MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING
JANUARY 21, 2020
TOWN HALL ANNEX

PUBLIC HEARING, 7:00 P.M.
Proposed modifications to Town ordinances

Regular Town Council Meeting, 7:30 P.M.

1. **PUBLIC HEARING:**
   1. **Repeal of Chapter 38, Article IV of Town Code**
   Blanchard opened the public hearing at 7:00 p.m.

   Elsesser read the legal notice of the public hearing. A change is being made to the reference section to point people to the right spot in the code. Hand is in support of making the change.

   **Audience of Citizens:**
   Chris Morgan - How often does this ordinance get used? Elsesser responded it is a special events ordinance pertaining to such events as parades or runs. This comes up three to four times per year and has to do with the planning pertaining to large events involving over 300 people. Morgan asked what would happen if someone holds an event on the Town Green without knowing the need for a permit? Elsesser said a fine could be imposed on the event planner. Mr. Morgan feels this limits free speech and should be thrown out.

   Thomas stated that under the first amendment people have the right to address grievances to the government. The courts have found these rights can be restricted for the health, safety, and welfare of the public. This is about a language change in the ordinance.

   Morgan continued that rather than change the language scrub from the regulation. Three hundred and one people can have a peaceable assembly. This should be the home of free speech and Elsesser should not act as the moral judge. Elsesser informed the audience the permit requires seven signatures for obtaining the permit with Elsesser’s being the final one.

   Blanchard thanked Mr. Morgan for his participation.

   The hearing is closed.

2. **Revision, Section 70-88 of Town Code**
   Blanchard opened the public hearing at 7:15 p.m.

   Elsesser read the legal notice for the public hearing. The purpose of this hearing is to eliminate the ordinance because a State law has superseded it. Elsesser stated that citizens petitioned for this ordinance pertaining to fracking waste before the State acted on the matter. Those citizens were consulted about this repeal and they are not opposed to the change. Due to many towns adopting a fracking waste ban ordinance their actions succeeded in getting a state law passed.

   The public hearing is closed.
2.3 **TOWN COUNCIL REGUAL MEETING: CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL**

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

Members present:
Julie Blanchard – Chair
Lisa Conant
Jonathan Hand
Matthew O’Brien, Jr.
Matthew O’Brien, Sr. – Vice Chair
Lisa Thomas
Richard Williams – Secretary

Also present: John Elsesser – Town Manager

4. **PLEGDE OF ALLEGIANCE:**

All present stood to recite the pledge.

5. **AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS:**

(30 minutes – 5 minutes maximum per citizen)

Blanchard read a prepared statement to clarify her request at the previous meeting. The intention was not to create a new policy. Speakers may comment on Council business and Town services. The audience was reminded and encouraged to make contact via email so written responses can be given.

Fire Chiefs Ken Boutin and Bud Meyers – Wished to publicly recognize some volunteer fire fighters and EMS personnel for their actions at a house fire on December 30, 2019. Jim McLoughlin, Fire & EMS Administrator, was also present. The Chiefs’ Award of Excellence went to Firefighters Ryan Boutin, Peter Foment, and Justin Rondo who were present. EMS Captain Craig Malan was also recognized but not present at the meeting. A round of applause was given to the fire/EMS personnel. The Council and Town Manager were thanked for the support given to fire and emergency services over the years.

Elsesser stated there was another structure fire recently where he heard from other town’s departments that it was a good save of the house. It is nice to hear such compliments. Blanchard and others agreed.

Jennifer Burdette, Bear Swamp Road – Spoke about disturbing events between her daughter and a Coventry police officer. Her statement is attached.

Harold Haberem, 80 Cassidy Hill Road – Spoke about one of the goals listed for the Town Council’s 2020-2021 agenda – transparency. His statement is attached.

Carolyn Arabolos, 132 North Farms Road – Began about Blanchard trying to silence the citizens of Coventry at the previous Council meeting. Her statement is attached.
Catherine Kennelly, 2293 Main Street – Is attending the meeting this evening because something disturbing in happening in town. Her statement is attached.

Emma Eaton, 41 Sean Circle – She wants the attention of all Council members during her statement. Ms. Eaton spoke about the Volunteer Code of Conduct from the Handbook for Elected and Appointed Officials and Volunteers. Her statement is attached.

Kathleen Breitenwischer, 61 Mark Drive – Mentioned Blanchard’s statement at the start of this portion of the meeting in which Blanchard apologized if her comments were misunderstood. Why did O’Brien, Sr. attempt to call Breitenwischer out of order at the previous meeting? Because he did not like what she was saying? The truth hurts.

