

**MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL
MARCH 1, 2021
7:30 P.M. – REGULAR MEETING
TOWN HALL ANNEX & VIRTUAL**

1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

The meeting was called to order by Blanchard at 7:31 p.m.

Members present:

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

Members absent:

Also present:

John Elsesser – Town Manager

2. Pledge Of Allegiance:

Council members and Staff stood to recite the pledge.

3. Audience Of Citizens:

(30 minutes)

Submit comments to be read aloud to: audience@coventry.org

Blanchard read the comments from the following citizens. Their statements are attached to these Minutes.

Barbara Barry, 307 Silver Street – Thrilled the library is open.

Pat Thurber, 233 Mark Drive – Supports the library. Hopes the Council does too.

Linda Blakesley, 27 Berry Avenue – Power Up Coventry is asking the Governor declare racism a public health crisis and is asking that Coventry does the same.

Rick Martin, 195 Northfield Road – Writing the Council about the insurrection on January 6, 2021 at the Capital. What is the Council going to say about this incident?

Motion: I move to the Council move to the Library Budget item next.

By: Thomas

Seconded: Hand

Voting:

For: O'Brien, Sr., O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Thomas, Conant

Against: None

Abstain: None

4. Acceptance Of Minutes:

- **February 16, 2021**

Motion: I move to accept the minutes of February 16, 2021 meeting.

By: Jr.

Seconded: Hand

With the following corrections:

- Page 5, paragraph after O'Brien, Sr.'s finance report, fifth sentence – add "O'Brien, Jr. asked what" to the beginning of the sentence.
- Page 5, item 6.E., third sentence – add "and pay \$65 per ton for waste disposal" after "recycling".
- Page 6, first paragraph, sixth sentence – change "be" to "being".
- Page 6, third paragraph, second sentence – add "said" after "Elsesser".
- Page 6, fifth paragraph, first sentence – change the beginning to read "Blanchard asked about the design/build decision and it could not be used for the State paperwork for the library renovation".
- Page 7, item 6.F.2., first sentence – change "as a" to "in our".
- Page 7, item 6.F.2., second sentence – change "by" to "to".
- Page 7, item 6.F.3., second sentence – change "continued" to "continuing".
- Page 7, item 6.F.5., second paragraph, first sentence – change "of neighbor" to "of our neighboring".
- Page 9, item 6.F.11., eighth sentence – change "It" to "She" and "that" to "who".
- Page 10, item 8.B., second sentence – change "have" to "has".
- Page 11, item 8.D., second paragraph, second sentence – change to read "Does anything in these regulations change Coventry's ability to hire the best person?, and add "Elsesser said no. O'Brien, Sr. said that's fine so let's pass these regulations.".
- Page 12, top of page – add after "candidates" "and recommends to us new ways to attract them and make them aware of our needs."
- Page 12, item 8.F., first paragraph – change the first "to" to "the".
- Page 13, item 8.G., second paragraph, third sentence – add "Elsesser said" as the beginning of the sentence.

- Page 13, item 8.H., discussion, fourth sentence – after “us” change to read “and they have helped us in the past with refinancing. Also they have helped in getting our bond rating increased.”.

Voting:

For: O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Thomas, Conant

Against: None

Abstain: None

5. **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: Conant

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: O’Brien, Sr. asked that item 9.B. to be removed from the Consent Agenda. Blanchard asked that item 6.F.5. be removed from the Consent Agenda.

Voting:

For: O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Conant, Thomas

Against: None

Abstain: None

6. **Reports:**

6.A. Council Chairwoman: Julie A. Blanchard

Blanchard had nothing to report.

6.B. Council Members:

O’Brien, Sr. said he, along with Hand, attended the Girls Softball Committee meeting. They are making progress and getting numbers for the proposed project. The Softball Committee has to come to a resolution of a determination of the location, then appear before the Finance committee, and then come to the Council. The difference between the two locations is \$160k-\$170k. Along with the financial costs we have to consider the loss of the gravel pit and the use of the property by Public Works Department. The Committee said the boys baseball league is willing to share their facility, such as the Snack Shack, in the meantime if they were to build across the street. Hand agreed we have to take into account the loss of the use of the DPW yard and to take into account the loss of the large sports field if they were to decide on the former landfill site. There are opportunity costs at both sites. Williams said he reviewed some of the plans and when he compared that to a field across the street there is a field that is almost the same size, it may be a 50-70 field. It is used for age 13 boys. How much is that field used? Elsesser said that field would not be a regulation softball field. Coventry

Baseball uses it. The information that Williams is looking for will be asked of Coventry Baseball.

O'Brien, Jr. responded to the Audience of Citizens letters that were said about Republicans saying- He condemned the riot at the Capital and all violence perpetrated against innocent people by anyone, against anyone. O'Brien, Jr. said those that took part in the riot don't represent any of us at this table. Trump has lost all court cases because they were rejected due to lack of standing not on lack of merit. What we all believe about the presidential election is irrelevant to a discussion of violence. It doesn't help that none of the alleged evidence has not been allowed to be heard by the public. It is unsurprising that a lot of people still have questions. There has not been a resolution put forward by Democrats. Lisa read a statement on behalf of Democrats and O'Brien, Jr. thought it would be a good idea to join with them and consider a resolution. What was tabled was the resolution written by Republicans and it was tabled to allow everyone time to consider it. That decision was unanimous. Clearly no lack of action on our part. O'Brien, Jr. has no contempt for any Coventry election worker. He did put forward a number of questions on the irregularities from the recount which numerous Republicans asked him to do for them not to delegitimize but to exercise their right to ask questions. That's what it means to honor democracy – asking questions.

