

**MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 18, 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=WU4sJSNRV7vM>

Link to a summary of SB1:

https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=https%3a%2f%2fcga.ct.gov%2f2021%2fSUM%2fPDF%2f2021SUM00035-R02SB-00001-SUM.PDF&c=E,1,wrHitSTSqQi_vixA4IPk9PnKoImCAxHY7hrCPaXrr4DFIXmvnVJqJ2l6wb0HJ1859y7yNIVN529I9uVUueNgD1rgIeRNqB9p2O7MY3AIFk-zAlqq7levjU-f6g,&typo=0

1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

The meeting was called to order by Thomas at 7:30 p.m.

Members present:

John French
Robyn Gallagher
Jonathan Hand - Secretary
Matthew Kyer
Marty Milkovic – Vice-Chair
Lisa Thomas - Chair

Members absent:

Julie Blanchard

Also present:

John Elsesser – Town Manager - remote
Amanda Backhaus – Finance Director - remote

2. Pledge Of Allegiance:

All stood to recite the Pledge.

3. Audience Of Citizens:

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

No one was present to speak.

4. Acceptance Of Minutes, January 3, 2022:

Motion: I move to accept the minutes of January 3, 2022, Regular Meeting.

Corrections:

- Page 1, item 3: - change “Carolyn Gallagher” to “Caroline Dowd”; second sentence – change “the” to “a”.
- Page 5, item 6.B., first paragraph – add “which is gender neutral” after “language”.
- Page 5, item 6.C. – change “Chairperson” to “Chair”.
- Page 7, item 6.D.1.e., Motion – change “Market” to “Marek”.
- Page 12, item 6.D.2.d., Discussion – add “and is excited to see what she will bring to” after “enthusiasm”; remove – “on”.
- Page 12, item 6.D.2.f., Discussion, second sentence – change “He” to “She”.
- Page 13, item 6.E., second paragraph, fourth sentence – change to read “The current composting available at the transfer station isn’t the same kind of compost you get from food waste.”.
- Page 14, item 6.F.6., fourth sentence – add “and other diseased and dangerous trees” after “trees”.
- Page 16, first paragraph, last sentence – change “reoccurring” to “recurring”.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Hand

Voting:

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

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

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

6. Reports:

6.A. Council Chairwoman: Lisa Thomas

Thomas read the following:

Chairwoman's Report

1/3/2022

I would like to thank our Town Manager, town staff, Fire/EMS staff and volunteers, and police department for their handling of our 2nd distribution of COVID test kits and masks. Parks and Recreation Director Lesley Munshower did an incredible job developing the registration process, screening registrations for duplicates, and adding people in from waiting lists. Our town staff fielded many, many phone calls for help getting accounts set up. I was unable to attend this 2nd distribution but from what I have read and heard, it went smoothly and residents feedback has been positive. Moving forward, please monitor news for information about local PCR test sites as well as President Biden's administration's efforts to continue to get COVID 19 test kits into people's hands at no cost. In addition, Coventry still has supplies of N95 masks that are available to residents and local businesses. While we are beginning to see a decline in positivity rates in CT, that rate was still at 17% yesterday, with over 1800 people hospitalized with COVID infections. Please continue to be cautious and to watch out for our community. I watch my own daughter who works in healthcare, directly with COVID positive patients, but with a very limited staff and my heart is so heavy as I see how mentally and physically exhausted Olivia is. So I'm grateful for the assistance I see you offering one another on various social media platforms and truly putting community first.

Please bear in mind that just like many of your families, businesses, and schools, our town staff are also experiencing COVID19 exposures and needing to isolate. This impacts our ability to get things done as quickly as we'd like. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

I have a correction to my column in the winter newsletter. I incorrectly listed Councilor Blanchard as a Steering Committee member and Councilor French as a Finance Committee member. It's actually the reverse.

I held the first round of office hours earlier this month. Councilor Hand joined me. Two residents came to chat with us which was a nice turnout for our first office hours which fell on the eve of a messy storm. Some of the topics we touched on were recreation baseball and softball program, our town manager search, and the library renovations project that is gearing up. I look forward to my next office hours on Thursday, February 3 again at 6:30 p.m. in the Library's front parlor.

Speaking of the library, did you know that they have issued a reading challenge to us all? Can we collectively read 500 or more books by the end of February?

Please join in to help reach the goal! There are lots of ways to log your reading, both online and on paper. Visit the Booth and Dimock Memorial Library's web site for info.

6.B. Council Members:

Gallagher: Was aware of the library reading challenge and has read one book toward the challenge count. There was a wonderful article in the Journal Inquirer about American Legion members in Coventry who are collecting for the Backpacks for Life organization. The filled backpacks are distributed to homeless veterans and provide some hope to them.