Linda Blakesley, 27 Barry Avenue – She commended the people who have spoken out on matters. Once an apology has been asked for, but not received, move on. Your positions are on the record. The only person we can control is ourselves. The 2019 CERC Town Profile indicates there are 777 people of color in town. The Council does not represent the make-up of the town. Have the parties and the Town recruited people of color? Blakesley urged that this be explored in the coming months. If people do not feel welcome, we are not doing a good job. Ms. Blakesley introduced ALICE from United Way, that is, Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. There are more than 400,000 people in the state that are above the poverty level but are in an ALICE household. Many are one emergency away from financial disaster. Coventry has 23% of ALICE households. She understands that the Chief of Police will be speaking about accreditation. How does the fitness level of officers affect that process? She feels it is important to meet the physical demands of the job and being able to perform the job. As a public service announcement, Blakesley encourages all residents to complete the census. Federal funding is contingent on the numbers.

Jason Blakesley, 27 Barry Avenue – He stated that he was arrested for growing medical cannabis even with his cannabis card. Sergeant Hicks was part of the investigation. The police department mistreats people. It stores citizen’s cars at the waste treatment plant under trees. Blakesley’s car was full of mice when he was able to retrieve it. Many department heads have had issues with their own equipment being there so no longer use the location for storage. Why does the police department use it then? Hicks almost hit Blakesley’s wife with his car while using his cell phone. Hicks almost ruined his life. Mark did not investigate his complaints.

This portion of the meeting is closed.

6. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES:
   6.A. December 23, 2019 with attachments
   Motion: I move that we accept the minutes of the December 23, 2019 meeting as amended.
   By: O’Brien, Jr. Seconded: Williams

With the following corrections:
- Page 6, th. rd paragraph – change “Hopkins” to Huckins”. Add “CDBG” before “grants” in the third sentence and before “grant” in the sixth sentence.
- Page 6, Item 6 – change “ZOE” to “ZEO” and change the first “if” to “it” in the
thirteenth sentence.

- Page 6, Public Safety – change the second sentence to read “O’Brien, Sr. noted that the BOE chose not to come to the Council to discuss the SRO and to instead focus on building security.”
- Page 7, Item 8 – change “account” to “accounted”.
- Page 7, Item 10 – change “He” to “Jim”.
- Page 7, Item 12, fourth sentence – change “misunderstanding” to “misunderstandings”.
- Page 7, Item 12, fifth sentence – change “suggest” to “suggested”.
- Page 7, Item 12, fifteenth sentence – add to the end of the sentence “as they have funded for 20+ years.”
- Page 7, Item 12, sixteenth sentence – change the sentence to read “O’Brien, Sr. stated charging market rate tuition was a way to put money into the fund.”
- Page 8, second paragraph, second sentence – change “be” to “get to”.
- Page 8, second paragraph, last sentence – add a closed quotation mark.
- Page 8, Economic Development, second paragraph – change “Farmers” to “Farmers’”.
- Page 8, Economic Development, second paragraph, fifth sentence – change “mean” to “means”.
- Page 8, Economic Development, second paragraph, seventh sentence – change the sentence to read “Eric Trott chairs that committee and the Town pays each year to be part of the group.”
- Page 8, Economic Development, third paragraph – change “Lippertrap” to “Liptrap”.
- Page 8, Economic Development, third paragraph, sixth sentence – change “are” to “is”.
- Page 9, sixth sentence – change “opposing” to “opposes”.
- Page 9, second to last sentence – change “Williams” to “Hand”.
- Page 10, first motion discussion, fourth sentence – add “plastic bag” in front of “tax”.
- Page 10, first motion discussion, eighth sentence – change “grants” to “grant” and add “we” after “that”.

Voting:
For: Hand, Conant, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams
Against: None
Abstain: None

6.B. January 6, 2020 with attachments
Motion: I move that we accept the minutes of the January 6, 2020 meeting.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Thomas

With the following corrections:
- Remove “Conant” from voting throughout.
- Page 1, Item 3 – change “Kathy” to “Kathleen”.
- Page 4, Item 6A., third bullet – change “Palma” to “Palmer” and “PREUP” to “PREA”.
- Page 5, Item 6.B., second bullet – change the sentence to read “Thomas commented that she was concerned about the January 2, 2020 Journal Inquirer article that referenced the letter that was published on the RTC website and in it O’Brien, Sr. had stated our platforms are vastly at odds. That felt hyper-partisan and divisive and that’s not what we were seeing at the table. Publicly at the table we were working together and hoped that is the direction we are going.”
Page 9, first paragraph – correct 2 instances of “counselling” to “counseling”.
Page 9, Item 7.A., third bullet – change “aware” to “award”.
Page 10, Item 8.A., second sentence – change “to” to “for”.
Page 10/11 – remove the third motion as being redundant.
Page 11 – No-Toll Resolution discussion – change the first sentence to read “Thomas’ concern was the proposed use of over $1.5 billion of the fund as proposed by the State Republican legislators.”
Page 11, No-Toll Resolution discussion, fourth sentence – add “does not” after “she”.

Voting:
For: Hand, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

6.C. January 13, 2020 with attachments
Motion: I move that we accept the minutes of the January 13, 2020 meeting.


With the following corrections:
- Item 1 – add “Sr.” after the first “O’Brien” and change the second mention of “Thomas” to Conant”.
- Item 2, sixth sentence – change “gird” to “grid”.
- Item 2, nineteenth sentence – add “Sr.” after “O’Brien”.