Thomas wants to recognize that Yasmine Forte was highlighted on the Living page in the Journal Inquirer. She is a 2015 Coventry High School graduate who is running a virtual art class for elementary school children for the Parks & Recreation department. Thomas thanked Yasmine for her efforts.

Hand said an email from William Glenney was received with a Statement of Interest for serving on the Veteran's Memorial Commission. Hand would like to add an agenda item to appoint this person to the commission.

Motion: I move that the Council add agenda item 6.C.2.c. to appoint William Glenney to the Veteran's Memorial Commission.

By: Hand

Seconded: Williams

Voting:

For: O'Brien, Sr., O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Conant, Thomas

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.C. Steering Committee: Matthew O'Brien, Jr., Chairperson

O'Brien, Jr. said the committee discussions included the turnover of Avery Shores to the Town of Coventry and a public statement on racism.

6.C.1. Reappointments:

6.C.1.a. Cemetery Commission: Chapman

Motion: I move that the Council reappoint Roger “Michael” Chapman to the Cemetery Commission, term to expire 10/20/2023.

By: O’Brien, Jr. Seconded: Hand

Voting:

For: O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Conant, Thomas

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.C.2. Appointments:

6.C.2.a. Energy Conservation/Alternative Energy Advisory Committee: Davis

Motion: I move that the Council appoint Caroline Davis to the Energy Conservation/Alternative Energy Advisory Committee, new term to expire 3/1/2023.

By: O’Brien, Jr. Seconded: Hand

Discussion: O’Brien, Sr. asked what kind of issues this committee focuses on? Elssesser said it makes suggestions or recommendations with things like LED lighting for town buildings and street lighting. It also serves a member of the School Building Committee.

Voting:

For: O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Conant, Thomas

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.C.2.b. Parks & Recreation Commission Alt.: Kyer

Motion: I move that the Council appoint Matthew Kyer to the Parks & Recreation Commission, Alternate, new term to expire 1/1/2022.

By: O’Brien, Jr. Seconded: Conant

Discussion: Hand said Kyer will be a real asset to the Parks & Recreation Commission. Thomas said with the challenges the Parks & Recreation department faces it will be great to have this person serve. He was the director of the summer program.

Voting:

For: O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Conant, Thomas

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.C.2.c. Veteran’s Memorial Commission: Glenney

Motion: I move that the Council appoint William Glenney to the Veteran's Memorial Commission, new term to expire 1/1/2022.

By: O'Brien, Jr. Seconded: Hand

Discussion: O'Brien, Jr. said Glenney has quite a good resume and we want to get him on board without having to wait a month. Blanchard said this group can start having meetings.

Voting:

For: O'Brien, Sr., O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Conant, Thomas

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.D. * Finance Committee: Matthew D. O'Brien, Sr., Chairperson

6.D.1. * Minutes, 02/08/2021

6.E. COVRRRA – John A. Elsesser:

Elsesser reported he spoke to some people in Hartford about getting something moving for the STEAP grant money for COVRRRA. He received an email saying paperwork is coming and now has a contact.

O'Brien, Sr. said it came up at the Girls' Softball Committee meeting that if they decided on the old landfill that would be done in conjunction with the COVRRRA project. They may not be ready to move forward if the STEAP money comes in for this summer. How long would the STEAP grant be able to be utilized and if there is a timeframe to be kept in consideration? Elsesser said the other option would be that it can be done in stages. Elsesser said the answer to the question will be sought.

6.F. Town Manager – John A. Elsesser

6.F.1. Projects Update

Updates to Elsesser's distributed report are:

- The federal bill has passed the House. It has to get through the Senate and things in the bill could change. The numbers sent out in the email are not fully accurate. There is money earmarked for education that we don't know yet. He is cautioning that it may be only part of the picture and we don't know what priorities need to be put in there. It could be good news but it is not real yet.
- The last easement for the Route 44/Swamp Road project was gotten today. That puts the project on track to go out for bid with construction starting in June.
- The drop box from Human Services increased to 42 from 35. They will continue that for the end of March.
- The parts for the streetlights in the Village have been received. The installation is waiting for the electrician. The supply chain for the lights is stretching out as it is for many items, such as the two heating units for the high school gym. The heating units will be installed over the summer so as not to disrupt school.

- Forestry Management has one more day of work to mark the trees before we get pricing for the work. The Tree Warden has to agree with cutting down those trees per state law. Forestry Management will get rid of dead trees and open up the canopy to get good growth and to have some way of getting in and out of the property. This is not a paved trail. Michelle Woods of Hull Forestry has provided brochures that will be on site for people to understand what the project is. Mark Bowen, Tree Warden, will put up some signs to explain what is going on.

6.F.2. COVID-19 Update

Elsesser said the numbers have come down a bit more. The vaccine chaos is starting.

