Minutes
Town Council Steering Committee Meeting
January 27, 2020
Town Hall Conference Room B

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Matt O’Brien, Jr.
   Present: Matthew O’Brien, Jr., Jon Hand, Lisa Conant, Julie Blanchard
   Also present: John Elsesser, Bud Meyers

2. Acceptance of Minutes, December 23, 2019:
   The Steering Committee reviewed the minutes of December 23, 2019 and made corrections as
   attached. Moved by Jon Hand, seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved.

3. Consideration/Possible Action: Modifications to Ordinances: Inspection/Permit, Open
   Burning:
   Bud Meyers, Fire Marshal, was asked to join the discussion on revisions to the inspection/permit
   and open burning ordinances. He distributed a January 27, 2020 letter highlighting four points:
   • Allowing delegation of authority
   • Providing procedures for open burning
   • Enforcement for non-compliance
   • Ensuring proper fuels for burning
   He discussed issues with burning construction debris. Outdoor furnaces are not the problem
   they were and are enforced by the State DEEP. Penalties are limited with warnings usually the
   first option. Open burning should be farther from buildings and property lines and no larger
   than 5 x 5. No unattended burning should be allowed.

   The fee schedule has not changed since 1991 and should be updated to reflect cost of doing
   business.

   The committee asked for specific recommendations for fees which John Elsesser said he could
   have Bud; Jim McLoughlin and Joe Callahan develop and compare to similar towns.

   They could also bring in the Town Attorney to help with language on distances from structures
   and property lines for open burning and what constitutes a nuisance. Also need to define what a
   responsible adult is.

4. Reports:
   b. Committee members: none.
   c. Possible recommendations/vacancy list/Board & Commission list: Steering reviewed the
      vacancy report and decided they need to focus on the Energy and Veterans’ committees.

5. Reappointments:
   a. HUD Housing Rehab/Fair Housing Commission: Roach. Jonathan Hand moved, Lisa Conant
      seconded recommending to the Town Council the reappointment of Marjorie Roach for a
      term to expire 12/31/2021. Unanimously approved.


d. **Pension & Retirement Board: Murzyn.** Jonathan Hand moved, Lisa Conant seconded to table until next meeting – no signature on form. Unanimously approved.

e. **Appointments:**
   Jon Hand moved, Matthew O’Brien, Jr. seconded to add the application of Barbara Pare for consideration for appointment to the Eastern Regional Tourism District. Unanimously approved.

   a. **Eastern Regional Tourism District: Sobol/Pare.** The two candidates were discussed and it was agreed that both were qualified candidates. It was mentioned that many of the meetings take place in Norwich, where Michael Sobol works. The option of having one person serve as our representative and the other serve as an alternate or proxy was discussed. John Elsesser was asked to check into this option.

   Jon Hand moved to recommend the appointment of Michael Sobol to serve as the Town’s representative to the Eastern Regional Tourism District, seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved.

   Lisa Conant moved to recommend the appointment of Barbara Pare as an alternate to the Eastern Regional Tourism District if allowed, seconded by Jon Hand and unanimously approved.


7. **Consideration/Possible Action: Policy for Council Interaction with Town Staff:**
   No action taken: waiting to see whether this is an issue. Julie asked that the 2nd attachment to the agenda be Joan Lewis’ original memo.

8. **Consideration/Possible Action: Rescinding Ordinance No. 125, Sections 2-271 to 2-274, Insurance Advisory Committee:**
   Discussed the proposed ordinance prepared by Duncan Forsyth, Town Attorney. Motion by Jonathan Hand, seconded by Lisa Conant, to recommend to Council calling a public hearing for Tuesday, February 18th before the Council meeting. Unanimously approved.

9. **Discussion: Repeal of the Public Gathering Ordinance 70-88:**
   Matthew O’Brien, Jr. started the discussion of changes to the Public Gathering ordinance and issues raised at the Council. Matthew also mentioned he sent a letter to Council members offering further detail. Chris Morgan’s key points were:
   - 30 days to process permit is prohibitively long
   - Age 21 negates younger folks
   - Why should a non-elected bureaucrat (Town Manager) be the judge of good moral character
- The $50 fee is inappropriate
- What is the purpose of the ordinance and the 300-person threshold

Lisa Conant stated examples demonstrated around the nation which got out of control and that pre-planning is a necessity for public safety.

Jon Hand asked for advice from the Town Attorney, Police Chief, Fire Chief.

The possibility of discussing with the Local Emergency Coordinating Committee was offered by John Elsesser.

Options for consideration included having a pre-planned location(s) which could allow for a faster turn-around time.