Voting:
For: Hand, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

7. 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 that we accept the Consent Agenda.

By: Conant Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Thomas asked that agenda items 8.F.5. and 8.F.6. be removed from the consent agenda.

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Conant, Thomas, Williams
Against: None
Abstain: None
8. REPORTS:
8.A. Council Chairwoman: Julie A. Blanchard
No report was presented.

8.B. Council Members:
Conant urges the Town to participate in the 2020 event marking 100 years of women’s right to vote. Volunteers are being sought for planning events. One event is for Girl Scouts to create a suffrage design as a badge project. Posters marking the anniversary have been received from the Secretary of State’s office. Conant would like these to hang in the Town Hall, the schools, and the Board of Education building if the Council agrees to this. The Secretary of the State will be holding an event for this centennial celebration.

8.C. Finance Committee: Matthew O’Brien, Sr., Chairperson
O’Brien, Sr.’s report is attached.


8.D. *Steering Committee: Matthew D. O’Brien, Jr. Chairperson

8.E. *COVRAA – John A. Elsesser:

8.F. Town Manager – John A. Elsesser:
8.F.1. Projects Update
Elsesser reported:
- The Folly Lane Bridge grant has been received.
- The Swamp Road intersection project meeting was held. A full signal redesign is needed to allow for a different type of signal, such as one that is camera controlled instead of one working on magnetic sensors. The impact is that one full construction season will be lost. More discussion is needed about the Northfield to Swamp connector. There has not been a meeting of the minds with the property owners whose land would be impacted. DOT was not happy with the right turn only option. If a concrete barrier where placed at Northfield emergency access would be from Forge. Will the State pay for the connector portion since they have rejected the right turn only from Northfield? We continue to go through the process of the design at this point.
- The meeting about the sewer line extension from Bolton was delayed by the State. We are working with our State elected officials and the Town Attorney to provide guidance in this matter.
- Downs Construction offered to provide a free estimate of the library project. They understand if the project goes forward they do not have an inside edge to getting the job. The project architect has forwarded files to the construction company to help in preparing the estimate. This will be presented at the February 18, 2020 Town Council meeting.
- The data backup project is going fairly well. Another rack was purchased. The backup system will be installed in the police station for the Town Hall and BOE buildings.
• We are working with the BOE’s final draft of the PESCE grant to replace the system that is eleven years old. The BOE has had a failure on their system and parts are no longer being made for that system. The core wires will remain and other components will be upgraded. We are submitting one combined grant asking for $204,000. The application will be under the BOE. This grant was noticed on short order and is highly competitive. Such a grant has not been offered in five to six years.

• The owner has to be a person, not a non-profit, for the free testing of a foundation. A low-income person is needed to satisfy the grant. Thomas asked if this need has been posted on the Town Manager’s page. Elsesser answered yes. Also the e-blast will be coming out soon and the newsletter is going to the printers.

• The Community Block grant will be an agenda item for the February 18, 2020 meeting. Right now, the application is being worked with the subject being Orchard Hills. An RFP for a consultant is being advertised. A public hearing is needed and the Council must vote on how to proceed.

8.F.2. Microgrid Update
The monitoring equipment was finished on Friday. An RFP will be issued. The installation of tiles for metering on all buildings is being finished up.

8.F.3. Crumbling Concrete Foundations: CFSIC Update
Anyone applying for the grant will go into a pending status. The insurance trust has a statutory expiration deadline and disappears in 1.5 years. There are more applications than they can process in that time. Unless the law is changed or the timeline removed they don’t want to be misleading anyone. Four more people from Coventry have come through.

8.F.4. UConn: IPP Graduate MPA and MPP Internship Program
Elsesser would like to try this program again. While Coventry did not have a good experience the first time through, many towns did. Some of those students in the program are now Town Managers. O’Brien, Sr. asked if Elsesser has a better feel on how to identify a good candidate? Elsesser stated that you have to act quickly to get your first choice candidate. Elsesser would like the Council to allow him to participate with the final decision being made at budget time.

8.F.5. *CCM: 2020 State Legislative Program
Thomas asked if this is something the Council can advocate for. Questions about some of these items can be talked about off line and then discussed at a future meeting.

8.F.6. *Warranty Deed: Grant to Joshua’s Tract, Parcel on Flanders Road
Thomas thanks Joshua’s Trust for being a partner in protecting land. The Schmidt property is a great piece of land and piece of history. It would provide riverfront access with possible canoe/kayak recreating. All can read more on the Joshua’s Trust website.