O'Brien, Sr. asked if we can get something set up for the distribution of vaccines such as a church is doing in Rockville. Elsesser has reached out the health district to try and do that and was told they do not have the staff or the funds to do that. The staffing for the next month will go to vaccinating school staff . The health district staff has been diverted to vaccine distribution for those eligible selected by public policy. The resource is not available until the public need is met. O'Brien, Sr. asked if we can petition the governor? There is money available for this purpose. They are disturbing money to give vaccines, set up sites and all the different things and we are not getting any for our health district? Elsesser said they are getting the money for materials but none for staffing; they are getting the vaccine. We have a very small health district. Vernon is doing an admirable job and they were on national news. They are staffed differently than us and they are doing a good job. The Vernon Town Administrator is a Civil Preparedness professional.

6.F.3. Microgrid Update

No report was made.

6.F.4. Summary: Changes Necessary For Compliance With Police Accountability Bill

Elsesser said this information was requested at the previous meeting to know what needs to be done and what is already done with our police department. O'Brien, Sr. said the summary was thorough and thanked the Police Chief for the report.

6.F.5. * March 2021 Coventry Community Update E-Blast

Blanchard said she asked that this item be pulled off the Consent Agenda because it is a newer version of the community update. Elsesser said this came from COVID-19 funds for outreach possibilities. Civic Send allows graphics and links. One post serves multi-purposes. This can be used by other agencies in town. Land Use will be using it for businesses support and training. Elsesser thanked Laura for taking the lead on this. Backhaus said the Senior Center, Fire, and Police departments will be using this to communicate with more people.

6.F.6. * FY 2019/20 Annual Report

6.F.7. * Staff Meeting Minutes, 02/17/2021

7. Unfinished Business:

7.A. 20/21-56: FY 2021/2022 Budget

1. Booth & Dimock Memorial Library (7:45 PM)

Blanchard said the Library Director, Margaret Khan, is present.

Margaret Khan said the following Library trustees are also on the call: Joe Jankowski, Claire Twerdy, Carolyn Arabolos, and Libby Parda. Khan used some prepared slides for the budget presentation. The statistics used came from the Library's Annual Report or from the Connecticut State Library. There has been an increase in helping people file for unemployment insurance this year, as well as receiving an influx of questions regarding tax filing since no paper forms were provided. There was an impact on how reference services were provided due to COVID-19, implementing curbside service, and virtual programming. On some days staff makes up 70 bags of books for patrons to pick up curbside. The virtual programming has had a strong, positive following with these programs reaching as many patrons, if not more, than prior to the pandemic. The proposed budget is \$521,000.

Blanchard asked how the phone cost is \$5,000. Khan indicated Elsesser added that into the budget. Backhaus said that could be down to \$2,500; she may have mistyped. That figure will be checked. Payroll and benefits are the majority of the budget. There is double the planning and preparation for virtual programs. The library has 16 employees, 3 of those are full-time. The librarians participate in ongoing education and professional staff is needed for the program offerings. Policy requires there be a minimum of three employees at any time for the building to be open. The increase in salaries is being made in the hopes of keeping staff on the job; the library loses staff to other libraries because salaries are low. Also there is the need to meet the new minimum wage increases. The library needs 129 hours from the part-timers to be open not including the custodian. Kahn is seeking an increase in benefits to \$12,000 for each full-time employee although she would like to see that at \$18,000 which is still below Town Hall staff. The median for the state for benefits is \$19,581. The book budget had to be reduced last year but Khan would like to look at increasing that budget in the future. The Service Contract category includes Bibliomation, HVAC, Elevator Inspection & Maintenance, Alarm Service, Fire Extinguisher Service, Boiler Inspections, and Pest Control. Bibliomation use has increased over 100% since last summer and is the largest cost in this category.

Khan explained future needs are expanded hours, one full-time or two part-time Adult Service Librarians, continued raises, increases to benefits, and an increased book budget. Coventry is a bit behind in wages and benefits to comparable towns. The library is currently open 23 hours per week; in normal times it would be open 43 hours per week.

O'Brien, Sr. asked if the statistics about salaries and benefits are matched to private library services. Khan said they do include municipal libraries; she can break that information down between private and municipal libraries. O'Brien, Sr. said one reason our library is private is that it may have savings in expenses by not having

municipal employees. O'Brien, Sr. asked if the HVAC is included in the renovation project. Elsesser said replacing the boiler and air conditioning is but the valves and air handling are not part of the renovation.

Thomas thanked Ms. Khan for the information. Hearing that Khan is not able to manage paying for health insurance and contribute to her retirement account based on the benefits amount causes Thomas concern. Thomas asked if the part-time staff has been working throughout the pandemic. Khan said all support staff has worked through this period and have been working in teams.

Williams thanked Khan for the presentation. He found it troubling that she is not able to contribute to the retirement program. He asked Khan to send additional detail about this to the Council. Williams said the majority of the budget is staffing. How many hours does each person work? The Teen Librarian, the Children's Librarian, and Khan work 35 hours per week. Khan handles the administrative tasks. The Children's librarian has been working on the virtual programming, adding new materials, and community outreach. The Teen library does similar tasks in working with the schools, reference, and technology assistance. The Adult Services Librarian works 20 hours per week. Library Assistant II(s) work 16-20 hours per week and Library Assistant I(s) are the people at the desk checking out and in books, answering phones, and emails. The Pages resshelf the books. The Custodian works 12 hours per week. There is one part-time employee who dropped down from full-time status who receives some benefits. That person has worked for the library for over 30 years. Williams said that is a lot of labor for not being open very many hours. He has said this for years. Khan said the employees are now working in teams to ensure the library can be open consistent hours. Staff is at the library when it is closed to the public to prepare the requests for curbside service. There is a lot of work to provide for services due to COVID. Williams said it is a lot of payroll hours for 43 hours per week and there are three people working at any given time. The labor seems incredibly excessive.

