MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL
FEBRUARY 18, 2020
TOWN HALL ANNEX

Public Hearing, 7:00 p.m.
Community Development Block Grant Small Cities Program

Regular Meeting, 7:30 p.m.

1. **Public Hearing, 2020 Community Development Block Grant Program**

2. **Regular Council Meeting, 7:30 P.M.**

3. **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 (arrived at 8:09 p.m.)

   Members absent: Richard Williams

   Also present: John Elsesser – Town Manager

4. **Pledge Of Allegiance:**
   Council members and Staff stood to recite the pledge.

5. **Audience Of Citizens:**
   (30 minutes – 5 minutes maximum per citizen)

   Christine Pattee, 98 Brookline Road – Thanked the Council for setting up the Senior Housing Alternatives Study committee. The first real meeting took place this morning and the Members are eager to get into the matter.

   Pattee stated the updated Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) has been completed and is being distributed to Boards and Commissions. This is the second decade that she has been part of the POCD. This is where Pattee gets to be a policy maker. Excellent staff support has been provided from Eric Trott. Bill Jobbagy has been the writer of the POCD for those two decades; Bill is a superb writer. Our POCD is being used as a model in other rural towns. It is unusual for this to be written by the citizens. Simsbury paid $200,000 for theirs to be written. Other than Staff’s time, Coventry has not had to pay out money for the development of the POCD. Pattee is proud of the POCD.

   Howard Haberern, 80 Cassidy Hill Road - Wishes to have Matt O’Brien, Jr. respond orally
at the next meeting for the purpose of transparency regarding his comment made at Creaser Park. His statement is attached.

Jennifer Burdette, Bear Swamp Road – Wished to update the Council that other women have come forward with allegations against Officer Hicks. Burdette also thanked the Council for addressing her request for a policy regarding Coventry police and sexual relationships with youth. Ms. Burdette’s third item was in regards to Chief Palmer’s actions in regards to the sexual harassment complaint against Officer Hicks. Her statement is attached.

Sandy Simon, 425 Geraldine Drive – Wants to ensure that our registrars of voters are certified. Having a registrar in Coventry go five years without being certified is concerning. When will Coventry’s registrar complete certification? The Secretary of State can ask for the removal of a registrar if deemed appropriate. Simon asked the Council report back to the community how many credits toward that certification the Republican registrar has and if it is not close before the next election they be removed and a replacement be put into the position. Ms. Simon’s provided the amendment (attached) that she referenced.

Carol Chipkin, 454 Cassidy Hill Road – She was on the ZBA for six years. Chipkin would like to Council to consider the fees and the regulations related to small lots around the lake. One person had to pay $588 for a permit to put a handicapped ramp on their property. Her statement is attached.

Jason Blakesley, 27 Berry Ave – He addressed Madame Chair in the importance of the first amendment and how dangerous it is to democracy to limit rights. It protects the O’Brien’s and allows citizens to criticize the O’Brien’s. It allows victims to speak out about difficult and emotional issues. There is no safety in silence. He speaks louder for women than others who lack backbones. He believes and supports victims. His experience with an arrest and subsequent complaint were detailed. Sergeant Hicks was the lead investigator and Blakesley was denied his rights. The Chief never investigated Mr. Blakesley’s complaint of how he was treated. Hicks lied to a judge about the amount of marijuana Blakesley had. The State’s Attorney took his case. Blakesley’s cars were seized as was his wife’ paycheck. His bond was high. Blakesley has an incurable disease. He has a medical marijuana card, but he was arrested for growing marijuana without a license. Coventry is less than 1% black yet Hicks made the statement that he noticed more people, especially African Americans and persons of color, putting their hands on the steering wheel at a traffic stop and how this made him feel safer. Hicks gives misinformation and lies on warrants, lies to judges, and lies to teenage daughters. These complaints have never been investigated by the Chief. Blakesley also asked that seized cars be stored in a place that allows the cars to be returned to the owners in the same condition as upon seizure.

Linda Blakesley, 27 Berry Ave – Is here in support of Jennifer Burdette, her daughter, and every woman in town. The Council has chosen to remain in silent. There is no safety in silence. This should have been taken as an opportunity to let young women in town know that we care about them. She went on to compare the current situation to that of Fire Chief Joseph Carilli. Her statement is attached.

This portion of the meeting was closed by Blanchard.

6. Acceptance Of Minutes:
6.A. February 3, 2020

Motion: I move to accept the minutes of the February 3, 2020 meeting.

By: Conant  Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Hand noted that some audience statements are still missing. Elsesser stated the Council is not voting on attachments to the minutes. The Town pays by the page to have the minutes and attachments stored. Hand should let Elsesser know which statements are not online; Elsesser’s office will remedy this. If there are any questions about content the video can be viewed. The video also provides the emotional context that reading does not.

Thomas asked if a disclaimer can be added stating the full videos are available online. Elsesser mentioned motions and voting are all that is legally needed to be in the minutes. The policy has been followed that it is better to provide more information. Perhaps one of the subcommittees should look at the policy.