8.F.7. *Staff Meeting Minutes, 1/8/20

9. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:
9.A. 19/20-28: Consideration/Possible Action: Recommendation By Town Attorney To Repeal Ordinance: Article IV., Sec. 38-91 Through Sec. 38-96, Due To Changes in
State Law
Motion: I move that we approve the recommendation by the Town Attorney to repeal ordinance: Article IV., Sec. 38-91 Through Sec. 38-96, Due To Changes in State Law.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Hand

Voting:
For: Hand, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

9.B. 19/20-29: Consideration/Possible Action: Recommendation By Town Attorney To Consider A Revision To Section 70-88 Of The Town Code Entitled: “Public Gathering” To Correct A Typographical Error
Motion: I move that we approve the recommendation by the Town Attorney to consider a revision to Section 70-88 of the Town Code entitled: “Public Gathering” to correct a typographical error.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Hand

Voting:
For: Hand, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

10. NEW BUSINESS:
10.A. 19/20-36: Consideration/Possible Action: Police Department PREA Grant
Chief Palmer presented. A packet was sent in advance of the meeting to provide the Members with background information. This grant is administered by Impact Justice. The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) impacts all prisons, jails, county lockups, and police lockups. Palmer saw this grant noticed on one of his services and applied. The Coventry Police Department was awarded this competitive grant.

Conant congratulated CPD for winning the grant. Is there a planning committee associated with it? Palmer replied the committee will be made up of members from within the department and a facilitator from Impact Justice. The grant expires in July 2022. There is a planning period and implementation period. An audit of the holding facility will be done by a Department of Justice auditor. The outcome is to have a certified lockup and to have policy and procedures in place. Equipment will be upgraded to allow for additional video and audio recording. There is a required match. We will use in-kind services. Palmer and Bachhaus will set up the time tracking method to track the third-party cost share. O’Brien, Sr. asked if there will be overtime involved due to the training? Palmer replied that training is paid for by the grant. Once established, the procedures will be a model for other communities. There is no other certified lockup that Palmer is aware of. The State Police is working toward PREA compliance. Coventry will collaborate with them in developing the procedures. Hand asked when this might be implemented? Palmer would like to see it implemented within a year.

10.B. 19/20-37: Consideration/Possible Action: COPS Hiring Program/School
Resource Officer
Palmer continued to present. One of the Council’s goals is to look at School Resource Officers (SROs). This grant opportunity recently came up. Palmer had a discussion with the Superintendent who informed him that the BOE is not formally taking up this issue. Palmer is proponent of SROs and the Superintendent supports the concept. The BOE will have to be brought on board. This is a federal grant with the application due March 11, 2020. Such grant applications are extensive and require time to prepare. The grant provides for new officers with 75% of salary and benefits being paid out of the grant (training and equipment are not provided for). After that period the Town would have to keep that person or persons on for one more year at full cost. A trained officer can be put into the schools under the grant, but that would reduce the ranks of the police department. Palmer would rather that a brand-new officer not be placed as an SRO. The grant would allow the department to replace the experienced officer; it does take close to a year to recruit, hire, train, and outfit a new officer. Palmer would ask for one officer although the BOE and Superintendent would have some say. A memo of understanding would have to exist. Thomas stated that after three years we must commit to one additional year of funding the SRO. It has been problematic in town to fund additional police officers. Palmer would move one of the current officers to the position and use the grant to bring in a new officer. Once the grant period is over the SRO’s salary would have to be absorbed into the budget or the new officer would be out since the experienced officer in the SRO position would have seniority.

Elsesser asked if there is enough interest in this subject to begin a formal dialogue or set up a meeting with the BOE? Hand asked if the application deadline is realistic? Palmer replied that the announcement went out all over the country and everyone has the same time period. Some of the background work has been done in our case. O’Brien, Jr. asked what would be the main benefits to have a dedicated officer in the schools versus what we are doing now? What do other schools do? Most SROs are shared positions. Palmer will research how many SROs surrounding communities have in place and how those have been funded and provide that information to the Council. Palmer envisions one resource officer at the middle/high school complex the majority of the time. This should minimize issues before a patrol officer is called. It is not the duty of an SRO to arrest children. A Juvenile Review Board would be needed. The resource officer could spend a day or two at the other schools. Palmer would like to have the same officer serve in this role year after year so the students are familiar with the officer.

Blanchard is in favor of having a conversation with the BOE. O’Brien, Sr. is interested in a joint meeting. Under a shared position scenario the SRO’s salary could be partially paid for by BOE and partially by the Town. Palmer added that during summer vacations the police department burns through overtime to cover shifts. The SRO could cover some of these shifts as the officer would not be needed in the schools. There is still much work to be done on this subject. Conant has mixed feelings about the grant because of the funding issue. Three years goes by quickly and then we have the cost of another officer. In the meantime, we have the 25% match. If the community has an appetite for this great; otherwise we will run into issues. Thomas asked if there is a requirement for the SRO to remain in that position after four years? Palmer stated that is the expectation, not a requirement. The idea of an SRO is to be familiar with the schools, children, and staff. The spirit of the grant is to address the safety of the students. What is the commitment we are making to our students? Williams feels this is a great starting point on the subject. O’Brien, Sr. hopes and would expect the position to be continued. O’Brien, Sr. is willing to consider hiring an SRO as an
employee even without the grant. Hand asked if the ongoing funding would be from the Town or BOE? O’Brien, Sr. answered that would need to be worked out, if the BOE agrees they want to do this, and it could be a shared salary. That would be O’Brien, Sr.’s hope. The Superintendent is supportive of officers going up to the schools.