Ms. Khan was thanked for the information. The Council will look through the proposed budget and submit questions if necessary.

Motion: I move to the Council move to the Land Use/Development Budget item next.

By: O'Brien, Sr.

Seconded: Hand

Voting:

For: O'Brien, Sr., O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Thomas, Conant

Against: None

Abstain: None

2. Land Use/Development (8:15 PM)

Eric Trott, Land Use Director, was present. Trott gave the Land Use/Development budget to the Members in advance of this meeting. Planning has been focused on maintaining the quality of service during the pandemic. There has been a lot of real estate activity and the department has had to react to those needs. Some of that includes delivering services in a different way. Restaurant support was important with establishing café seating and working quickly to help get those services going. The department has been a clearing house of information from the state or federal governments for the business community.

The revisions to the Plan of Conservation and Development were completed last year. This update was done in-house with a PZC subcommittee and Town staff. Many towns hire a consultant for this activity. The sewer extension from Bolton to the Coventry gateway has been another long term project. Trott is hoping for a positive outcome for the effort that has been put in. Four towns sharing similarities have developed a group for economic vitality. The focal points are developing a Four Town Community Calendar, asset inventorying, vacation approaches, mini tours, and open space assets. The Farmer's Market will be moving to an in-field option for 2021 after having tent-side pick up last summer. The department is working with the health district for the spacing requirements to accommodate virus protocols. Land Use has been working as partners with Arts on Main to get resources for that group with a focus of bringing people downtown. The EDC has been meeting and connecting with businesses. Tim Liptrap has been working with bringing in Nickels College interns for social media, websites, and digital media assistance to town businesses. The Chamber of Commerce has been a resource for businesses also.

The department has been connecting with developers such as those for Dollar General and there may be additional development through them for nearby properties over time. This is taking advantage of relationships that have been built up. The Senior Alternative Housing Study Committee is working with the narrative from the survey. A draft report is expected in May. This has been an extremely useful survey. The State is requiring towns to have an Affordable Housing Plan developed in 2022. This will be more global than being focused on senior citizens.

The lakes have been the focus of open space due to the invasive species. A \$50k DEEP grant to battle aquatic invasives has been applied for. Coventry's application has a research element to it to be able to measure when we may be able to stop chemical applications. A tuber study is being developed to see if the chemicals are having an effect at the root level. On Eagleville Lake we are dealing with fanwort which reduces the aquatic and recreational qualities of the lake. This grant application will include an educational plan in addition to the application of chemicals. The Open Space Stewardship Committee is working on open space maintenance including trail blazing, to keep trails open, and allow people to be active and safe on the trails. Bolton, Coventry, Vernon, and Tolland are working on a Bolton Lakes Watershed Planning project. The Nathan Hale Greenway needs forest management. There are 275 acres of Town open space land that requires maintenance. On Flanders Road the Schmidt property has been turned over to Joshua's Trust to preserve 30 acres of river frontage.

In agriculture a digester project is being set up. This uses manure waste to create power generation. Now food waste is being added to the project. Thirty percent of the energy produced will be used by Hytone Farm with the remainder going into the grid. The Land Use department has been actively involved with Caprilands for seven years. While the idea for adaptive reuse of the property fell through we are now focusing on legacy planning with the intellectual property being saved for the future.

Sustainable CT is a huge undertaking to maintain our Silver certification. We are preparing for the next certification round. Miscellaneous projects include a possible autonomous vehicle testing facility, a clay softball training area, working with the UConn Architectural department for a new cemetery and columbarium, and grid scale energy storage adjacent to the North River Road substation. The energy storage will be used as a back-up system and will harmonize with the vicinity.

The online permitting system was rolled out last fall. We are working on electronic scanning and maintenance of records. The digital GIS mapping is a juggling act to maintain the mapping as accurately as possible. Blight zoning enforcement will never end although it has cooled down during COVID and the winter. Blight works on a complaint generated basis. Alexa Gorlick is the new Zoning Enforcement Officer. We are expanding the Wetlands staff with expanded hours for Mindy Gosselin.

O'Brien, Sr. thanked Eric Trott for the information but this is about the Land Use budget. Trott said the budget is included in the information provided prior to the meeting. The budget is a bare bones approach with the focus being on staffing and professional training. There is some cost savings with the new ZEO being on a lower pay scale than the predecessor. Elsesser said the Land Use budget is in section 4-19 of the proposed budget notebook. Adding hours for Mindy Gosselin allows the freeing up of our Town Engineer for projects.