With the following corrections:
- Page 1, Zeppa comments – add “species” after “invasive”.
- Page 2, Blakesley comments – change “Barry” to “Berry”.
- Page 2, item 4, bullet four – add an “A” to the end of “PEGPETI”.
- Page 3, item 6.B., last line – add “per Elsesser” after “development.” Change the “.” to a “;”.
- Page 5, item 6.C.2.a., add the following information – “Elsesser reported this person is representing the town in general. All appointees have ties back to the Council. O’Brien, Sr. would like to get information from Eastern Regional Tourism District in case the Council want to have input to the committee.”.
- Page 7, item 6.F.3. heading – capitalize “Grid”.
- Page 9, discussion – change “prize” to “price”.
- Page 9, item 9.B. – change “cannot” to “can’t”; last line on the page – add “safety and” before “parking”.

Voting:
For: Hand, Conant, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas
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 members 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: Thomas  Seconded: Conant

Discussion: Conant asked that item 11.B. Minutes, Coventry Arts Guild be removed from the Consent Agenda.

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

8. **Reports:**

8.A. **Council Chairwoman: Julie A. Blanchard**

8.A.1. **Establish FY 20/21 Budget Meetings With Town Departments**
Meetings will be held between departments and Council members to work through the budget process. The Registrars will stay on the schedule. Human Services will include Senior Services. Representatives from Fire Service comes under Public Works. Dates for the meetings will be squared away later.

There is going to be a Republican primary. Each party will have to run their own primary. The password for the State website has been locked. A two-factor authentication was not set up. Elsesser is very concerned about preparation for the primary. O’Brien, Jr. will meet with the registrars.

8.B. **Council Members:**

O’Brien, Sr. spoke with Peter Depaola who is active in the Patriot’s Day race; he tried to contact the Veteran Memorial Commission looking for assistance with other events. Depaola found the Commission is not actively operating now. It may be a good thing to expand the charge to include coordinating with veteran’s organization services, veteran related events and activities in Town, as well as continuing to assess memorials. There is no one person or group coordinating major events in town. We should be doing more to help recognize and benefit veterans of Coventry. Steering will look at this worthwhile issue. Peter and Jamie Depaola were thanked for their efforts.

O’Brien, Sr. and Hand attended the Pension Committee meeting where the Committee decided to recommend the actuarial recommended amount for the budget.

Conant reminded everyone that this Sunday will be the last Winter Farmer’s Market from 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. in the high school cafeteria.

8.C. **Finance Committee: Matthew O’Brien, Sr., Chairperson**
The report provided by O’Brien, Sr. is attached.

Thomas asked how many properties made up the $4.5 million reduction on the grand list. Elsesser stated it is about 64 properties but it is a moving target.

Hand reminded the Council that he had asked how much of the 4.6% increase of the grand list was due to growth and how much to revaluation. Elsesser replied this is still be worked on; it is a very complicated process to determine this. And, the office is extraordinarily busy.


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

8.E. **COVRRRA – John A. Elsesser:**
8.F. Town Manager – John A. Elsesser

8.F.1. Projects Update

- Meetings were held with DOT about LOTCIP projects. The largest and most time consuming was about the Swamp Road realignment. DOT will not back down on a total signal replacement. DOT will support the extra money needed, but this has to go to CRCOG. The signal has to be redesigned; the Town pays for the design fees. This will push the project back one year. Public information showed a soft right in and out was wanted for Northfield Road. DOT wanted to harden the end of Northfield Road to even prevent emergency vehicle access. An agreement was reached to do the Northfield Road to Swamp Road extender with DOT paying for that option. The taking of rights is needed. Although there was not an agreement in the household about the taking, there is no longer a choice. The resident may be able to gain access to property on the Northfield side and back of their house.

- Six trees will be taken down or topped by the end of March for the Folly Lane bridge replacement. DOT will pay for the temporary solution to getting a spot for the golf cart trailer to turn around.

- We have gotten the South Street sidewalks released from DOT.

- Cumberland Farms is going up fast.

- CT Water will be working on getting water down Swamp Road and across Boston Turnpike to service Cumberland Farms. Swamp Road will probably be closed during working hours 02-24 through 02-26.

- There is a deed restriction on the possible site of softball fields at the WPCA location. The deed states if the property is ever sold a market value would have to be obtained and 80% of the purchase price would have to be refunded. Town Attorneys are looking into this.

- We are in the final draft for the $20,000 study for Caprilands. There is a pressing timetable to get this out the door.

8.F.2. Microgrid/Co-generation Update

Progress continues. The tiles are generating data. There are some spikes at the Middle School that are being researched. Backhaus has seen the first blush of the economic model. Coventry is looking for net flow. The information is proprietary so it cannot be shared with the Council. O’Brien, Sr. returned to the previous conversation about not charging them property tax. Elsesser said this could be the case as they do not plan on selling excess energy outside of the town. In general, it is felt they are very close to the thresholds of this being a viable project. There will be one master meter and costs allocated between the facilities.

The Building Committee is looking at design/build for unit ventilators and how to tie that into the microgrid. The state codes are being looked at for installation on school properties. There will be noise codes and separating distances to buildings. National safety codes need to be addressed. The Building Committee is looking at air conditioner although the Micro Grid/Co-generation proposal never considered A/C.