10. Adjournment:
Matthew O’Brien, Jr. moved to adjourn at 9:07 PM, seconded by Jon Hand and unanimously approved. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

John A. Elsesser
Town Manager
AGENDA
Town Council Steering Committee
Special Meeting December 23, 2019, 6:30 P.M.
Town Hall Conference Room B

1. Call To Order, Roll Call
   The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by O’Brien, Jr.

   Present: Matthew O’Brien, Jr., Jonathan Hand, Lisa Conant, Blanchard (arrived)
   Absent: None
   Also present: John Elsesser, Town Manager

2. Acceptance Of Minutes: November 25, 2019
   Motion: I move to accept the minutes of the November 25, 2019 meeting.

   By: Conant  Seconded: Hand

   With the following correction:
   • Page 3, Item 8, 5th line from the bottom – add “at the same time to all Council Members” at the end of the sentence.

   Voting:
   For: O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
   Against: None
   Abstain: None

3. Reports:
   3.A. Chairperson

   3.B. Committee Members

   3.C. Possible Recommendations/Vacancy List/Board & Commission List
       The board member report was reviewed. There are no recommendations since the last review. Hand mentioned that this list will get shorter as some boards are disbanded. The elimination of the Insurance Board will require a public hearing the negate the charge. Elsesser will check if the letter was distributed to the volunteers of the Personnel Appeals board.
       No recommendations since last review.

4. Resignations/Not Wishing To Be Reappointed:
   4.A. Veterans Memorial Commission: Kelly
       Motion: I move to accept the resignation of Peter Kelly from the Veterans Memorial Commission with thanks for his service.
By: Hand  Seconded: Conant

Voting:
For: O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

Elsesser added that the Cemetery Commission is not interested in taking on the Veterans Memorial Commission. However, they will try to recruit someone from the VFW community to serve on the commission.

5. Reappointments:

5.A. Ad-Hoc Farmers' Market Operating Committee: Coughlin
Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Janine Coughlin to the Ad-Hoc Farmers Market Operating Committee; term to expire 12-06-2022.

By: Hand  Seconded: Conant

Voting:
For: O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

5.B. Capitol Region Council Of Governments: Marek
Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Stephen Marek to the Capitol Regional Council of Governments; term to expire 01-01-2021

By: Hand  Seconded: Conant

Voting:
For: O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

Elsesser noted that Marek has served two terms and wishes to continue as the representative from Coventry with CROG.

5.C. Conservation Commission: Lowe
Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Leroy Lowe, Jr., to the Conservation Commission; term to expire 01-01-2024

By: Hand  Seconded: Conant

Voting:
For: O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

5.D. Conservation Commission: Proctor (E)
Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Robert Proctor to the Conservation Commission; term to expire 01-01-2024

By: Hand Seconded: Conant

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

5.E. HUD Housing Rehab/Fair Housing Commission: Grady
Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Dorothy Grady to the HUD Housing Rehab/Fair Housing Commission; term to expire 12-31-2021

By: Hand Seconded: Conant

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

5.F. Parks & Recreation Commission, Alt; Carlson
Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Beverly Carlson as an Alternate on the Parks & Recreation Commission; term to expire 01-01-2022.

By: Hand Seconded: Conant

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

5.G. Parks & Recreation Commission; Gallo-Hall
Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Marie Gallo-Hall to the Parks & Recreation Commission; term to expire 01-01-2022.

By: Conant Seconded: Hand

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

5.H. Pension & Retirement Board; Emanuele
Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Benedict Emanuele to the Pension & Retirement Board; term to expire 01-01-2023.

By: O’Brien, Jr.  Seconded: Hand

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

5.I. Pension & Retirement Board; Jatkowski
Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Paul Jatkowski to the Pension & Retirement Board; term to expire 01-01-2023.

By: Conant  Seconded: O’Brien, Jr.

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

5.J. Pension & Retirement Board; Powers
Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of David Powers to the Pension & Retirement Board; term to expire 01-01-2023.

By: Hand  Seconded: Conant

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

5.K. Veterans Memorial Commission; Lowe, Jr.
Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Leroy Lowe, Jr. to the Veterans Memorial Commission; term to expire 01-01-2022.

By: Hand  Seconded: Conant

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None
Appointments:

1.A. Courant: State Says Eastern CT Tourism Group Must Return $150K

Elsesser mentioned this was discussed in a previous meeting about trying to find a person for this role. The law was enacted in the May/June timeframe. The meetings are held in Norwich during the day. The Group has not been holding meetings because a quorum cannot be reached, which is the basis for the call to return the funds. Every town in eastern Connecticut sends a representative with Bolton being the line designating that region. This is likely in response to the quiet corner never getting any money. The suggestion was to approach the parties to get the word out that a representative for Coventry is being sought.

1.B. Inland Wetlands Agency Alt.: Choate

Elsesser stated that the historical process is to call the interested party in for a discussion about their philosophies to be sure that those are in tune with the commission/board. This person looks well qualified. He suggests this person be invited to the next meeting for an introduction/discussion.

Motion: I move to table this matter until a discussion with the interested party is held.

By: Hand Seconded: Conant

Voting:
For: O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

1.C. Senior Housing Alternatives Study Committee, At-Large Member: Twerdy

Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council the appointment of John Twerdy; to a term for the life of the committee.

