Road, with the Lotcip grant. Elsesser explained since it is part of the second grant, and we are not fully certain at this point. It was built before modern designs. Modern rotaries are typically built lower, without a stone wall. Recently someone crashed into it and we are seeking advice to see if it should be repaired. We are going to have the professional engineers look at it, to see if it needs to be modified in some way, or removed. We put it in there as people were speeding through that area, and there were some pretty serious accidents.

Blanchard questioned the work at South and Swamp, and if there was projected work on South. Elsesser informed that they will be doing work through the bends, and into the cornfield. He noted it will also include a bus turnaround. Blanchard asked if there have been any comments on the smells in that area lately. She noted she has come through in the morning sometimes, and it smells bad. Elsesser said he has not heard anything, but he will ask.

Blanchard also asked if the Council has received, or can receive a sketch for the Nathan Hale Trails grant, as well as what is being prepared for the access from South Street to the Skungamaug river. She noted she would like to see what that looks like. Elsesser informed that at Nathan Hale, it is just going down the existing road. Where there is a dirt road now, it will be upgraded to just be a path. They discussed being able to see it on Google Earth. He added that there aren't any plans for that, as they are just doing it from what is existing, and that they will grade the road and do some cross-over pipes. For the other project, it is in early stages, so there is no sketch at this time.

Blanchard asked regarding the Fire Administrator vehicle they had budgeted for. Elsesser informed it was ordered about 6 months ago, and it will be about another 8 months to get it, because there have been issues with getting things in. Backhaus commented it is projected to be in, in May. Elsesser noted Jimmy thought it could be July at this point.

6.F.2.COVID-19 Update:

Elsesser reminded everyone that COVID is still here, but it is slightly better than it was a month ago. Our region, and the rest of the state now, is “red”, so they are recommending masks in large group settings. Elsesser noted that at Town Hall, there are signs that state “Masks are welcome”, so he is leaving those.

Milkovic questions how it is impacting staff. Elsesser noted there are currently 3 people out. Backhaus informed that right now there are 3, but over the past month, there have been 2-3 people out each week.

6.F.3. Update: Property Tax Working Group:

The Property Tax Working Group Executive Summary was reviewed. Thomas asked Elsesser to give an overview as he has been working on this for so long, and we are always trying to figure out what to do to cover our expenses and manage property taxes in the best way possible.

Elsesser informed this group came from a project the 1000 Friends of Connecticut has worked on, and that he works with them occasionally. He informed they have put out an updated report and executive summary, which highlights some new solutions and ideas. He highlighted the following:

- Municipalities statewide get approximately 71% of their revenue from local property taxes.
- Property tax revenue is the third highest in the nation. CT is at 24.5%, versus 16.6% nationwide. Property tax is high in Connecticut because there are no other revenue sources.
- State wide, 43% of state and local governmental revenues are from property taxes.

Elsesser informed that this is a bad thing for the following reasons. Property taxes inhibit economic growth, businesses factor this in when planning locations, and it creates competitions between towns. This competition creates inefficient nodes of towns, because we are competing for the property tax revenues. We are being driven by trend to invest money into our own local towns, rather than what makes the most sense for a region.

He continues this causes companies to move out of urban areas, which exacerbates the problems in those areas. This is a problem for Connecticut, as our urban areas are much smaller than others in the nation. He noted that we don't accurately compare the poverty in these areas based on other areas like West Hartford and Bloomfield. This causes us to have a distorted view of our situation.

He summarized that this creates a barrier to collaboration with other communities, as we try to have control over the revenue and spending. In addition, we don't preserve open space and farmland because we want development, to bring in more properties and businesses for higher revenues. Elsesser shared a quote from Senator Martin Looney, “Municipal property taxes are as high as they are primarily because the state has not been able to raise enough revenue to provide municipal aid. We are, after all, one state, and we need to look at

taxes on a statewide basis, and not a hyper-local basis.” Elsesser noted that they are admitting to lack of funding to municipalities. In addition, this report was from 2021, and the revenue picture has changed dramatically since then. He also added that once the motor vehicle tax changes, there will be a need to increase property taxes. This means taxpayers will pay less on their cars, but more on their house.

Recommendations from the group for reform are:

- Put in place targeted property tax relief, with refundable property tax credits and/or circuit breakers to make the property tax more progressive in terms of overall tax burden. This could mean tying the property and income taxes together.
- Fully fund special education. This should not be the responsibility of individual local towns, but more so of the region, or the state.
- Increased funding to K-12 education would also help, as so much of our budget goes to education. Elsesser noted doing tax comparisons makes you look at other states, like New York, who have regional education. Other states have education under a separate tax authority, and it is not all under the town.
- Commit to regional and collaborative solutions for the delivery and coordination of state and local services. This goes back to the property taxes creating competition between towns, as we so tightly want to control how the money is spent. This caused us to miss out on opportunities of collaboration, which would save money.
- Provide policymakers with up-to-date facts and independent non-partisan analyses. We are one of the few states that does not have a policy center to do research.