8.F.3. Lake Management Update

The hydrilla and fanwort reports show that work against these invasive species will continue next year. The fanwort is going further into inlets and rivers. There are cost implications to this in addition to the use of more chemicals. There is also the DEEP
permitting issue. The removal of the bentic barrier for the hydrilla is under debate. The company that installed the barrier is concerned that removing the barrier may stir up everything on the bottom. Solitude says you want to remove it; there are plants growing under it. Removal of the bentic barrier will cost $8,500. The firms are talking about this matter. Chemicals cannot act on the hydrilla with the barrier in place. This invasive species is going to be here for a long time. The survey will be annualized. DEEP has made some comments that need answers.

8.F.4. COST 2020 Legislative Priorities
Elsesser, Backhaus, and Hand will be attending the meeting on this tomorrow. O’Brien, Sr. asked if we can add diseased trees in addition to the dead and decaying trees? Elsesser replied as soon as an ash borer enters a tree it is decaying or diseased. It is not in the DEEP’s master plan to go back to curbside sorted waste management. DEEP wants even more cradle to grave stewardship. There are some that feel the Municipal Set Aside for a capital project costing over $50,000 is too low. O’Brien, Sr. stated support for the fair share education funding efforts. Increasing the bottle deposit fee, and adding nip bottles, may assist towns in meeting environmental goals.

8.F.5. FY2021 Capital Improvement Budget
Elsesser presented with a PowerPoint presentation. The Town Charter requires the preparation of a capital improvement plan. This is a multi-year planning instrument. This includes priority setting and should save money through coordination. The Planning and Zoning Commission has to review this per statute.

Some discussion points:
- Police SUVs cannot reuse any of the outfitted equipment from the old vehicles to the new ones.
- The Open space fund has been whittled down to $15,000; it should be up around $100,000.
- The PSS van has to be handicapped accessible through the 52-10 program; this is a very effective grant.
- The Community Center roof has to be replaced.
- An improvement at Creaser Park would be to fix up one building to be suitable for use. Laidlaw Park would be improved with the installation of a toilet trailer.
- Small bridges, culverts, and guardrail work is included.
- Also included is a Town Hall locking system. We lost control of the locks a couple of months ago. With the current system the twice-yearly time change and leap year is problematic.
- A STEAP grant of $500,000 would be for a water tower that could pressurize the four fire hydrants in the Village area. Insurance rates would go down for 36 people with this fire suppression in place.
- The trucks at DPW are going on fifteen years when the average life span is about ten years; new trucks would be those that are considered cleaner air diesel. Electric school buses are real; the diesel coming from the current buses is not good for kids.
- Debt service has stabilized since 2009.
- The roof of the band room is leaking.
- Girls’ softball fields were put in as a placeholder. The cheapest option would be to overlay two softball fields over the football field. Another option is in the area of
the existing transfer station. Or across Route 31 and back into the woods. However, there is a deed restriction on that land that is being researched.

- The Library Renovation committee will be presenting at the next Council meeting and is to include a list of the current code violations.
- There is no money for wind code compliance.

9. **Unfinished Business:**
   None

10. **New Business:**

10.A. 19/20-46: **consideration/Possible Action: Reappointment Of Special Constable**

**Motion:** I move that the Council reappoints Special Constable John Chipman.

Discussion: Elsesser reported this will be the fourth time for this action. This allows Chipman to issue parking tickets, violations of park ordinances, and enforcement of winter parking bans. There are no arrest powers. Chipman’s duties also includes enforcement of junked vehicles.

By: O’Brien, Sr.  
Seconded: Hand

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

10.B. 19/20-47: **Consideration/Authorization: Resolution Approving Application for 2020 CDBG Small Cities Grant And Authorize John A. Elsesser, Town Manager, To Execute**

**Motion:** I move that the Council move to adopt the resolution approving application for 2020 CDBG small cities grant and authorize John Elsesser to execute it.

By: O’Brien, Sr  
Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Hand expressed thanks to the Staff for the large amount of work for this. Elsesser stated the grant consultant actually took care of this.

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

10.C. 19/20-48: **Consideration/Possible Action: Sale Of Town Property On Hinkle Mae Drive (Map Q, Block K, Lot 43)**

The Town owns many very small lots either through gifting or there are no owners. Some of these lots go back to the 1920s. A review is done periodically to see if any provide connectivity to surrounding Town land. The evaluations are then presented to the PZC. This lot is .15 acres in size. There are three abutters. If the sale of the property is authorized, policy requires it go out to sealed bid. A structure cannot be put on the lot. If an abutter buys the lot it may make their primary lot more conforming.
Motion: I move that the Council authorize the sale of property on Hinkle Mae Drive (Map Q, Block K, Lot 43).

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Hand

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

10.D. 19/20-49: Consideration/Possible Action: Easement, End Of Pine Knoll Drive
Pine Knoll Drive is off of Sam Green Road. There is an unbuilt road stub here. Because of the price of roads putting a subdivision here is not realistic. The frontage for the property is on Main Street with access to the land at the end of Pine Knoll. The owner wants to put in a driveway to the property. It will be a significant driveway. This is a nice sized lot. Elsesser supports this because it supports use of the large lot. The Town will preserve the slope rights at the end of the cul-de-sac.