Thomas said Elsesser has mentioned departments that are overburdened and understaffed. How is the Planning department doing? Does it have adequate staff hours? Trott said that not having a zoning agent for a time caused some additional work. With the additional hours for the Wetlands staff the department will have more opportunity. We are trying to be smart with our hours. The pressure of dealing with the pandemic is stressful. Trott said the department can work with the staffing level we have at this point and we should be able to react to changing conditions moving forward. Elsesser said starting this week Brenda Bennett from the Senior Center will be working at Town Hall on Thursday afternoons and Fridays to help with the conversion of Permit View. Getting people used to the Permit View system has been a challenge while trying to also field phone calls and emails. The Senior Center is by appointment only right now. Thomas asked if there will be unmet Senior needs on Thursdays and Fridays. Elsesser said a person was brought on for developing programs for the Senior Center and those hours will be shifted to cover the Center. Bennett knows the work in the Land Use office because she used to work in that department.

Conant thanked Mr. Trott for the thorough presentation. She asked him if the department has reached out to the Connecticut Institute for Water Resources at UConn for the lake research project; that might be another resource. Trott said he will look into connecting with them. Elsesser added in working with UConn students and the professor on the cemetery project we may find that connection spilling out to other projects professors at UConn may be developing.

3. Discussion/deliberations

7.B. 20/21-57: Consideration/Possible Action: Adoption Of Resolution Denouncing Violence

Motion: I move that the Council adopt the resolution opposing political violence

By: O'Brien, Sr.

Seconded: O'Brien, Jr.

Discussion: O'Brien, Jr. read the resolution into the record.

Thomas said this is a lovely statement and expresses a lot of sentiments. However, "When Councilwoman Lisa Conant read a statement on behalf of herself, Jon Hand and me denouncing the January 6 insurrection it was to address a highly unique moment in time that threatened the very core of our nation. On that day not only were the foundational beliefs of our government attacked in an attempted coup, but human beings were maimed and murdered. We shared our hope that such an event would never happen again. That is the only sentiment we wanted to express. We were not looking to litigate one political belief or another - nor to denounce general violence. We did not request that our statement be put into writing as a resolution for the Council. Councilman Matt O'Brien Jr. did.

The resolution before us has no urgency or timeliness relevant to the January 6th insurrection. It is a generic resolution that could have been adopted 10 years ago, 100 years ago, 200 years ago. This resolution does not reflect what we discussed, so I will vote no and I will continue to stand by the statement read into the record by Lisa Conant on January 19 on the eve of what we prayed would be a peaceful transition of power on inauguration day."

Our urgency and our statement was to address a very unique moment in time, a very specific incident that literally attacked our government. It wasn't just any old political protest that turned violent. It was a direct threat, a direct coup on our democracy. That is what we wanted to share. This resolution is very broad. It does not look at that particular instance and she is happy to talk about something like that in the future but it doesn't address what we were concerned about. It certainly has an underlying tension of talking about all political violence and what does that necessarily mean. It really takes away from taking a firm stand it doesn't matter who you are. We don't support the coup that was attempted on January 6.

O'Brien, Sr. said you made that statement at the meeting, he believes, as well. It was read into the record.

Hand said that on January 19th the statement put forward by Conant on behalf of herself, him, and Thomas was very specific to that event. It was about the attempted taking, overthrow of our government, it was very focused. Hand said he believes O'Brien, Jr. made the suggestion that it be turned into a resolution. Hand believes the statement was 'just add the whereases as it stands'. O'Brien,

Jr. said someone might have said that. This proposed resolution is very far, very general, and very, kind of like whitewashing the event into a big sea of bad things happen all the time. The event on January 6, the domestic terrorism, the coup attempt – it should matter to any political party and all citizens that benefit from having a government that is run by a free and fair election. That is a thing that should not go unnoticed and that’s why he supports a statement that was made being turned into a resolution; a statement that was made on the 19th with the whereases added which he does believe is available to all Members. That may have been delivered to Blanchard, but he supports entertaining we put that as a resolution and that we adopt. It was very clear. It was agreed to on that night how good it was, very focused, very carefully worded just to focus on denouncing the event and how it shakes the foundations of our very democratic republic, our system of government. Hand does agree that there are some nice things said in this new totally generic one that has been offered up. There are many things that he can agree with but they are generic and not time-sensitive to this event. Hand thinks the purpose of the Council saying anything about this is that a very bad thing happened on January 6th, 2021 and that needs to be denounced. A coup attempt needs to be denounced. I think we can all agree on that, we want to have a stable government.

Voting:

For: O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Blanchard, Williams

Against: Thomas, Conant, Hand

Abstain: None

8. New Business:

8.A. 20/21-58: Consideration/Possible Action: Appropriation Up To \$6,750 From CNREF For Control Modification To Town Hall Air Handling System

Motion: I move that the Council appropriate up to \$6,750 from CNREF for control modification to the Town Hall air handling system.

By: O’Brien, Sr.

Seconded: Thomas

Discussion: Blanchard asked if the money has to come out of CNREF? Is that the best option? Elsesser said we don’t have anything in our operating budget. It could come out of the Council’s 1.5% fund as an alternative. We are struggling to get out of this fiscal year. This is an advancement to allow us to vary the air flow throughout the building; this is about air handling in Covid times. Williams asked how this moves the air around? Elsesser said the unit in the back parking lot will allow the fan to be sped up and put more air into the system. The air ducts in the building are improperly sized. The louvres in the vents need to have enough pressure when they are wide open to move air to the end of the building. It provides more volume to fill the whole system. A Connecticut company developed this patent. Williams said it seems relatively inexpensive.