By: Hand Seconded: Conant

Discussion: The charge of the committee will now be developed as there is a number of members needed for a quorum – Christine Pattee, Aline Hoffman, Sondra Stave, Roberta Wilmot, John Twerdy, Rudy Vinkels – these people have much experience. One more Democrat can be added and the balance will be proper. Each of the following will have a representative – Town Council, Housing Authority, and Human Services.

Voting:
For: O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

7. Consideration/Possible Action: Policy For Council Interaction With Town Staff

Blanchard commented that she is still mulling this over. She recently experienced the red tape that can become involved about someone wanting to ask questions of Town Staff. As elected officials the chain of command should be observed. Questions with simple answers are not the problem. The issue arises when research involving Staff time is required. For these cases, there should be a formal process in place. Most questions are supposed to go through the Chair of the Town Council or if involving Town Staff the avenue should be the Town Manager’s office. Hand requested that answers to questions be distributed to the entire Council or the appropriate subcommittee to provide transparency. Elsesser added that the taking of Staff’s time has not been a huge issue.

Motion: I move that this matter be continued to a future meeting.

By: Hand  Seconded: Conant.

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

8. Consideration/Possible Action: Modifications To Ordinances:

Inspection/Permit, Open Burning

Elsesser reported this has been surfaced for three items that are being suggested to undergo fee changes. The philosophy being that we do not charge more than it costs to provide the service. These fees have not been changed in some time. Meyers gets a stipend of $500 per month for his services. Noel Waite, having more plan review experience than Meyers, will be asked to do these reviews when they surface.

Meyers is suggesting a crackdown on open burning that is more than a ceremonial bonfire. The current regulation allows for a fire that is not larger than five feet in any direction. People moving to the country have an expectation of being able to cook and/or have a fire in the backyard. While not quash that expectation too much, there are health concerns to be considered and that people not do have a fire and a crowd every weekend.

Conant asked how this could be possibly be enforced? By a fine of $200 or jail? Hand commented that the town size and population density can be considered as a nod to the rural character. Smoke does have a dissipating
area. He feels there should be a limiting of scope and clearly defining of what this should accomplish for Coventry and then research what other towns do. O’Brien, Jr. added air quality, fire size, and what is in the fires must be considered. Burning hazardous materials is different than burning a tree. There is a state law against burning leaves. Coventry will accept collected leaves without cost at the transfer station.

Elsesser will speak to Meyers about the bullet points and what the intended outcome is.

This matter was tabled until the January 27, 2020 meeting.

9. Adjournment
Motion: I move for adjournment at 7:11 p.m.

By: Hand Seconded: Conant.

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Conant
Against: None

Respectfully Submitted,

Yvonne B. Filip
Yvonne B. Filip
Town Council Clerk

PLEASE NOTE: These minutes are not official until approved by the Steering Committee at the next Committee meeting. Please see the next Steering Committee meeting minutes for approval or changes to these minutes.
January 27, 2020

Dear Steering Committee Members,

As a Fire Marshal, it is my responsibility to ensure citizens are safe from fire and other life safety hazards. There are specific fire codes that are in place to keep the public safe from fires/smoke that can occur in buildings. When it comes to open burning, municipalities may adopt regulations in accordance with Ct. Agency Regs. CGS § 22a-174(f). This allows the open burning of non-processed wood under the following circumstances: (1) the burning is conducted in accordance with any restrictions imposed on it by the local official or DEEP; and (2) the burning does not constitute a nuisance. These provisions apply to all types of property, even if it does not require a permit.

When the Fire Marshal’s Office, Coventry Police and/or Fire Departments receive calls for outside fires, it is our duty to respond and take every complaint seriously, including smoke that could be creating nuisance problems. Although the smell of wood burning smoke may be appealing to some people, studies have indicated threatening effects on human health caused from exposure to this smoke. Smoke contains fine particles, also known as fine particulate matter, which are microscopic and can get into the eyes and respiratory system, leading to symptoms such as burning eyes, runny nose, and other illnesses, such as bronchitis. The particulates may also worsen asthma symptoms and trigger asthma attacks, heart attacks, stroke, irregular heart rhythms, and heart failure; especially for those who are already at risk for these conditions.

Implementing this proposed ordinance change will better educate citizens and help to regulate outside fires. Permitting situations where open burning proves to be unsafe, and/or smoke is causing significant interference with another person’s use and enjoyment of their property to be remedied and/or eliminated by:

- Allowing the Fire Marshal to delegate his authority;
- Providing legal documentation to follow when dealing with the person(s) responsible for open burning;
- Taking action(s) to stop the problem or face prosecution for non-compliance, and;
- Ensuring proper use of correct fuels when burning.

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at bmeyers@coventryct.org or via cell phone at (860) 234-2195.

Respectfully,

Bud Meyers
Fire Marshal
Town of Coventry