There was consensus from the Council members to send this matter to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

10.E. 19/20-50: Consideration/Authorization For Town Manager To Execute Contingent Agreement With Estate Of Lance Stewart To Satisfy Debt And Purchase Open Space And Easements
Motion: I move that the Council authorizes the Town Manager to execute a contingent agreement with the estate of Lance Stewart to satisfy debt and purchase open space and easements.

By: Hand Seconded: O’Brien, Jr.

Discussion: Elsesser reported this has been under discussion for some time. The DPW would pick up 4.51 acres for public works activity and possible relocation of the transfer station. Seven acres would be open space. Easements would be created from Olsen Farms Road to the open space, the parcel on Millwood Drive, to Nathan Hale Forest out to Talcott Hill Road to Daly Road and to Main Street. Walking trails are being proposed. Approval from the Probate Court is needed with the agreement coming back to the Council.

A special town meeting will be needed for the open space acquisition. This is the result of long, fruitful discussions with a better product being gained in the end. The discussions provided a better understanding of some of the uniqueness of the property. There are some major mushroom colonies that are very extensive. Mushrooms clean contaminate out of soils. This property is centrally located and has a lot of flexibility for future use. The PW Study committee wanted 25 acres for the garage site; they got 12. Stockpiles for DPW is down at South Street Ext. It would be more efficient for the stockpile to be at the garage. In the long term, the additional acreage will provide a buffer. If houses go up nearby there could be noise complaints. With the agreement the Town may have access to the land, otherwise it would probably go to a
foreclosure sale.
Voting:
For: Hand, Conant, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas
Against: None
Abstain: None

11. MISCELLANEOUS/CORRESPONDENCE:
11.A. Burdette: Request For Establishment Of Policy Governing Relations Of Coventry Law Enforcement Personnel
Elsesser stated this needs further study. There have been initial discussions with the labor attorney and some policies may already address this. The Town Attorney is starting to look at other aspects of the law and if we can do this. How well are we addressing this now under current policies and, if we wish to add this policy, are we allowed to? Another question is if this would be an ordinance or policy. O’Brien, Jr. asked if the Council can get more information about the current policies. Elsesser stated that he will get the police manuals. Thomas asked if inquiries have been made to other towns regarding a similar policy or ordinance? Elsesser has not heard of this. This is an area of concern and needs to be looked into. Steering meets next week to start the discussion to begin developing a plan on how to research it.

11.B. *Minutes, Coventry Arts Guild: 2/21/20
Conant wanted to highlight some upcoming events mentioned for public interest.
2-21 – An event about Van Gogh will be held at the library.
5-23 – A show will be held at Mill Brook place.
6-21 – Make Music events will be held at Mill Brook place and in the Village.
8-22 – Arts on Main celebration.

11.C. *2020-2021 School Year Calendar – Final

11.D. *Board Of Education Agenda – 02-13-20

11.E. *Board Of Education Agenda – 2-18-20

12. Executive Sessions:
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 - six Council members, John Elsesser, and Amanda Backhaus.

By: O’Brien, Sr. 
Seconded: Thomas

Voting:
For: Hand, Conant, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas
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 - six Council members, John Elsesser, and Amanda Backhaus.


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

The Council entered Executive Session at 10:10 p.m.

The Council exited Executive Session at _______ p.m.

11. ADJOURNMENT:
Motion: I move that the Council adjourns at _______ p.m.

By:  
Seconded:

Voting:
For: Hand, Conant, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas
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.
I, Howard A. Haberern, a citizen of Coventry with my residence located at 80 Cassidy Hill Rd. Coventry, Ct. request that the Town Council appoints a council person to address my question and concern. I request that this will be on the next Town Councils agenda.

I prefer that Town Council Member Matt O'Brien Jr. himself give an oral reply at the next meeting for the purpose of Transparency.

The matter is, does Town Council member, Matt O'Brien Jr. still believe and support the statement that he made publicly at Creaser Park that “all Democrats are Godless people who are compromised by the Devil.”

I feel that he and the council have the obligation to address this concern since it both applies to the swearing in oath that he swore to and one of the Town Council’s Goal of Transparency.

I’d like to have this included in the record.

Howard Haberern

Howard Haberern  Feb. 18th, 2020
I have recently spoken twice at Town Council Meetings for Town Council member Matt O’Brien Junior to be Transparent.

Transparency is supposedly one of the Council’s Goals.

**Living up to** the oath that every Council member takes is required for a person to be on the Council.

If a Council person can’t abide by the Oath that they swore to, under God, then it is mandatory that they resign.

The OATH are not just woods, it is an OATH sworn under **GOD**. It is the backbone of our legal system.

**It is also the foundation of a democracy**!

Prior to the election, Mr. O’Brien Junior publicly posted during his rant at Creaser Park that all Democrats are Godless People who compromise with the devil.

If he continues to feel this way, then he lied when he took his **swearing in oath**.

He hasn’t been transparent to us Coventry citizens and especially to those citizens who are Democrats.

It is the Council’s obligation to appoint a council person to address this matter and let us Coventry Citizens know if he still believes this.

I think that the reply should come from him.

**DOES MR. O’BRIEN STILL CONTINUE TO FOSTER THIS BELIEF???? That all Democrats are Godless people who compromised with the devil.**
I know that the O’Brien’s both share the same game plan. Their game plan is to never apologize for anything.