Voting:

For: O'Brien, Sr., O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Conant, Thomas

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.B. 20/21-59: Consideration/Possible Action: Authorization For Board Of Education To Appropriate Up to \$6,300 From The Reserve Fund For Capital Expenditures For Unit Ventilator Controls At G.H. Robertson School

Motion: I move that the Council authorize the Board of Education to appropriate up to \$6,300 from the reserve fund for capital expenditures for unit ventilator controls at G.H. Robertson School.

By: O'Brien, Sr.

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Blanchard said they did ask for this. They gave it to us late for the last agenda. O'Brien, Sr. said this an appropriate use of the fund for an emergency need.

Voting:

For: O'Brien, Sr., O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Conant, Thomas

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.C. 20/21-60: Consideration/Possible Action: Resolution to Approve Amending The CDBG Program Income Plan And Program Income Reuse Plan

Motion: I move that the Council adopt the resolution to approve amending the CDBG Program Income Plan and Program Income Reuse Plan.

By: Thomas

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Elseser said this is doing a couple of things, the most significant being upgrade to the bathrooms at the Senior Center and the community rooms at Orchard Hills to touchless. The other is to make three museum properties in town ADA accessible if they desire to access the funds. The funds have to be used for specific targeted national objectives – for lower/moderate income people and ADA objectives.

Voting:

For: O'Brien, Sr., O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Conant, Thomas

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.D. 20/21-61: Consideration/Possible Action: Appropriation From Town Council 1.5% Fund In The Amount Of \$16,500 For Participation In UConn Graduate Internship Program

Motion: I move that the Council appropriate from the Town Council 1.5% fund \$16,500 for participation in the UConn Graduate Internship program.

By: Hand

Seconded: Thomas

Discussion: Elsesser said this would be for an intern from August 23, 2021 – May 22, 2022. This year the intern has allowed us to catch up on work projects allowing us to move forward with new projects, such as updating job descriptions that go back to 1991. Economic development is another targeted project. It is helpful to have the extra staff hours that are flexible and the person is able to work at a high level.

O'Brien, Sr. said this sounds like a good idea. The current intern is paid out of the 1.5% fund. Elsesser said it could be added to a future budget, but the program has to be committed to by April 27th. We did it off budget due to that timing

Voting:

For: O'Brien, Sr., O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Conant, Thomas

Against: None

Abstain: None

9. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:

9.A. PILOT Funding – Tiered Reimbursement

Elsesser said he is sharing this because it is complicated. The state has not been living up to their statutory obligations and over the years they kept cutting this. Areas that have public services are overburdened and need more money. As more money became available depending on what tier they are in, we are in the middle tier, they would get more. Elsesser's fear is that they get more money and they cut the other people. In the bill there is a hold harmless provision that we would get no less than what we get now. He does not trust that. Elsesser is not diminishing the needs that urban areas have that host our hospitals, State buildings, etc. This is not a level playing field. We get very little money for the forest, in terms of taxes, and get very little money for the 490 land that we have. Elsesser's opinion is those lands add to the quality of life in the state and they are not being recognized. It has a good chance of passing. He does not know where the extra money will come from to fund it and is afraid they will not keep to the hold harmless provision.

9.B. * Board Of Education: 2/11/21 Minutes; 2/25/2021 Agenda

O'Brien, Sr. said on page 3 of 5 in the Minutes under B., third paragraph –

Dr. Petrone noted the ESSER II Grant spreadsheet, which suggests how to use the funds we will receive. He said the funds can be used for the current year's budget, but he believes it would be more beneficial to push it out to FY22 and FY23. He reviewed the spreadsheet, which includes items that could be removed from the general operating budget and be funded by ESSER II funds instead.

O'Brien, Sr. said if this is true the BOE has to have a discussion with the Council before they make this kind of decision if, in fact, they are instead to rely on taking the money from the general fund to augment this year and then have funds two years out when O'Brien, Sr. believes that COVID will not even be that much of an issue for them to have an extra \$265,000 in that budget year as opposed to using it in the year when we are currently, according to the BOE, \$200,000-\$300,000 over their budgeted amount due to COVID expenses. This seems they are making a conscious decision that they can use those funds this year to do that. O'Brien, Sr. would like to be part of

that discussion as the Town Council rather than the Board deciding unless they don't intend to come back and ask the Council for the \$100,000 that has been put aside for COVID expenditures that can't be met by other grants or funding or savings in the budget. O'Brien, Sr. would like to look into this more to find out if it is an accurate statement. He thinks there should be a discussion between the Board and the Council before this kind of determination is made to gain an understanding of what their expectation of the Council would then be going forward for this fiscal year.

Thomas asked if O'Brien, Sr. is talking about the new funds that might come in. This came up at Finance. O'Brien, Sr. said we determined the governor proposed putting it in the next two years and that it couldn't be spent this year. If you read this statement it says it could be spent this year but we are choosing not to. If that is true that changes the whole thinking of who is going to pay for what they are talking about in this fiscal year. If there is a grant available to pay for those expenses we should be talking about how that can happen and how that would benefit the whole town as opposed to looking two years in the future when we are not even sure there is going to be COVID impacts going on and putting that money out towards future expenses that may or may not be there when we know we have the need this year. Our fund is very specific that that money is available after grants and savings are applied. If they put off a grant purposefully O'Brien, Sr. would want to have a discussion as to how that impacts the use of our grant fund. Thomas said their plan is to put funds toward their current proposed budget to reduce the current proposed budget for the next fiscal year. O'Brien, Sr. is comfortable with that part. O'Brien, Sr. said it's only the point of not using it for this year and then putting it two years out.