Elsesser side noted that they were able to finally change a law at the federal level, to have Councils of Governments recognized as a benefactor of counties. We were losing out on major federal grants that went to counties. County money from ARPA was divided by the towns, but since we don't have county government, we were penalized as a state. They came up with a way to have “county equivalents”, and the Councils of Governments were recognized as those organizations, which was a very important change.

Elsesser discussed ways to pay for reform, as we have some money and can put a dent into some of these things. Some ways are:

- Collecting what is already owed to the state. The 2021 CREATES report indicated there may be as much as \$1.1B in revenue due to the state that is not being collected by the state Department of Revenue Services. Elsesser noted they have laid off staff, so there is no one to go after those who are not paying their income and sales taxes. He added that instead of raising taxes, we should have people paying what they are legally obligated to pay. Also, the DRS could bring in \$95M by improving their digitized filing. Elsesser added that this state does not invest in technology and there are some state offices that are using outdated systems.
- Look at marginal returns on some tax investment programs, like the FILM tax program. This would give away \$100M a year, but it is not showing that it is bringing in that money. He also informed that Department of Revenue Services estimates that the money not collected is closer to the amount of \$2.6B a year.

Elsesser informed that there are ways to handle this, if someone was to get serious about this and fund current programs appropriately, we could be able to lower property taxes. He noted that this is change, and change is hard, but no one has challenged the numbers published on this summary.

Thomas asked if Rep. Ackert had any questions or comments. Ackert noted he met with some union members today, and found we have a dysfunctional process with hiring people in the State of CT, and blame goes to the government and the OPM director. He added that there are frustrations in trying to fill vacancies in important revenue collection agencies like the Department of Revenue Services, the Department of Consumer Protection, and the Attorney General's Office. Speaking with members of the union, they informed that change needs to come from higher up as it takes months to fill a position. OPM won't fill the slot until the existing person has already left, and then approval is needed in order to put out a job posting. Thomas asked if this process was new, and Ackert informed that yes, it was not under the Malloy administration. Ackert also informed that there needs to be someone stepping up to fulfill the revenue collection positions, but the main issue is the lack of bodies, to the point no one is answering phones.

Ackert stated he has put into legislation for several years that special education be fully funded, as it is a huge part of the education budget. We are struggling to get them to pay, what the state statute is saying they are supposed to pay, and someone needs to follow through on that.

He continued that property taxes, along with mortgages, have been a biggest struggle for most people, and those property taxes is what it takes to run the town. He noted Elsesser brought up a great point about all the towns in the state battling for economic development, and creating barriers with other towns. Ackert noted that instead of regionalizing, it seems to be that towns want to keep things individual and local.

Milkovic commented on the hiring issue, and that it seems for the past 10 years or so, the state has reduced the number of employees pretty drastically, and if the issues today are a hangover from that. Ackert noted that a lot of it has to do with the technology upgrades, and if they were to switch from Cobalt to Microsoft, about 90 Union workers would lose their jobs. So, we have stopped modernizing, due to the fear of losing jobs, when we could take those jobs and retrain the staff to serve needed areas. He added that CT is falling back in terms of technology. He continued that Milkovic could be right with the reduction of staff, but there are several areas that we need to grow it. He commented he is glad to see the State is advertising for these "in need" areas. However, he felt there needs to be a top-down view of all these departments, and have a labor audit to fix the problems we are facing.

Elsesser made comments that the state is no longer competitive with hiring anymore, because no matter where you come from, you have to start at the bottom rate, regardless of your experience. Also, there is still a 40-hr work week. Most people are not going to accept these conditions, especially coming from a private sector where the work week is 35 hrs. Governmental change is hard, but it is hurting them from getting the top candidates.

Gallagher commented the proposed solutions in the summary are really exciting, especially fully funding special education at a state level as it caused fluctuations with the budgets. Her concern is that relying on greater state funding to lower property taxes, could create a vulnerability for municipalities when state funding fluctuates, and how to plan for that. Elsesser informed we have that already with ECS, and next year they are going to cut even more. Gallagher stated the more you rely on the state rather than property taxes, that grows the vulnerability. Elsesser agreed property taxes are more stable and there are benefits to it in terms of predictability.