10.C. 19/20-38: Consideration/Possible Action: Fire Transition Study Committee Recommendation
Steve Pacholski and Jim McLoughlin presented. The report was provided in the packet. On the SWOT chart Thomas noticed in the External Threats box that lack of affordable housing was included. This is definitely lacking but how is that relevant in this case? Pacholski stated that the SWOT chart was developed with input from the members. One comment was to entice younger members the town needs to have appropriate housing for them. A few members have stepped away because they did not have housing. McLoughlin mentioned that the vision and mission statements and the core values were agreed upon and tweaked by those responding to calls. No short- or long-term savings is expected by combining the stations although it will increase efficiency and the quality of service. O’Brien, Sr. feels it is important to show the unity of the department so the marketing and rebranding will need seed money. It was apparent how well the two companies work together based on the fire response last night. O’Brien, Sr. appreciates the time and effort expended by the committee. McLoughlin agreed and the work product is reflective of this. Blanchard asked how the positions will be filled – by election? Pacholski replied that is not the suggestion of the committee and explained the selection process. Elsesser commented the process suggested is consistent with a model we have used within the police department. Hand thanked the whole group for the work.

Motion: I make a motion that we approve the FTC Phase 1 report and have them move on to Phase 2.

By: Hand
Seconded: O’Brien, Sr.

Discussion: We are excited and appreciate the hard work. Elsesser stated that at some point we did say merger 2020. The contract issues can be taken care of by mutual agreement. We have held off negotiating the MOU. We will start discussions using the existing contracts and come to new agreements with the associations. We believe the associations can serve a vital role and those will require office space and use of the buildings. The transitional costs and incentives can be phased into the budget. If incentives are not working we will have to reevaluate. Different people may want a different menu. For instance, if we offered a property tax credit some members may not own property or live over the town line. O’Brien, Sr. asked Pacholski to provide a prioritization of the recommended expenditure items.

Voting:
For: Hand, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

10.D. 19/20-39: Consideration/Authorization: Town Manager To Execute Revised Employment Agreement With Director Of Finance
O’Brien, Sr. suggested this be tabled for discussion until in Executive Session. Any action to be taken must be done outside of Executive Session.
After the Council exited from Executive Session:

**Motion:** I make a motion that the Town Manager be authorized to execute the Employment agreement with Amanda Backhaus, Director of Finance, as presented.

By: O'Brien, Sr.  Seconded: Williams

**Voting:**
For: Hand, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None


**Motion:** I make a motion to accept the audit.

By: O’Brien, Sr.  Seconded: Hand

**Discussion:** Staff was thanked for the wonderful work on this.

**Voting:**
For: Hand, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

**10.F. 19/20-41: Consideration/Possible Action: Board Of Education Request To Use Reserve Fund For Capital Expenditures For CIP Projects In Amount Of $98,500**

**Motion:** I make a motion that we approve the request of the Board of Education to use the reserve fund for capital expenditures for CIP projects in the amount of $98,500.

By: Thomas  Seconded: Hand

**Discussion:** This is in the CIP. It doesn’t hurt if the BOE asks for approval. This amount is for asbestos removal in the CHS cafeteria and removal of a wall for better traffic flow, water the filtration project, and air conditioning. BOE has been working with design/build firms. All members of the BOE approved and voted on this. There is $238,000 in that account.

**Voting:**
For: Hand, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

**11. MISCELLANEOUS/CORRESPONDENCE:**

**11.A. Haberern: Concerns Regarding Registrar Of Voters**

Blanchard stated that the Town does not have oversight of the registrar. The Secretary of State is investigating the Republican registrar. The Town does not have the authority to remove the registrar from office. That person is in the process of signing up for the necessary classes. There are eight modules to complete the certification process; scheduled classes may be cancelled if there is little participation. Generally, the modules are offered in order after an election. UConn is now offering these classes.
11.B. *Eversource: Support For CT Veterans Day Patriot Race

11.C. *Board Of Education: January 9, 2020 Meeting, Agenda & Minutes

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION:
Motion: I move 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: seven members of the Town Council, John Elsesser, Town Manager, and Amanda Backhaus, Financial Director.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Hand

Vote:
For: Hand, Conant, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams
Against: None
Abstain: None

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 subsection (b) of Section 1-210 with the following people in attendance: seven members of the Town Council, John Elsesser, Town Manager, and Amanda Backhaus, Financial Director.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Conant

Vote:
For: Hand, Conant, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams
Against: None
Abstain: None

Executive Session was exited from at 11:22 p.m.

13. ADJOURNMENT:
Motion: I move that we adjourn at 11:23 p.m.

By: Conant Seconded: O’Brien, Sr.