This is the same game plan that our president uses.

Their plan is to just let any uneasy concern raised by a Coventry citizen to just wear itself out without giving an answer or apology when wrong.

This is just another form of censorship. In fact, it is a tactic similar to the one that Chairperson Julie Blanchard did to me a couple of meetings ago to keep me from speaking at the Audience of Citizens.

When public attention was brought out because of this she then tried to blame the press for misrepresenting her remarks. Her remarks were recorded and censorship it certainly was.

Again, this is the same tactic that our President uses: **blame the press**.

For the sake of brevity, redundancy, and to make the council perform their job,

I’m requesting for the secretary to include into the record both my written speech and my written request for the council to address this issue. It needs to be on their agenda.

We Coventry citizens deserve transparency and honesty.
Good evening Town Council, I have three items I would like to touch upon tonight.

First, I would like to update the Town Council that other women have come forward to Major Crimes with allegations regarding Officer Hicks that are being investigated separate from our case.

State police enforce state statutes. I reference federal law 18 United States Code, section 2422 subsection b, the sexual grooming of minors. It is governed by 18 United States code section 3299 which states an indictment may be found at any time without limitation for any offense under section 1201 involving a minor victim. I would also like to add that the FBI has been made aware of Officer Hick’s actions.

Secondly, I would like to thank you for addressing my request for town policy regarding Coventry Law Enforcement and sexual relationships with youth. Thank you for being willing to research more into current policies and law. Per statements made to the media, it appears the policy in Coventry, or any applicable law, truly isn’t clear at this point. This issue extends nationwide.

Thirdly, I must call attention to some truly disappointing situations that have occurred.

Chief Palmer, did NOT inform States Attorney Mathew Gedansky in 2017 of Michael Hicks sexual harassment and other actions. States Attorney Gedansky did NOT have the information he needed to make an informed decision regarding the Officer of the Year Award. (prop) Therefore, he is pictured shaking the hand of an officer who was just disciplined for sexual harassment, describing Hicks and the other awardess as
tireless workers who refused to give up, intelligent and officers not satisfied with adequate work" Officer of the Year 2017. But Chief Palmer, in the same time period, had this to say about Officer Hicks, "I find that this type of activity has a detrimental effect on your abilities to effectively perform your duties as a police officer, and moreover, as a supervisor" (pause)

You can’t have it both ways. Which officer is he? Is he the officer of the year, or an officer engaging in activities, which detrimentally effect his ability to perform and lead?

Chief Palmer as well over the last several months choose to NOT inform the State police of Officer Michael Hicks 2017 disciplines despite directly relating to his tendencies for inappropriate sexual behavior. State Police should have heard this from the Coventry Chief of Police, and not from the newspapers months into their investigation.

What I find most shocking of all, Chief Palmer choose NOT to inform the state police immediately of new allegations made to the Coventry Police Department regarding Officer Hicks. I shouldn’t have had to be the one to insist your police chief inform the state police weeks later.

Who else has made complaints regarding Officer Hicks? Why are we playing, hide the complaints?

My daughter and I, were told from the start, to not talk to anyone about our situation, that there was “no need” to go to the state Police. Chief Palmer decided, in less than 24 hours, he wasn’t putting one ounce of effort into criminally investigating further.
I surely believe that if I didn't push our complaint, it would have gone to the same mysterious place the 2017 disciplines went. Absolutely nowhere, and hidden from any outside law enforcement agency investigating any future allegations.

Coventry Administration and Council, I urge you to do the exactly what your town attorney advised you, and apply it to your Police Chief. Take your personal friendships and feelings toward Chief Palmer out of it. Demand accountability for the issues I outlined, and demand a valid reason for these actions.

Coventry Police subscribe to the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics, which include “I will cooperate with all legally authorized agencies and their representatives in the pursuit of justice.”

Coventry, if you, your loved ones, your son or daughter had to come forward today due to a sexual assault or harassment situation in town, especially with a town employee or God forbid even an officer, would YOU feel it would be handled well? Or would you feel, like you would have to advocate to the extent I have, to even get things in motion? Would you really want to spend months of your life advocating publically for a thorough investigation?

Chief Palmer, “I find that this type of activity has a detrimental effect on your abilities to effectively perform your duties, as a supervisor.” As a mother of one of the victim's of Michael Hicks predatory tactics, I thank you for the positive things you have done for Coventry over the years, but at the same time, ask that you consider resigning. Times are changing, women are changing, and we won’t tolerate sexual
harassment, sexual abuse, or cover-ups (whether ill intentioned or not) related to it anymore.

Coventry, in my opinion, its time for new progressive leadership of your police department.

I urge anyone with information regarding Officer Michael Hicks to call the Troop K Barracks at 860-465-5400 and ask for Major Crimes Detective Stephen McManaway. Do not call the Coventry TipLine regarding this issue. I urge both former and active Coventry police officers, to come forward with any information in this case as well, and to demand a strong leadership change that reflects your own hard work and dedication.

Jenifer Batt 2/18/20
General Assembly  

*SB0105108482SRO*

Offered by:

SEN. FASANO, 34th Dist.
SEN. MCLACHLAN, 24th Dist.
REP. SMITH, 108th Dist.
REP. LAVIELLE, 143rd Dist.
REP. KOKORUDA, 101st Dist.