Hand: Thank you to Deb Walsh of the Library Renovations Committee for a tour of the space earlier this evening to walk-through the renovation project.

Milkovic: Was on the library tour as well. He was impressed with the work that will be done with the lesser amount of money than they had hoped to get. There are volunteer opportunities in town on various boards and commissions. Volunteers are the life-blood in town. Contact the Town Clerk or look on the town website for a statement of interest form.

French: He read the newsletter and had issues with the front page. The first sentence in the second paragraph infers that the past Town Council did not have honesty, integrity, and respect. That is a Democratic Town Committee statement and he opposes this avenue for using this. He thinks an apology is needed. He has the same issue when the message refers to ‘for the good of the town’. In regards to paint recycling locations mentioned in the newsletter, Willard’s no longer does paint recycling. He has an issue with being put on the Steering subcommittee when his expertise is in finance. He would like switching him to the Finance committee be considered. Regarding negotiations with the library – he has not seen any of the details. The whole board should see the documents if they can be released after being discussed in Executive Session.

Thomas: She did not interview Members before making appointments to the subcommittees. Blanchard also has years of budgeting experience here in Coventry and brings information from participating in the past several budgets. The prior Council did not finish an agreed upon contract with the library. The documents being discussed in the restarted conversations will be available when negotiations are completed between Finance and the Library Board. Documents are not being kept from the Members. They aren’t ready yet.

Gallagher: When she knows there will be no breach of confidentiality she will share the documents of the agreement with the library. In the meantime, she welcomes any comments; these can be emailed or discussed with her. As to the proposal of French and Blanchard switching subcommittees, Gallagher feels she benefits from Blanchard’s continuity on Finance. There is an experienced Member on each of the subcommittees.

Thomas: Extended congratulations to our newest Police Officer Jose Pansini.

Motion: I move that the Council hears item 8.A. at this time.

By: Milkovic

Seconded: Gallagher

Voting:

For: Hand, Thomas, Milkovic, Kyer, Gallagher, French
Against: None
Abstain: None

6.C. Finance Committee: Robyn Gallagher, Chairperson

Gallagher read the following:

Last week, on January 10, 2022 we had the first of our joint finance meetings with the Board of Education to receive the report from the auditor - Clifton Larson Allen ("CLA" formerly Blum Shapiro).

Regarding the Auditor's Report, there was nothing that the auditor needed to bring to our attention. We received a clean audit report as to the annual report itself as well as the state and federal programs that were audited. Additionally, while the auditors do not opine on the internal controls they would have raised any concerns if they had seen any. There were no concerns regarding our internal controls.

After the Audit report was delivered there was an opportunity for questions.

One question raised was why a schedule, pertaining to capital improvement projects, had been removed from the report. Apparently when CLA assumed control of Blum Shapiro they expressed concern regarding inclusion of the schedule, which spans several years and therefore includes time periods not covered by the scope of the audit. As a result, the schedule was removed this year - and Amanda Backhaus subsequently circulated the schedule to the BOE and Town Counsel finance members.

Overall the presentation of the audit, while positive in that it had good results, was not exactly what we were looking for. This gives further impetus for us to go out to bid for our next audit.

While we had the Board of Education present, we discussed funding for the Coventry High Schools wall fix. The engineers are finalizing recommendations and therefore we do not yet know what the exact cost will be. We are hopeful that we will have those costs for the next Town Council finance committee meeting.

The Board of Education also circulated their proposed Capital Improvement Projects before the meeting to allow Town Council members to ask any questions. The proposal represents a significant increase over the prior year and so there was a detailed conversation regarding certain line items. The next step is for John Elsesser, Town Manager, to take the proposal and refine it into the Town Manager's proposal which is what will be presented to the Finance Committee next. Discussion of the Board of Education's Capital Improvement Projects did prompt conversation about the "Renovate as New" program. More information will be forthcoming over the next few months but the Renovate as New program provides a great opportunity for the Town to save a lot of money while addressing projects that have been outstanding for years.

After the Board of Education left, the Town Council Regular Finance Committee meeting began. The Town Council reviewed the Finance Director's reports and discussed continuing concerns with, for example, the EMS fund.

Additionally we discussed that sewer fees would likely be increased - a decision that is outside of the purview of the Town Council but is worth understanding as

it is a cost that will impact our tax payers.

I encourage anyone to reach out with any questions.

Thank you,

Robyn

French: Asked about going out to bid for the next audit – are we at the end of the contract? Backhaus: We are at the end of the three year contract. Leslie is willing to accept a one-year or three-year contract. Blum & Shapiro has been the auditor for the five years she has been here. Elsesser: Blum & Shapiro has been the auditing firm for Coventry fairly consistently with the exception of another firm in the middle that kept asking for more money and no one was happy with. Backhaus: Was happy and impressed CLA (who bought out Blum & Shapiro) was able to get this report delivered on time. French: Maybe we can look at a two-year contract with two year renewal option. Elsesser: We have had some serious conversation about going out to bid.