Vote:
For: Hand, Conant, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams
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.
Good evening town council members and thank you. My name is Jennifer Burdette and I am former Coventry resident of 20 years and a graduate of class of 89.

"There is no safety in silence" a quote from Coventry Town Minutes March 2013.

When my daughter was 15 years old and a freshman in high school, she received disturbing Facebook messages from a man in his thirties. This communication went on for months. Her age and his were immediately discussed. He specifically told her “trust is important’ ....complained about his marriage and job..how he gambled all night at the casino. Told her she was a bad girl, a wiseass, she sucked. I’m stalking your facebook page, don’t be scared. The conversation turned sexual quickly, with him discussing her sexual preferences with her. You are beautiful and I feel like a dirty old man looking at your pictures. He proclaimed he wanted to be special. He requested she not tell anyone about the picture he showed her and to not post on his facebook wall. Trust is important He encouraged her to send inappropriate photos to him, and told her as long as he immediately deleted them upon receiving he wasn’t breaking the law, and provided a private email for her to send them to. Trust is important. He told her she was lazy if she didn’t send photos, and hounded her repeatedly for them. He reminded her repetitively of his job title, quoting her nonstop on sexual assault statues, telling her 16 was good to go. Commanding she call him by his job title. Telling her other boys were competition for him.
When she expressed concern about a suicidal friend, he stated to her he is probably just doing it for attention. He tried to persuade her to walk to meet him on the town line while he was on duty at work. He proclaimed "I really don't give a ___" if your parents would be pissed that I am trying to hook up with you.

I'm sure we would all agree, that is truly disgusting and horrific. Classic predatory behavior we all recognize today.

Even more horrific, these words came from a Coventry Police Officer while he was on duty by his own written messages and on the Coventry Citizens time and tax dollars. Patrol car, full weapon arsenal, full police power. Coventry you paid for this officer to predate upon my daughter.

My daughter discovered this conversation was still on her facebook last year and contacted me immediately. This experience has traumatized her to today. Along with traumatizing her, this hurt and affected everyone who loves her.

\[\frac{2/4}{3/9}\]

I spoke with Chief Palmer immediately and was instructed to not talk to anyone about this. No need to call Troop K. The very next day, my daughter received a call from Chief Palmer stating Coventry Police were not investigating this further criminally, but they would consider perhaps sanctioning him.

Interestingly enough, Troop K felt differently, that this crime had occurred in Andover under their criminal jurisdiction and referred this criminal investigation to Major Crimes. No safety in silence.
This officer finally was placed on administrative leave, but at Chief Palmer's discretion retains his weapon paid for by Coventry citizens; I disagree with this choice strongly. I feared for my safety and outlined the various reasons why on my complaint. This officer's own father stated in writing to my daughter, his son performed this act due to stress in his life, but she should be complimented by it, because she is so beautiful any guy would do anything to be with her. So now he has the stress of this investigation, and we should not trust this officer to make proper legal, moral and safe decisions. I request the council ask the Chief to take this officer's Coventry issued weapon away.

I spend EVERY day afraid for my safety due to coming forward with this. Even DCF warned me to not drive through Coventry during this time.

Coventry Town Council apparently was never informed of this last year, which I find concerning and perhaps this never even went farther than the desk of the Police Chief, Town Attorney and Town Manager. Worried about a potential lawsuit...performing damage control...fear other potential victims may come forward? Even if unintentionally, this neglected the safety of the youth in town.

Town Council was muzzled into silence by the Town Manager last week. Instructed to not speak of this, or have an opinion or comment. Even though a few members received a letter of concern, they cannot place it on their town council agenda, which appears to go against the council's own protocol, from my understanding.

So I ask, how do you feel about being silenced? How do you feel, the victim's mother had to inform you months later?
Who will change the town notification laws, and require the police chief and town manager to notify the superintendent, School administration, and town council members when a Coventry employee in a position of trust, has been placed on leave for investigation of inappropriate behavior toward minors?

Is anyone monitoring what town employees are doing on the Internet while on duty for the Town of Coventry?

As this man himself said to my daughter, TRUST IS IMPORTANT. Well, Council, it certainly is, and he has destroyed the trust Coventry placed in him.

Since you can’t break the silence, I just have.

Protect the youth of Coventry, send a strong message that wielding your badge as a tool of sexual intimidation and coercion to a minor is NOT acceptable behavior, and make sure Michael Hicks never has police power in Coventry again!

Trust is important.

Silence is broken.

Thank you

Jennifer Burdette
Howard Haberern

Tonight, I will be addressing one of the goals listed for our Town Council's 2020-2021 agenda.

Transparency

Transparency and freedom of speech are two important ingredients that are required in order to have a true democracy.

At the last Town Council meeting I was going to speak under “The Audience of Citizens” portion about some ugly issues that are still existing in our town.

Instead of me being able to speak and exercise my Freedom of Speech rights, I was Censored.

The citizens of Coventry were told that we can no longer talk freely about different subjects. We have had that right for as long as I can remember.

