

Town Council Steering Committee Meeting
January 25, 2021
Remote meeting via ZOOM

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Matthew O'Brien, Jr.
Present: Matthew O'Brien, Jr., Julie Blanchard, Jonathan Hand, Lisa Conant
Also present: John Elsesser, Town Manager
2. **Acceptance of Minutes:**
Lisa Conant moved to accept the Steering Committee meeting minutes of December 28, 2020.
The motion was seconded by Jonathan Hand and carried on unanimous vote.

3. **Reports:**

- A. **Chairman:** No report.
- B. **Committee members:** no report.
- C. **Boards & Commissions/Vacancies/Expiration Reports:** Julie Blanchard noted some updates that need to happen on the Board report, including the departure of Mark Kiefer, Director of Public Works, who needs to be replaced on the Local Traffic Authority. Our Zoning Agent has changed and also needs to be updated. Also, the president is currently blank, but John had indicated that is a software function that gets updated.

John Elsesser noted that sometimes the lists don't adequately identify committees that are struggling. The Energy Conservation/Alternative Energy Committee is non-functional. Right now the Chair is the only person who is active. From time to time two people show up, but that is still not a quorum. He has instructed his intern to do something to try to push it. Any assistance the Steering Committee can provide to recruit for that committee would be very much appreciated. They haven't been able to have a meeting in six or seven months, and we need them. Jonathan Hand said an overview of what the committee has accomplished might be helpful as we are trying to recruit. John replied they have had broad involvement, from the technical side to community events. They were in charge of the Solarize Coventry initiative. They pushed us to do the LED lighting conversions of all the Town buildings. They've saved the taxpayers a lot of money. They helped us with the Town's Sustainability Plan. They've run energy fairs at the Farmers' Market. They were the group that helped us sell the compost bins. They have helped us promote home energy audits, and the C-Pace program for businesses. They also have a representative on the School Energy Building Committee to look at energy issues there, and helped us implement the bonding for school energy projects. In the past we've had some very good energy, engineering and solar people on the committee, who have shared their wisdom. It was very helpful to us. Matthew asked if they would be involved with projects like the Library. John replied yes. They got the Library involved in the LED lighting initiative. We also ran through some of the items for the Library boiler upgrade and dehumidification. At some point we'll talk about solar for the Library, but we have to get the leaks stopped first because the roof is a logical place for it.

Lisa Conant asked if the committees are struggling because people are not showing up for meetings, or because they lack members. John replied both. He thinks it's mostly because people aren't showing up. He will have to get their names. Lisa asked how many seats are on the Energy Conservation/Alternative Energy Committee. Jonathan Hand looked it up

on the report, and said it's five members, with three-year staggered terms. Matthew asked if the committee serves as a liaison for the various energy initiatives such as the home energy audits. John Elsesser replied yes. The committee's involvement often reduces the amount of work required by Town staff. Also residents like when these energy programs are presented by their neighbors.

4. **Consideration/possible Action: Modification of Charge to Human Rights Commission:**

Documents relating to modifications to the scope of this Commission were reviewed. Julie Blanchard said she thought we would potentially have an annual review of any Police Department complaints. Jonathan Hand noted that the document prepared by John's intern Olivia contains some of that language under item four, review of complaints. John Elsesser offered to pull the various points from both documents together into a consolidated document, and put together a supplemental charge for Council consideration. A supplemental charge would not require modification of the ordinance. The Steering Committee agreed with this approach.

5. **Consideration/possible action: Combination of Human Services Advisory and Youth Services Advisory Committees:**

Bylaws and charges to these committees were reviewed. John Elsesser noted that the Youth Services bylaws were originally required by a grant, but the funding was switched to a different agency and they didn't require it anymore. Both groups are intended to bring in outside people to coordinate services, so they are not duplicative, but the reality is that Youth Services is really a component of Human Services. Often, if there are youth issues, you need to work with the parents too. Many of the people served on both groups. We are having quorum problems because of scheduling issues. Consolidation to one group makes sense, which would make for one less meeting. It's just a matter of fine-tuning the wording. Jonathan Hand said the summary document from Annemarie Sundgren appears to do a good job of combining the committees. John Elsesser noted that no ordinances are involved. The Committee agreed to forward the document authored by Annemarie Sundgren to the February 1, 2021 Town Council Meeting for consideration. John Elsesser will prepare a draft charge for the Council's review.

6. **Consideration/possible action: Update to Town of Coventry Affirmative Action Plan:**

John Elsesser identified the changes that were made in the draft document since the prior review, including the workforce analysis and the goals on page 16. Utilization analysis is the area we need to concentrate on, which starts on page 20.

The Committee reviewed the hiring goals on pages 23 and 24, and agreed that the goals for women and minority populations were appropriate. The emphasis on recruitment partners for minority representation was also agreed upon. Lisa Conant suggested reaching out to UConn. John replied that it can be a challenge due to personnel turnover there, but recruiting in their publications might be something to look at. Lisa suggested the Office of Diversity as a resource. Matthew asked what outlets we are currently using for recruitment. John replied it depends on the type of job. If it's clerical in nature, we use our online subscriptions and local newspapers. We also go to the Department of Labor job bank, which has the broadest distribution. We don't use Indeed and other online job sources because the volume of inappropriate submissions is overwhelming. At the managerial or technical level, in addition to our web-based and DOL listings, we also go through their professional associations, and CCM, which has a job bank. Municipal jobs over the years have almost been turned into guilds. For example, to become a town clerk, you have to have two years of training as an assistant town clerk, and to be an assessor you have to have five years working in an assessor's office, so how do you get your foot in the door? In a lot of circumstances, the first place you cut is the assistants, so there is no growth coming up of people who are able to meet job requirements. It's a problem statewide, in that you need a certified employee. We are going to have to look at alternatives on a statewide

level for these specialized jobs, or he doesn't know how we're going to get new people in the door and trained. We need to come up with solutions to break down the barriers. Part of that may be internships to get people interested in the jobs. UConn is supposed to have an Institute of Public Service under their charter, but they dropped it. Lisa Conant indicated that the new leadership at UConn is very committed to diversity, so you might find a receptive ear there now. John said that we will check with the Office of Diversity - that is very helpful information.

John Elsesser made another point about the Affirmative Action Plan - it can be amended at any time by the Council if we find something we don't like about it. Matthew O'Brien asked if we are ready to send it to the Council for consideration. He thinks we are. Jonathan Hand made a motion to recommend to the Council to adopt the affirmative action plan as amended on 1/21/2021 for the Town of Coventry. Lisa Conant seconded the motion. The motion carried on unanimous vote. John thanked the Council for helping him get this UConn intern, who is producing a lot of work that was long on his list of things to get done. It's very helpful and she has done a great job. On your next agenda you will see a couple of other simple things from her on some community issues that we want to get to, such as a forestry committee, some other lake issues, water conservation, and other good community things that we just never had time to work on.

7. Adjournment:

Jonathan Hand moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:39 PM. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and carried on unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone
Town Council Clerk