French stated one of the biggest problems in the state right now is that we are \$90B in debt, and \$50B is unfunded because of state retirement. He added he suggested, in 2016, that special education be fully funded, as it makes sense that the money follows the children as there is a large impact on the local communities in terms of funding. Also, every election year, like this year, the Governor gave away \$39 M to 78 towns, just in Eastern CT. There are much bigger problems happening, yet we are looking at these other things. Went through teacher enhancement, which he noted Thomas was around for, where we got 3 years of raises that were necessary, but only got state funding for 1 of the years, leaving local municipalities with the financial burden. He continues that we should try and handle the debt first, prior to spending more money. Elsesser made note, that up to 15% of the surplus has to go to pension, which reduces their annual amortization. Then the next budget year they cut their annual payment. There should be a law that states they cannot cut their annual payment until they no longer owe. Thomas noted to Ackert, if he puts a bill in for that, the Coventry Town Council will write a letter of support. French concluded that he spoke with Senator Jeff Gordon, and he wanted to state that he can't wait to help Coventry as much as he can.

Gallagher informed she will be inviting both Ackert and Dr. Gordon to an upcoming Finance Committee meeting. Elsesser noted that Dr. Gordon has also come to see him to speak about issues, and is particularly interested in the EMS problems.

Akert noted that some of the bills presented to him at labor meeting today showed an increase in municipality spending for Workmans' comp for fire and emergency workers.

6.F.4. COST: Adopted 2023 Legislative Platform:

Thomas noted that COST, CRCOG, and CCM have all adopted legislative priorities. She encourages that the Council look at these to figure out where we want to weigh in, as we can send in legislative testimony which should be done sooner rather than later.

Thomas thanked Ackert for joining the meeting. Ackert left at 8:35 PM.

Elsesser noted that they are doing open hearings again, that are more successful in getting a point across.

6.F.5. * CCM: Prescription Drug Discount Program, December 2022:

6.F.6. Minutes: January 4, 2023 Staff Meeting:

This item was removed from the consent agenda at Blanchard's request.

Blanchard questioned the item that mentioned we will be saying goodbye to a zoning consultant, Robin, and if it played into the engineering assistant that is starting soon. Elsesser informed that Robin was a temporary consultant while we hired a zoning agent. We had to bring in an outside consultant, and she was a certified zoning enforcement agent. We needed someone to fill in 12 hours a week to make sure things didn't get shut down and used salary savings to do so.

Blanchard then questioned under Fire/EMS, it was noted a generator was being moved from Station 318 to CGS. Meanwhile, we are buying a new one for the South Street sub-station to replace what was there, but there is one across the street not being used, and we are moving it to CGS. Elsesser informed they are replacing

the one outside of mission critical fire station, and moving it up so that it can keep the freezer going at CGS. Backhaus noted that CGS IT, also feeds the internet for the North Fire Station. So, if CGS loses power, the fire station is not able to receive phone calls. Elsesser also clarified that the South Street sub-station is getting a new generator, and the existing one there could possibly be relocated, as it is still in working condition. The fire station wants to make sure the large garage doors open for the firetrucks. The new generator was funded using ARPA as a one-time cost. When the new freezer was installed, the electricians laid down conduit in order to have generator connectivity. Being able to relocate the old generator to CGS will help hold off on buying something for them until they can do capital improvements, which includes a larger generator. Gallagher also mentioned that keeping the freezer going will make sure we don't have significant food and financial loss.

Blanchard asked a final question regarding why Bill Watkins working on a grant for a horizontal curve sign project. Elsesser stated it is being worked on because it is available, and we have a lot of accidents on curves and bends. He noted this was submitted previously and Bill is just responding to their questions, and informed that these signs are very affective. Thomas asked if there were concerns with the signs, and Blanchard commented no, but didn't think there were as necessary as Elsesser stated they were.

7.Unfinished Business:

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

Thomas noted that this came up at the Finance Meeting, and Blanchard expressed concerns with using ARPA funds for the Town Manager search, and hiring a firm, which would cost approximately \$30,000, including potential travel expenses. Blanchard noted that it wasn't specifically using ARPA funds, but more so the timing, and why it couldn't wait until we had an exact amount to ask the Council to approve. The money was already set aside, but now we would be asking for more from ARPA.

Motion: I move that the Town Council approve funding of up to \$40,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act Funding for costs associated with the recruitment of a new Town Manager, which include hiring the search firm and travel related expenses.