The fact is that our Town Council Chairwomen, Julie Blanchard, illegally changed the rules for the Audience of Citizens.

Without knowing at that time that this was illegal and respecting her position as the Chairwomen, I instead refrained from speaking and left the building.

Only after I got home and read the rules did I realize that Chairwomen Julie Blanchard had illegally changed the rules to suit her agenda, to protect her friends, the O'Brien's.

Days later interesting articles were printed in both the Chronicle and JI regarding this illegal action.

Chronicle QUOTE:

It doesn’t matter what the audience wants to talk about
“It is denying members of the public the right to discuss what they want with the people. “
Chronical Quote:

"The choice of limiting what can be discussed appears to go against the Boards Code of Conduct."

Ji- Article quoting ACLU Ct. Legal Director Daniel Barret:

A prime purpose of the public comment section of council meetings is” for voters to speak their mind and to evaluate their job performance.” “That’s the heartbeat of democracy.”

Ji Article from Hank Murry- Labor and Employment lawyer:

One of the founding principles of the First Amendment is that government officials are not “suppose to regulate the content of speech.”

Ji:-William Dunlap a Quinnipiac Law Professor:

It is highly problematic the council wouldn’t follow it’s own rules and regulations. Boards are generally required to follow their own rules and if that is going to interfere with someone’s ability to speak at a meeting the court is likely to take it seriously.”

To sum it up Chairwomen Julie Blanchard has illegally tried to eliminate our Freedom of Speech rights!

I wonder why she once again wasn’t willing to speak to the press. Maybe Transparency applies to only what is on her agenda! Maybe she knew it was illegal all along and didn’t want to talk about it?
You see, people like me are upset and want our Town Council to do what is best for our town and to represent all citizens of Coventry fairly and without bias, to allow us Freedom of speech.

People like me have never been so disappointed by the actions and unprofessional remarks of certain Town Council Members.

I have been a Coventry resident for over 40 years, and prior to last month have never spoken in a negative way about any Council Member.

I wonder what happened, maybe our council should be transparent about that. Get to the root cause.

Who and what actions started this? Why are the newspapers concerned enough that negative articles are being printed?

Funny, it wasn’t like this when Republican Mike Sobol was on our Town Council. Maybe this is a clue. He did what was best for the Town of Coventry, so he was dropped from the Republican slate by O’Brien Senior.

“Transparency.”

Transparency is a joke and just meaningless words when your Freedom of Speech is eliminated, when the illegal changing of our rules are allowed.

I don’t have to tell anybody about the importance of Freedom of Speech. Without it we don’t have a democracy. Many a brave soldier has died to protect that right.

Countries go to war fighting for that right. Journalist are murdered defending that right!

Freedom of Speech:

Here is a perfect example of Freedom of Speech:
Look at what Council Member Matt O’Brien Junior was legally allowed to say under his Freedom of Speech rights:

That “All Democrats are Godless people who compromise with the devil.”

Concerning and very disappointing, but he had that right to say that under his Freedom of Speech rights.

However it does violate the oath he took when he was sworn in, UNDER GOD, in order to become a Town Council member.

Transparency:

So it is important that Council Member Matt O’Brien Junior be transparent and let all of the citizens of Coventry know if he still shares and believes in that statement that he made in Caesar Park that day.

I’m hoping that all citizens of Coventry attend or watch the Web Casts of Board and Council meetings. Watch the actions of our elected representatives.

No longer can we just sit by; we must always vote for the best candidates by knowing the truth of their actions and not be fooled by false Big Red campaign signs that were used last year.

Like Mahatma Gandhi said years ago “Tomorrows future depends on what we do today.

So, it is today, that all citizens of Coventry should be watching and voting accordingly to what our representatives do every day. Our future does depend on it.

I’m handing in my speech to be included into today’s record minutes.

Thank you.
Coventry Town Council, Audience of Citizens, January 21, 2020:

At the last Town Council meeting, Chairwoman Julie Blanchard attempted to silence citizens with a directive that the Audience of Citizens portion of the meeting focus only on the business before the Council and to not call out any council members by name. There is no such mandate in the Coventry Town Council Standing Rules of Procedure. As stated in its introduction, the rules of procedure are “designed to enable the Council to discharge its duties expeditiously, fairly, and completely in the spirit of open government”.

Attempting to silence its citizens does not equate to open government.

The Audience of Citizens is a standard agenda item for each Council meeting, as listed in Section 2.04 of the rules of procedure. Section 2.10 specifically addresses the Audience of Citizens portion of the Council meetings. During this time when the Council has opportunity to hear directly from citizens, the Chair is to “encourage brevity and conciseness”, meaning he or she would ask speakers to provide their commentary within a reasonable amount of time – “such as five (5) minutes”.

The Chair does not have the authority to direct the commentary during this time. The people of this town have the right to stand before this Council to address anything that concerns them regarding Coventry. This includes requests made of our elected leaders.

