Minutes
Town Council Steering Committee Meeting
February 24, 2020
Town Hall Conference Room B

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Matthew O’Brien, Jr.
Present: Matthew O’Brien, Jr., Jonathan Hand, Lisa Conant, Julie Blanchard
Also present: John A. Elsesser and guests

2. Acceptance of Minutes: January 27, 2020:
Julie Blanchard suggested amendments to section 3 to eliminate a semi colon in the fourteenth line and replace with a comma, and add commas after McLoughlin and Callahan.

A motion was made by Lisa Conant to accept the minutes as corrected, seconded by Jonathan Hand and unanimously approved.

3. Matthew O’Brien, Jr. invited Suzanne Choate to discuss her interest in serving as an alternate on the Inland Wetlands Agency. She gave her background as a civil engineer and her experience in serving for several years on the Planning & Zoning Commission in South Windsor. She wants to serve the community and can read plans. She stated she has presented in front of the Inland Wetlands Agency so she is familiar with the process.

Jon Hand moved to recommend to the Council the appointment of Suzanne Choate to the Inland Wetlands Agency as an alternate member for a term to expire 9/15/2022. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved.

Lisa Conant moved to move items 7A, 7B, 7C, 7D and 7E up for discussion. The motion was seconded by Jonathan Hand and unanimously approved.

7. A. Matthew O’Brien, Jr. invited Carolyn Gerrity to discuss her interest in serving on the Economic Development Commission. She stated she has a BA in Business with a minor in Business Psychology. She has served on the Board of Finance in Putnam before moving to Coventry a couple years ago and witnessed the difficulties in growing a rural town with significant open space. She feels that preserving the rural image is important but a good mix of business is essential, not just for taxes but for convenience and quality of life. She feels Rt. 44 has potential due to traffic volume. She mentioned that Coventry’s open space and lake are some of the reasons she moved to town. She suggested using surveys to determine residence preferences and Putnam conducted a branding study. Focus on core commercial services for growth. Matthew O’Brien, Jr. thanked her and discussed the process of interviewing all prospective new members before making a decision.

B. Matthew O’Brien, Jr. then invited Andrew Ladyga to discuss his interest in the Economic Development Commission. Mr. Ladyga stated he has been a business owner for 10 years and has attended Coventry Economic Development Commission meetings for several years, and how has
gone to meetings in Bolton, Tolland, and Mansfield. He stated he owns a great deal of land on the Bolton/Coventry town line that is available to build on and feels the Commission can push for the highest and best use of this land. He stated he is knowledgeable of the zoning approval process and also wants to keep the character of the town.

Matthew O’Brien, Jr. asked Mr. Ladyga to discuss his vision for development. Mr. Ladyga stated Rt. 44 is the best location, and businesses such as Aldi’s, restaurant/brewery, car wash, auto parts store, affordable housing, medical facilities or day care should be considered.

Matthew O’Brien, Jr. asked what Coventry is not doing. Mr. Ladyga stated we should consider a branding project – say $50,000; loosen up zoning regulations (especially in Bolton). Reach out to businesses instead of waiting for them to come to us and consider tax incentives and abatements.

Jonathan Hand raised the issue of whether there is a conflict of interest in serving on the Commission and pushing for de-regulating his land. Mr. Hand appreciated Mr. Ladyga’s openness on owning the land. Mr. Ladyga stated he would refrain from voting on recommendations.

Lisa Conant asked about development in the Village. Mr. Ladyga stated he likes what was accomplished and the style could also be used on Rt. 44 on his land. But he felt that the Village was more suited to Mom & Pop stores. He also offered they could also use help from the EDC.

The Committee thanked Mr. Ladyga for sharing his thoughts.

Jonathan Hand moved to table items 7A through 7D until the next meeting, seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved. The Committee asked Mr. Elsesser to schedule interviews with the other candidates at the next meeting.

Lisa Conant moved to move agenda item 7J up for discussion, seconded by Jonathan Hand and unanimously approved.

J. Matthew O’Brien, Jr. welcomed Mr. Michael Gerrity to the table to discuss his interest in serving on the Zoning Board of Appeals as an alternate. Mr. Elsesser mentioned that this is an elected Republican seat and it is to fill a vacancy. Mr. Gerrity has been recommended by the Republican Town Committee.

Mr. Gerrity stated as an electrical contractor he has attended ZBA meetings but would need to learn more, and is willing to learn more about the roles and responsibilities. He feels everyone should get a “fair shake” and ZBAs should not abuse their authority. Matthew O’Brien, Jr. thanked him for coming in and moved to recommend to the Town Council that Michael Gerrity be appointed to the Zoning Board of Appeals as an alternate to fill a Republican vacancy, for a term to expire 11/2/2021. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved.
4. Reports:
   A. No report of Chair.
   B. Jonathan Hand mentioned we should be thankful that we have so many qualified candidates.
   C. The vacancy lists were reviewed and the following comments made:
      - Remove Insurance Advisory Committee from the list.
      - John Alosky should not be listed as a vacancy on the Local Emergency Coordinating Committee.
      - CoventryVision needs folks since they are down to a bare quorum.
      - The Energy Advisory Committee also needs members – maybe ask Michael Gerrity since he is a knowledgeable electrical contractor.