O'Brien, Jr. said there was some other grants that we thought that we wouldn't be able to utilize in the current budget year. O'Brien, Sr. said the ESSR funds are specific to the schools; the CRF funds are specific to the municipality and the schools also did get to tap into those, and FEMA funds. Those were the three sources for COVID. O'Brien, Jr. said these are emergency relief funds. O'Brien, Sr. said that is how it was approved in December by Congress. O'Brien, Sr. said a question was asked of Governor Lamont at a meeting discussing expenses this year and we were incurring hundreds of thousands of dollars because we remained open and he asked Lamont to make a priority those towns remaining open to help us pay for those expenses. O'Brien, Sr. thought Lamont said yes, we'll have you do the same thing where you will submit those expenses and they will be on our dime. In Lamont's budget proposal, instead of doing that, he hasn't proposed any town in the whole state use any of those funds this year, during the year we are being affected by COVID and O'Brien, Sr. said we are all putting out more money now for COVID than we would in the future except for things like air handling. For operational expenses we are making the changes now, we're paying for staffing, we're paying for all those things in this fiscal year if the grant is available and it can be utilized O'Brien, Sr. would like to at least have a discussion before they come and say we decided to not use the grant and we want to also use the \$100,000 the Town Council put aside in the General Fund. O'Brien, Jr. said we are in a hole this year because of COVID. O'Brien, Sr. said if you look at their management report once we remove the CRF

funding it is probably ~\$220k-\$230k that they say they are over for expenditures that were not in their budget. The bottom line is that it is less than \$100k and we do argue that they have \$60k of COVID savings that they put into the cafeteria fund as well that is still available to meet those expenses. If they don't have a plan to cover their expenses in this fiscal year and they've chosen not to use the grant money O'Brien, Sr. would like to have that discussion before they make that final decision and then try to come to the Council and ask us to pay for those expenses.

Williams said he got the impression they were doing well financially and were chipping away at the losses that they anticipated and that was a combination of ESSR funds and CRF that they were getting closer to that number being better. Williams almost got the impression they were going to be fine without any additional funds from the Town Council. They were slowly doing better and managing funds better and the biggest expense seemed to be staffing and the absenteeism. O'Brien, Jr. said if that is the case then Dr. Petrone's statement makes a lot of sense. Thomas and Blanchard also got the sense they were doing better from the Minutes. Backhaus said they have been doing progressively better. As of now they are still negative. Each month it has been improving. Their projections look like they can cover it. Backhaus agrees it would be good to have that conversation to be sure everyone can get out of this fiscal year before we move forward. O'Brien, Sr. said we should have this continuing discussion with the Board during the budget session.

10. Executive Session

- **Labor negotiations**

Elsesser said we've started pension negotiations with the seven units today. Backhaus shared a PowerPoint presentation on why this is important. The life tables are getting longer because people are living longer. We are going to try to come up with a way that employees can help bear some of the cost of lower returns on investments.

- **Manager evaluation**

Elsesser said Executive Session is not needed on this matter.

11. Adjournment:

Motion: I move that the Council adjourn at 10:13 p.m.

By: Hand

Seconded: O'Brien, Jr.

Voting:

For: O'Brien, Sr., O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Williams, Conant, 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.

Amanda Backhaus

From: 307barbara@charter.net
Sent: Thursday, February 18, 2021 9:18 AM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Applause to the library

Thrilled the library is open.

Thanks to technology a book not available in Coventry can be secured through the system and within a few days another happy patron of the library.

AND

Joy for the generous gift from Sondra Stave.

Barbara Barry
307 Silver Street

Amanda Backhaus

From: Pat <pcthurber@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, February 26, 2021 1:45 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Booth and Dimmock Library

Books at your fingertips from instructional to fictional and everything in between. Friendly supportive, reachable staff (not too many businesses can boast that). Electronic media. Someone to help you with electronic media. Reading groups...a place to meet and cultivate friendships and expand your mind through discussion. Children's services to open their eyes to the world of books and beyond. Social teas. Etc. (I'm sure there is more). And all of this free.

I support the library; please, I hope you continue to too. Thank you.

Pat Thurber
233 Mark Drive
Coventry CT 06238
860-742-8237

Sent from my iPhone

Amanda Backhaus

From: Linda Blakesley <lindablakesley@outlook.com>
Sent: Monday, March 1, 2021 1:51 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Declare Racism a Public Health Crisis

Hello. My name is Linda Blakesley and I live at 27 Berry Avenue. Along with two community members and parents in town, I am one of the three organizers of Power Up Coventry, which is a sister group of Power Up Manchester, now known as Power Up Connecticut, led by Manchester resident and founder of Power Up, Keren Prescott.

One of the major demands these groups are asking, and I am as a citizen of this town and state, is for Governor Lamont to declare racism a public health crisis. Currently there is a petition being raised to demonstrate support and demand that this be done at the state level.

I am asking that you do this in Coventry. In fact, I have to wonder why you are dragging your feet on this. You could ask the same question to me, and that is fair, but the time to act is now, late as it is.