By: Gallagher

Second: Milkovic

Discussion:

Gallagher wanted to address the timing concern, and noted that an "up to" amount was being stated, so when the time comes, we have advanced authority in order to move quickly. The amount of time needed to hire a Town Manager is 13 to 15 weeks, and we are getting to the point where we are running out of time. We need Elsesser and Backhaus to have the flexibility to approve spending on certain items without forcing them to come back to the Council. She does not view it as an invitation to spend all these funds if it is not called for, and trusts them to be prudent with their spending. We already know the costs for the firm are going to be around \$24,000, so having additional funds for related expenses as needed can allow us to move more quickly.

Thomas also noted that it will be the Council's decision as to who they are bringing in as finalists, and therefore essentially approving the travel costs by which candidates we invite to come in. Milkovic agreed, and added there could be a variety of unexpected things that come up, and we would be approving them ahead of time.

French had a concern as to why nothing was put in the budget to account for this, as he felt the \$40,000 could have been covered that way, rather than having to use ARPA. Thomas indicated that this cost has been on the ARPA list, and they have planned to use the ARPA funds for this purpose for about a year and a half.

Gallagher stated she felt it was a good expenditure to take from ARPA, as it falls within the categories, they were looking for with ARPA spending, which was mainly one-time expenditures. She added they wanted to make sure that continuing expenditures were factored into the budget, and that they were not spending ARPA funds on things that were recurring expenses. At the same time, we wanted to keep the budget as low as possible, so when there were items that were one-time expenditures, we considered the ARPA funds as a valid use to cover those costs. Backhaus agreed.

Voting:

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

Against: Blanchard

Abstain: None

8.New Business:

8.A. 22/23-44: Consideration/Possible Action: Town Manager Search:

Thomas made note that we need to start moving on hiring the firm, and to respond to Laura Stone if they have not already done so.

This item continues on the agenda.

8.B. 22/23-45: Discussion/Possible Authorization Funding Of Repair To Veteran Memorial:

Motion: I move that we authorize funds, not to exceed \$4,500, from CNREF for the repair of the wheels on the cannon at the Veteran's Memorial Green.

By: Milkovic

Second: Gallagher

Discussion:

Hand commented it seems prudent.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.C. 22/23-46: Consideration/Possible Action: Municipal Certification Of Resolution – 2023 Neglected Cemetery Account Grant Application And Authorization Of Town Manager To Execute:

Motion: RESOLVED, that John A. Elsesser, Town Manager of the Town of Coventry, be and hereby is authorized to execute the grant application for the 2023 Neglected Cemetery Account Grant. IN ADDITION,

that John A. Elsesser, Town Manager, is hereby authorized to enter into and execute any and all agreements, contracts and documents necessary to obtain said grant, should the Town be selected for a grant award.

By: Milkovic

Second: Hand

Discussion: Elsesser noted that Backhaus can fill in some more information as needed, but the point of this is to do some walls repairs at the Nathan Hale Cemetary. They use the term neglected in this case to mean anything that is in need of dramatic repairs. Milkovic asked if it was the walls on the lake side. Elsesser informed they have done a lot of work on the road side, and the lake side was finished this year. This will cover the other side that is steeper, and more active with crumbling. Blanchard asked if this was a state grant that we can apply for annually, Elsesser confirmed. Elsesser also noted this is the first year that we have applied because they changed the definition of what “neglected” meant. Backhaus commented that the last grant award, each town that applied got around \$2,300. We need more than that to fix our wall, but her and the Public Works director were in agreement that they might as well apply, as it will help with the overall costs of the repairs.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

9.Miscellaneous/Correspondence:

9.A.* Board Of Education: Agenda, 1/12/2023

9.B. * Thank-You Letter To Congressman Courtney Re: Community Project Funding

10.Executive Session:

1. Public Works Union Contract:

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, Matthew Kyer, Jonathan Hand, Robyn Gallagher, Lisa Thomas, Marty Milkovic, Julie Blanchard, John French (The Town Council), John Elsesser (Town Manager), Amanda Backhaus (Finance Director).

By: Blanchard

Second: French

2. Citizen personnel complaint

Motion: I move that the Town Council enter into Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1- 200(6)(A): discussion concerning the employment, appointment, performance, evaluation, health or dismissal of a public officer or employee with the following in attendance, Matthew Kyer, Jonathan Hand, Robyn

Gallagher, Lisa Thomas, Marty Milkovic, Julie Blanchard, John French (The Town Council), John Elsesser (Town Manager), Amanda Backhaus (Finance Director), and Chief Peterson (Police Chief).

By: Blanchard

Second: French

Motion: I move to leave executive session at 9:55 PM.

By: Blanchard

Second: Milkovic

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

11. Adjournment:

Motion: I move that the Council adjourn at 9:56 PM.

By: Hand

Seconded: French

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicole Archambault

Nicole Archambault, Minutes 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.**