5. Resignations/Not Wishing to be Reappointed:
   - Jonathan Hand moved to accept the resignation of David Lamore from the CoventryVision Committee with appreciation. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved.
   - Jonathan Hand moved to accept the resignation of Sondra Stave from the CoventryVision Committee with appreciation, seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved.
   - Jonathan Hand moved to accept the resignation of Richard Giggey from the Economic Development Commission with appreciation. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved. Mr. Giggey’s long service was noted.
   - Jonathan Hand moved to accept the resignation of Michael Hicks from the Lake Advisory & Monitoring Committee, seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved.

6. Reappointments:
   - Jonathan Hand moved to recommend that the Town Council reappoint Tim Liptrap to the Economic Development Commission for a term to expire 2/1/2025. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved. Mr. Liptrap’s workshops for small businesses were noted.
   - Lisa Conant moved to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Jennifer Reilly to the Energy Conservation/Alternative Energy Advisory Committee, for a term to expire 3/1/2023. The motion was seconded by Jonathan Hand and unanimously approved. Her efforts were acknowledged.
   - Jonathan Hand moved to recommend to the Town Council the reappointment of Robert Murzyn to the Pension & Retirement Board, for a term to expire on 1/1/2023. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved. His long tenure was noted.

7. Appointments:
The Steering Committee discussed having three persons for two available seats on the Coventry Lake Advisory and Monitoring Committee. It was mentioned that Deb Zeppa, Committee Chair, had submitted a recommendation for Choate and Imhoff.

Jonathan Hand moved to recommend to the Town Council the appointment of Suzanne Choate to the Coventry Lake Advisory & Monitoring Committee, for a term to expire on 8/1/2020. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved.

Lisa Conant moved to recommend to the Town Council the appointment of Carly Imhoff to the Coventry Lake Advisory & Monitoring Committee, for a term to expire on 8/1/2021. The motion was seconded by Jonathan Hand and unanimously approved.

The Committee requested staff reach out to Eric Gare and urge him to work as a volunteer with the committee, or look at other vacancies.

The Committee discussed the vacancy on the Senior Housing Alternatives Study Committee. It was noted the designation of a Council Representative and Housing Authority Representative are required. Jonathan Hand moved to recommend the appointment of Richard Brand to the Senior Housing Alternatives Study Committee as the Council’s representative for the duration of the project; seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved. The Committee requested staff to reach out to Orchard Hills with a list of committee members and suggest they select one as their designee. They also would welcome Laura Bradley to attend the meetings as a non-voting staff person.

Mr. Elsesser stated he is waiting for revisions from Bud Meyers, Fire Marshal, on revisions to the burning ordinance. Lisa Conant moved to table discussion until the next meeting, seconded by Jonathan Hand and unanimously approved.

Julie Blanchard stated that no issues on interaction with Town staff by Council members have been brought to her attention, so Matthew O’Brien, Jr. moved to table this item until the next meeting; seconded by Jonathan Hand and unanimously approved.

Mr. Elsesser mentioned that we are waiting for comments from Police and Fire on the large gathering ordinance, but at the last Local Emergency Coordinating Committee meeting there was a willingness to look at some revisions, such as:

- Having a designated pre-planned place for faster approval
- Modify the language “of moral character” to a background check by Police
- Other possible revisions will also be looked at.

The Committee moved to table this item to their next meeting on a motion by Jonathan Hand, seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved. They would like to change the agenda wording from “repeal” to “modifications.”
11. The various job descriptions from the Fire Merger Committee were discussed. It was felt that since the positions being filled will be interim for one year, the job descriptions could also be interim. They could be finalized and revised as needed before the positions become final.

Jonathan Hand moved to forward the interim job descriptions to the Town Council for consideration and possible adoption. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved.

12. After a brief discussion of the broadening of the Veterans’ Memorial Commission to include events, the Town Manager was requested to bring back some sample language. Jonathan Hand moved to continue this item at the next meeting, seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved.

13. The letter from Josephine Sabino was reviewed, and Council Chair Blanchard will respond that while the Council appoints the members of the Coventry Housing Authority, they do not oversee daily operations. The clear support of residents at last week’s CDBG hearing was also noted.

14. Mr. Elsesser discussed that he is waiting for information from both the Town’s labor attorney and Town Attorney on what our existing policies entail and whether the suggested language of Jennifer Burdette could be adopted as a Town policy, or whether a State law is required. Jonathan Hand stated that there is public support for some action. He moved to continue this item to the next meeting, seconded by Lisa Conant and unanimously approved.

15. Lisa Conant moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:51 PM, seconded by Jonathan Hand and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

John A. Elsesser
Town Manager