To: Subst. Senate Bill No. 1051  

File No. 713  
Cal. No. 403

(As Amended by Senate Amendment Schedule "A")

"AN ACT STRENGTHENING THE STATE'S ELECTIONS."

Strike section 2 in its entirety and substitute the following in lieu thereof:

"Sec. 2. Section 9-192a of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective from passage):"
(a) (1) The Secretary of the State shall, in consultation with the advisory committee created pursuant to subsection (b) of this section, establish a program and criteria for the certification of registrars of voters. All registrars taking such office on or before July 1, 2015, shall complete such program and satisfy such criteria for certification not later than July 1, 2017. Any registrar taking such office after July 1, 2015, shall complete such program and satisfy such criteria for certification (A) in the case of a two-year term, not later than the conclusion of such term, and (B) in the case of a four-year term, not later than two years after the date of first holding such office, except as provided in subdivision (2) of this subsection. Each municipality shall pay on behalf of such municipality's registrar of voters the cost of completing such program and satisfying such criteria for certification.

(2) If a deputy registrar becomes registrar, in accordance with the provisions of section 9-192, on or after the ninetieth day prior to a state election, as defined in section 9-1, such new registrar shall complete an abridged program prescribed by the Secretary of the State for a provisional certification. Completion of such abridged program and receipt of a provisional certification shall not be deemed to satisfy the requirements for certification described in subdivision (1) of this subsection.

(3) Once certified, pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection, each registrar shall participate each year in not less than eight hours of training, not including any training described under subdivision (2) of subsection (d) of this section, in order to maintain such certification. Such training shall be as prescribed by the Secretary of the State and shall be conducted by said Secretary or a third party approved by said Secretary to conduct such training. Any registrar who fails to satisfy such annual training requirement shall be directed by the Secretary of the State to take remedial measures prescribed by said Secretary.

[(a)] (b) There is created [a] an advisory committee for the purpose of establishing programs and procedures for training, examining and certifying registrars of voters, deputy registrars of voters and [permanent assistants] assistant registrars of voters, as described in section 9-192. The committee shall consist of six members, one of whom shall be from the office of the Secretary of the State, one of whom shall be from the State Elections Enforcement Commission, and four of whom shall be registrars of voters. The Secretary of the State shall appoint the registrars of voters, in consultation with the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut, or its successor organization. The committee members shall serve without pay. The Secretary of the State shall determine the length of the terms of the initial members, in accordance with the following: Two of such members shall serve for a one-year term; two of such members shall serve for a two-year term; and two of such members shall serve for a four-year term. Thereafter, all members shall serve for four-year terms. The committee shall select a chairperson, who shall be one of the registrars who is a member of the committee.

[(b)] (c) The committee Secretary of the State, in consultation with the advisory committee, shall adopt criteria for the training, examination and certification requirements of registrars [deputies and permanent assistants] pursuant to subsection (a) of this section. In advising the Secretary of the State on the adoption of such criteria, the committee (1) shall consider whether the prescribed training leading to certification may, in part, be satisfied through participation in the required two conferences a year called by the Secretary of the State,
pursuant to section 9-6, for purposes of discussing the election laws, procedures or matters related to election laws and procedures, and (2) may recommend programs at one or more institutions of higher education that satisfy such criteria. The Secretary of the State shall include in the prescribed training adopted pursuant to this subsection procedures detailing the differences between a motor vehicle operator's license issued pursuant to section 14-36m and any other motor vehicle operator's license issued pursuant to subpart B of part III of chapter 246 and shall create materials to accompany such procedures. The Secretary of the State shall require that such procedures and materials be presented to each attendee at each conference called by said Secretary pursuant to section 9-6. Any [registrar of voters, deputy or permanent assistant] deputy or assistant registrar of voters may participate in the course of training prescribed by the [committee and, upon completing such training and successfully completing any examination or examinations prescribed by the committee, shall be recommended by the committee to the Secretary of the State as a candidate] Secretary for certification as a certified Connecticut registrar of voters. [The Secretary of the State shall certify any such qualified, recommended candidate as a certified Connecticut registrar of voters. The Secretary of the State may rescind any such certificate only upon a finding, by a majority of the committee, of sufficient cause as defined by the criteria adopted pursuant to this subsection. No provision of this subsection shall require any registrar of voters, deputy or permanent assistant to be a certified registrar of voters. ] The Secretary of the State shall certify any individual who completes such training and successfully completes any examination or examinations prescribed by the Secretary as a certified Connecticut registrar of voters.

[(c)] (d) The advisory committee shall also (1) develop a training program in election procedures for poll workers, and (2) develop an election law and procedures training program and guide for registrars, deputy registrars and assistant registrars. The training program developed under subdivision (2) of this [section] subsection shall provide for training to be conducted by trained registrars or former registrars hired for such purpose by the Secretary of the State. The committee shall submit such training programs and training guide to the Secretary of the State, who shall approve or modify the programs and guide."
Substitute Senate Bill No. 1051

cite any authority that is discussed in such instruction or opinion.