What the Chair does have the authority to do is to “appoint a member of the Council to discuss” the concerns voiced by a particular citizen if the concerns have not been resolved. This Council has heard from some of its citizens more than once regarding their unmet and unanswered requests. I would ask Chairwoman Blanchard if she has appointed anyone from this Council to address the concerns that have been raised.

As I am one of those citizens and I have not heard anything from Ms. Blanchard nor have I been made aware of any Council member being appointed to address my or my neighbors’ concerns, I would conclude that the answer is “No”.

Madame Chair, I understand that you, like myself, are affiliated with a political party though not the same party. I respect that your party holds the majority position on both the Town Council and the Board of Education. However, in your role as Town Council Chair, your primary obligation of duty is to the citizens of this town and not to your party.

Carolyn G. Arabolos  
132 North Farms Road, Coventry
Good evening. My name is Catherine Kennelly, 2293 Main St. I am here tonight because something very disturbing is happening in our town.

My first concern came when I saw oversized negative and misleading signs all over town leading up to the last election. It was only well after the election that I learned the signs were encouraged and/or influenced by Joseph Visconti, a politician in West Hartford who is on the fringe of politics, who served on the town Council several years ago, then ran twice unsuccessfully for governor, first as an independent candidate and garnered only 1 per cent of the vote, then as a Republican when he withdrew before the Republican Party convention. He also ran unsuccessfully prior to that for the US Congress. As recently as August, 2018, Mr. Visconti was criticized by both Democratic and Republican leaders for making racist remarks about the then-candidate for Attorney General, William Yong. Yet he managed to persuade our town Republicans to wage a negative campaign. All Coventry citizens should find this disturbing.

We then had the unfortunate incident at a November Board of Education meeting when both of the O'Briens publicly used inappropriate language. Subsequently, Mr. O'Brien Jr. posted Mr. Oros's personal information on the Facebook page of Mr. Visconti. Fortunately, it was subsequently removed.

Following these incidents, several citizens spoke at multiple Council meetings, repeatedly asking for public apologies from the O'Briens or at least an apology to the students who were in attendance at that Board meeting. Neither has done so or has even defended his behavior, although Mr. O'Brien Sr. at the last meeting lamely backtracked after 2 months and tried to claim he had acted as a private citizen.

The most recent event was at the last Council meeting when the Council chair, Ms. Blanchard, misused her position when she tried to restrict the public's right to free speech. A speaker was actually called out of order, so I do not think your words were mischaracterized.

I am not a political person. In the 4 towns I have lived in as an adult, this is the first one in which I have felt compelled to publicly address what I perceive as something similar to what happened in a European country prior to World War II. I beg the remaining Republican representative on the Council to intervene and lead his party in a more civil and positive way than what is happening now. Perhaps the Council as a body can effect change.
First, from the Handbook for Elected and Appointed Officials and Volunteers, published by the Town of Coventry, I want to remind all Council members of the following items from the Volunteer Code of Conduct you are all bound to abide by:

1. Acting professionally and in the best interest of the Town of Coventry at all times.

2. Treating people with respect – even when they disagree.

3. Avoiding discourteous or abusive language or conduct towards others while representing the Town of Coventry.

Mr. Matt O’Brien Jr. and Mr. Matt O’Brien Sr. have both quite clearly violated all of these first three tenets, and also clearly don’t have much respect for the fact that they are bound by them.

Second, Chairwoman Blanchard’s attempt to restrict the free speech of this town’s citizens at the last Town Council meeting by limiting the content of statements made at Audience of Citizens is out of line and contrary to the democratic process. Audience of Citizens exists as a way for citizens to express concerns about their town in whatever form they take. It is a key way that this Council maintains transparency and accountability as an elected body. We attend these meetings to communicate issues we feel are of significant importance to this town that we are all rooted in and care deeply for. Additionally, this country relies on the first amendment of the constitution to
limit the government from abridging the freedom of speech and gives people the right to petition government for a redress of grievances - in other words, the exact reason all of us have been coming here for months to try and right the wrongs that were done surrounding the BOE meeting on November 14.

Lastly, I speak for myself when I say that I don't want this to continue to drag on. Council has important business to attend to. It is my hope that this issue can be properly put to rest and that work can progress without need of citizens coming here to continue to demand accountability and transparency.

However, if members of this council who ran and were elected on a promise of absolute transparency in government continue to avoid communicating openly on the issue of their clearly unethical conduct, then I would request that per article 2.10 of the Coventry Town Council's Standing Rules of Procedure, which reads in part

"If it appears that, after a reasonable period of time, such as five (5) minutes, the particular citizen's concerns cannot be resolved, the Chair should appoint a member of the Council to discuss those concerns more fully with that citizen and report back to the Council. “

That the Chair agrees to appoint a member of council to address this issue formally, since they are not being handled in a responsible manner by the parties directly involved.
The need for this request is still easily avoidable if the members in question will simply acknowledge that their actions at and around the November 14 Board of Education meeting were in error, that they feel remorse for them, and that they regret the presence of children and their families when this all took place.