Milkovic: The joint meeting between the Finance boards was successful and constructive.

6.C.1. * Monthly Financial Reports

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

6.E. COVRRRA – John Elsesser

We are still waiting for a price from Willimantic Waste for tipping fees. Looks like the MIRA plant is done and will be closed in June. Then the scramble will start for where trash will go. The Transfer Station bid is on track to get out in February.

6.F. Town Manager – John Elsesser

6.F.1. Projects Update

Elsesser reported:

- The federal uses of ARPA have changed. They are very flexible now. The decision process will be more open with more possibilities for use of the funds.
- A DPW Maintainer 1 has been hired; he is not sure if a start date has been set.
- Old landfill methane venting is out to bid right now.
- There are three finalists for the Building Official position.

Thomas: Congratulated Elsesser on the issue he raised of including HVAC funding in school construction grants. The state department is researching this for inclusion. She suggests Council Members write letters in support of this.

Motion: I move that the Council express support of including HVAC in school construction grants by submitting letters to the state.

By: French

Seconded: Milkovic

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.F.2. COVID-19 Update

Elsesser: Expressed appreciation to the Staff for the hard work on the distribution. There are 250 people on the waiting list. There is a noon deadline tomorrow to tell the to state how many more test kits the town wants. He proposes the next distribution begins with those on the waiting list. More importantly the federal government test kit request form went live today. Our insurance carrier has said they can give up to 8 kits per month per employee. This week we will be distributing kits and masks to businesses. Masks remain available; call his office to arrange for pick up. We are seeing Staff come and go making it difficult to get daily work done but the Staff is hanging in there.

6.F.3. CRCOG 2022 Legislative Agenda

Thomas: The next session begins on February 9, 2022. Members can send comments to Thomas that will be forwarded.

Elsesser: CRCOG has already adopted their agenda. CCM has not finalized theirs. This is to let you know what the various agencies are focusing on. If the Council has issues of concern or those that are of significance to you Elsesser should know those.

6.F.4. COST 2022 Legislative Priorities

Elsesser: In this short session there will be a dramatic limit to what they will look at.

6.F.5. * Staff Meeting Minutes, 1-5-22

7. Unfinished Business:

8. New Business:

8.A. 21/22-45: Preliminary Engineering/Project Design For Daly Road LOTCIP Application For CRCOG Consideration (8:00 p.m.)

Todd Penney, Town Engineer/Wetlands Agent, Chris Mastriano PE of BL Companies, and Ken Radziwon, Project manager of BL Companies, were present.

Penney: We will be submitting the grant application tomorrow for the Daly Road Roadway and Pedestrian Improvements project. This presentation is for informational purposes only. Penney went through the prepared presentation including how Daly Road was reclassified as an urban collector road and the number of and costs of projects that Coventry has received through LOTCIP in the past. Penney explained the improvements and reasons for them along segments of the road.

Elsesser: Congratulated the engineers for the design they produced, particularly in a couple of spots we were afraid of. This is for a grant; we will see what happens with our application. We are in a niche where we have been very successful. We think this is a very competitive project. Share the Road signs for bikes will be erected along the roadway.

Penney: Coventry is limited to four collector roads in town for this type of grant. Six million to eight million dollars have been set aside for small communities.

French: Is the water being piped through the culverts discharging to town property or private property? Wider, smoother roads usually mean it becomes a speedway. What can be done on the one mile of improved road to keep traffic speed down? Penney: The existing six culvert outfalls are on private property. We have a prescriptive right to discharge. This is a 30 mph roadway with a 10' travel lane. Data collected indicates the average speed is 32 mph in the northerly section and 35 mph in the southerly section. There is 20% built into the budget for contingencies that could be used for corridor improvements to help with vehicle speed. This was not designed as a 40 mph road. Elsesser: The road geometry will not encourage excessive speed.

Milkovic: Has spoken to a number of people on Daly Road; sight line issues have come up at times and some have raised the issue of speed. We should encourage any other traffic calming methods. Penney: We have been operating the LED speed signs in stealth mode collecting data. The monthly reports states the average speed was 32 mph on northerly section. Pedestrian amenities are a traffic calming method. We can look at adding trees for a closed in effect which is also a calming method.

Kyer: Does not travel Daly Road. In these close knit neighborhood bus stops are on the main roads instead of in front of their house. Does the design accommodate existing bus stops? Penney: We include the bus company early on in the design phase. We will coordinate with the bus company once there is an official project.

Abstain: None

9. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:

9.A. * Board of Education: 1/13/22 Agenda

10. Adjournment:

Motion: I move that the Council adjourn at 9:26 p.m.

By: French

Seconded: Milcovic

Voting:

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

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.