Sec. 4. (NEW) (Effective from passage) Whenever the Secretary of the State is of the opinion that a registrar of voters has engaged in misconduct, wilful and material neglect of duty or incompetence in the conduct of such registrar's office, the Secretary may seek removal of such registrar from office by filing a statement in writing to that effect with the State Elections Enforcement Commission. Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision (2) of subsection (g) of section 9-7a of the general statutes, as amended by this act, not later than thirty days after the filing of such statement, the commission shall investigate such statement and render a determination of whether the matter should be referred to the Attorney General to request that he or she pursue such removal pursuant to this section. Upon referral from the commission of such matter, the Attorney General may request that the commission undertake such further investigation as he or she deems appropriate. If the Attorney General concludes that the commission's investigation so warrants, he or she may prepare a citation in the name of the state commanding such registrar of voters to appear before a judge of the Superior Court at a date named in the citation and show cause, if any, why such registrar of voters should not be removed from office. The Attorney General shall cause a copy of such statement and such citation to be served by some proper officer upon the defendant registrar of voters at least ten days before the date of appearance named in such citation, and the original statement and citation, with the return of the officer thereon, shall be returned to the clerk of the superior court for the judicial district within which the municipality served by such registrar is situated. To carry into effect the proceedings authorized by this section, the Attorney General shall have power to summon witnesses, require the production of necessary books, papers and other documents and administer oaths to witnesses; and upon the date named in such citation for the appearance of such registrar of voters, or upon any adjourned date fixed by the judge

Public Act No. 15-224
ZBA talk
My name is Carol Chipkin, I live at 454 Cassidy Hill Road.

I spent the last 6 years as a member of the Zoning Board of Appeals. During those years the applicants’ cost of appearing before the ZBA increased from $588.00 to $763.00 and went as high as $961.00.

In those 6 years, by my account, the ZBA acted upon 49 cases. Of those 49 cases, 26 were properties located around the lake. As you all know, the properties around the lake are very small, postage stamp size lots. Lake properties do not comply with the current distance from property line zoning regulations and predate the current zoning regulations. I also noted that because of their size they are among the least expensive homes in Coventry.

Most of the 26 cases were requests for a storage shed. You’re forcing these property owners to pay $763.00 for permission to install a shed that cost perhaps $2500.00 with no guarantee that permission will be granted. One of the cases involved an individual who paid $588.00 to the town for the right to build a handicap ramp.

I’m requesting you change the zoning property line distance requirements for the homes around the lake. Due to the size of the properties I believe in a much smaller distance from property line. By mandating the ZBA fees, which can be a hardship on the most vulnerable homeowners in Coventry, you are discouraging property improvements. Removal of some of the impediments to improving lake properties would ultimately raise property values, which would raise tax revenue for the town.
Good evening. My name is Linda Blakesley. I live at 27 Berry Avenue.

I am here tonight, once again, to show my unwavering support for Jennifer Burdette and her courageous daughter who came forward to report the sexual harassment she suffered as a teenager by a man who is in a position of power, Sgt. Michael Hicks of the Coventry Police Department. My support extends to every woman in town, and once again, I encourage any male or female in town who has been victimized by anyone in a position of power or otherwise, to come forward. Please know that I will stand by your side, and unlike every other leader in this town, my support is visible and loud.

I get that you cannot speak about the allegations regarding the inappropriate sexual messaging of Sgt. Michael Hicks to a high school aged female while on duty. What you can do, and have not done, is speak loud and clear to support and encourage women in this town to come forward should they have experienced similar harassment or worse.

Instead, you have chosen to remain silent on this issue. I am here to tell you tonight, there is no safety in silence. Shame on all of you for choosing to ignore this opportunity to declare to the young women of this town that we care about them, we support them, and we believe them.

For the record, I’ve contacted both the Republican and Democratic Town Committees through Facebook asking them to post a message of support and encouragement to the women of Coventry empowering them to come forward if they have been a victim. While the Republican Town Committee had already voluntarily asked for Mike Hicks’ resignation from their committee, they have not since posted any message of support, nor did they bother to reply to my request. The Democratic Town Committee responded to me nearly 6 hours after they read my message, and privately stated that they stand by the women of our community, yet they failed to post anything publicly stating the same. Does fear for speaking against the police extend to even our political leadership in town?

This wasn’t the case several years ago when then fire chief, Joseph Carilli, was arrested because of similar accusations of sexual harassment with another Coventry youth. In fact, I wish to read an excerpt from the Town Council minutes on March 4, 2013, which is scarily relevant today in 2020.

1
Linda Blakesley
27 Berry Avenue
Coventry, CT 06238
"...when a few courageous young women came forward and filed formal complaints of sexual misconduct alleging former fire chief Joseph Carilli was harassing them in their workplace, I stated then the most important thing we as a Council and as a community could do was make it clear to those women and all in our town that they should feel we take their complaints very seriously and will act upon them. There is no safety in silence. Each of us has a moral obligation to speak up on behalf of those who are victimized and abused. I would expect that if another adult suspected that either of my daughters was being harassed, bullied or victimized in any way that they would have the courage to alert me, and if they didn’t feel that I’d be able to act on their suspicions then I would hope that they would bang on every door possible from the school administrators to the police chief until they found someone who could and was willing to take action. We cannot act to safeguard our children or any member of our community only on the basis of swirling gossip and rumors. The only way we can stop abusers is to let victims know that Coventry is a safe place to come forward and we will listen and act on their grievance. We must provide ongoing education in our community about who the people are that we adults can go to when we need to file complaints. We must teach our children how to identify who they can confide in when they suspect that other children are being victimized. This must be continuously taught in our homes and in our schools, year after year as our children grow and develop. We should ask our children every year, “who are the adults you can turn to when you can’t or are unable to turn to me...silence will not protect us only our purposeful actions can.”