What this will do is allow for policies and structures to be looked at and examined to identify where racist practices and beliefs exist. Declaring that racism is a problem is a necessary first step because if you don't explicitly declare it as a public health crisis, then the review cannot be as focused on identifying where racism exists. The charge is weak and ambiguous without this declaration.

This means that merely charging the inactive Human Rights Commission with looking over town policies is a huge cop out on this. The veil of doing something can easily be seen through, and I find it difficult to believe that any substantial change will come out of such a setup. Even if you do eventually get members to serve on the Human Rights Commission, they will need training and guidance, as well as resources and perhaps connections from other towns where this has already been done. Since committee members are all volunteers, this seems like an enormous ask even if the members brought a wide and varied background and expertise to the table. Tackling this demand this way will not meet the needs of what I am asking.

The town is increasing in population of Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian and Biracial families and children. It is our duty to ensure that Town institutions and structures are not in place to overtly or covertly oppress people of color, or other marginalized and disenfranchised residents.

Furthermore, as I said before, we are preparing all of our children to work in a global economy. They must learn, develop, and practice interpersonal skills with others who look different from them and come from different backgrounds. We are doing them a disservice if we are upholding policies and leaving unchecked potentially harmful consequences or obstructions. The adult leaders in this community must make this bold statement to our children and our residents that people of color are valued and we will do everything we can to ensure that equitable systems are in place. They are our future leaders. Let's set an example for doing the right thing.

None of this can successfully happen without a declaration that racism is a public health crisis. Anything less is performative and will have not have sustainable effect on demolishing racism.

So, I ask you tonight, why have you not yet declared racism a public health crisis? What do you have to lose?

In my eyes, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain, and that is a town that demonstrates its commitment to all members of the community, especially our neighbors of color who have suffered disproportionately as a result of racist practices and policies potentially and likely embedded and interspersed throughout town policy, beliefs and culture.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak my views on this. I am hopeful now that you have begun the discussion with the Steering Committee, and I look forward to seeing a formal resolution soon.

Regards,

Linda Blakesley
27 Berry Avenue
Coventry, CT 06238

Linda Blakesley

Amanda Backhaus

From: RICHARD MARTIN <rfmartin65@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 1, 2021 3:11 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Insurrection

I am writing the Town Council concerning the insurrection at our nation's Capital on Jan. 6, 2021. As any true patriot can see, this was an assault on our Constitutional form of government. The insurrectionists stated very vocally their aims were to "hang Mike Pence" and "put a bullet in Nancy Pelosi's head." They were attempting to overturn an election that was fair and free. They were incited to violence by a delusional president who told them the election was stolen from him despite losing over 60 court cases due to lack of evidence showing voter fraud. The facts of the incitement and the resulting violence and attempt to overthrow our duly elected government are not in dispute.

Make no mistake about it, these insurrectionists were from the right-wing militias that this delusional president courted to his cause and to say that any other groups were involved is just as delusional as the man who called them there.

I will not go into detail as to what these insurrectionists did, for example, beating police officers with the American flag or defecating and urinating in the halls of Congress. The list goes on and on, and it was all on display for the world to see. The courts will deal with these violent traitors and hopefully they will receive long prison sentences.

However, I am writing to the Town Council to find out what, if anything, the Council is going to say about this attempted coup.

On 1/19/2021, the Democratic minority placed a statement condemning the insurrection before the Council. It was a solid condemnation of the insurrection. The Democratic statement detailed their strong support for our Constitutional form of government, support for free and fair elections, support for our law enforcement agencies and for those citizens who worked to safeguard our elections, and mourned the loss of life. I believe at least one Republican supported the Democratic statement.

I was shocked, but I was not surprised, that the Republican majority tabled the statement and took no action condemning this attempt to overthrow our government. I had hoped that there would have been a bipartisan agreement on condemning the violent insurrection, instead I believe the Republican majority plans to condemn all protests that occurred in the past year. I would remind the Republicans that there has been only one protest that has attempted to overthrow our government and that was the one by Trump supporters on January, 6th.

I must ask the question: Why are you so silent? What prevents the Republican majority from joining with the Democrats to condemn this attempt to overthrow this election and our government?

Is your silence because you do not think the election was free and fair? After all, a Republican member of the Council made no attempt to hide his contempt for the recount vote on the library and the election workers who participated in that recount.

Is it because the Council's Republicans have bought into the "Big Lie" that the election was stolen from Trump? Is it not true that a Republican member of the Council publicly questioned the legitimacy of the presidential election 2 weeks after President Biden was declared the winner?

Is it because you are afraid to upset your base supporters? This is very alarming. That you would pander to those that would support an insurrection because they have bought into the "Big Lie."

Or is it because you are actually supporters of these far right wing militias that attacked the Capitol? There is a Republican member of the Council who has spoken at rallies supported by Three Percenters. Was there not an attempt by the Republicans to change Coventry's Public Gathering Ordinance to make it easier for those same groups to hold their inflammatory rallies in Coventry?

I would remind the Republicans that there is nothing that is patriotic about these racist, far right wing, white nationalist, supremacy groups. The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security have both said that the greatest threat to our nation's security and democracy is from these groups.

So, I ask the Republicans on the Town Council why you won't stand up for our Democracy and condemn the insurrectionist who participated in the Jan 6th attempt to overthrow our duly elected government in a fair and free election?

Rick Martin

195 Northfield Rd.