These were the words of Lisa Thomas, councilwoman during this period in 2013. Now, I ask you, Lisa Thomas, and all of you for that matter, why has your support been non-existent or only in private? Why do you choose to remain silent on this? Do you fear being targeted by the police? Is it because of your political aspirations? Do you not believe the victim? Do you simply not care or find this important?

I urge all of you to consider if your daughter, sister, significant other or friend were being targeted. Would you stand by them, or would you remain silent? Not me, I say again that I stand by all women of this town. Remember, there is no safety in silence. Silence cannot protect us, only purposeful actions can.

In conclusion, I leave you with this quote credited to Dante, the Italian poet.

“The hottest places in hell
are reserved for those
in times of great moral crisis,
remain their neutrality.”

Linda Blakesley
27 Berry Avenue
Coventry, CT 06238
Coventry Town Council Finance Committee
February 10, 2020

We held our Finance Committee meeting on February 10th.

Our Finance Director, Amanda Backhaus reported that tax collections through February 3rd, which was the last day property tax payments were on-time, were 96.76%. Our General Fund collections were at 86.83% as of January 31st, which is in line with prior years. Expenditures for the Town and BOE were in line with prior years and that there are no major issues or transfers needed as of this report. Amanda reported that COVRRA and Sewer Use collection rates are up in both funds.

Amanda reported that the assessor completed the 2019 Grand List and it shows an increase of 4.6% due to the revaluation. Amanda also included a report on the impact of crumbling foundations on our grand list. We currently have a reduction of $4.5 million due to crumbling foundation properties impacts. It was noted that 7 properties have been repaired and returned to full value and that the $4.5 million is the current net figure.

Amanda reported that the Finance department has applied for a PEGPETIA grant to replace our video recording equipment for both the Town and BOE and are hopeful we will receive some funding under the grant.

Amanda reported that the Pension Committee had opted to not rebalance the pension assets at the end of the last quarter to meet the 60% equity / 40% fixed assets and left the equity % slightly higher than the approved guidelines recommended and they agreed to look at it again at the end of the current quarter. The Pension Committee also did not reach agreement on the recommended budget contribution for FY21. There was to be a special meeting on February 12 to review this issue.

John Elsesser noted that he had included a recent presentation by a pension attorney who reviewed the State’s plans. John noted it was very informative and shows a grim outlook on the State’s plans.

The committee discussed the COVRRA budget and the new contract agreements for recycling and hauling and disposal fees. We discussed the recent collapse in the market for recycling material and the change from receiving payment for recycling to having to pay to have it removed, the state’s mandate to force towns to use a single stream recycling system, and the pending failure of some of the trash to energy facilities in the state. Amanda reported that the change in next year’s hauling and disposal fees will add about $36,000 to our costs in 2020-2021. Amanda also projected the revenue based on current rates and updated number of units. Amanda reported that looking at the projected expenditure increases, including disposal, salaries, etc, we would be looking at over $200,000 of fund balance in order to cover the expected costs. Amanda noted that this would be about $40 more per unit.
The chair reported that he had reviewed the changes in the COVRRRA fund balance from year to year to see what impact the two $5 decrease in per unit charges in FY2017 and FY2018 had made. Even after both of the reductions were implemented COVRRRA was still incurring surpluses each year. It is the dramatic loss of revenues ($25 per ton) from recycling, the dramatic increase in new costs to pay for recycling ($30.90 per ton) and the increase in hauling and disposal fees that have caused the dramatic changes.

We discussed Amanda’s projections and the chair agreed that in light of all of these changes the Town Council will have to consider raising the fees in the coming year. The chair said that he would like us to get information out to taxpayers so they can understand the reasons why circumstances have changed. Amanda noted she will include additional explanation in this year’s budget documents.

We received two reports from the Board of Education in response to our request for an end of year encumbrance report for FY2019. In the FY2019 audit report we learned that the Board had let about $55,000 lapse back to the general fund from June 30, 2018 encumbrances and Amanda had reported that the Board was carrying a high balance of unspent encumbrance funds currently from FY2019. We received a Purchase Order History Report and the Voucher Supplement Account Summary from the Board. They showed that the Board had encumbered $586,000 as of June 30, 2019 and of that about $297,000 were spent within 60 days of the end of the year. There is still about $45,000 of the remaining $289,000 that was encumbered unspent to date. It was agreed that the information that was received from the Board was difficult to understand and took a lot of work to follow.

We also reviewed the Town’s FY 2019 end of the year report and it was noted that this report was much easier to read and understand and we asked Amanda to share her report with the Board in the hopes they might emulate it.

I recommend that you review the attachments included on the Finance Committee agenda to get more information.

Matthew O’Brien Sr.