1. **Call To Order, Roll Call:**
   The meeting was called to order by O’Brien, Sr. at 7:00 p.m.

   Members present:
   Julie Blanchard – remote
   Lisa Conant – remote (arrived 7:02 p.m.)
   Jonathan Hand- remote
   Matthew O’Brien, Jr.
   Matthew O’Brien, Sr., Vice Chair
   Lisa Thomas
   Richard Williams, Secretary - remote

   Members absent:

   Also present: John Elsesser – Town Manager
   Amanda Backhaus – Finance Director

2. **Unfinished Business:**
   2.A. 19/20-51: FY20/2021 Budget
   1. **Budget deliberations/possible adjustments**
      Elsesser presented from the Budget Book:
      - Tab 4, General Administration, section 4.2 – Funds were added for the Council Clerk due to going from a stipend to an hourly rate. Some money was added for training events. The cost of printing the three newsletters has increased.
      - The Town Manager page – There is an increase for a salary and a longevity payment. There is a range increase for all employees. Elsesser removed the UCONN Intern Program money.
      - Financial and Admin – This has two changes – salary and an old valuation. The money was pulled out of health insurance instead of Admin.
      - Section 4.8, Accounting Office – Money was added to provide more training to the accountant. Money was also added to salary. The salary is an open contract.
      - Collector Revenue – A reduction was made in printing and advertising based on historical trend. Increases are for salary and coming up-to-date with the rate books.
      - Section 4.12, Assessor’s Office – Money is needed to buy another valuation book, for longevity payments, and salary increase. Blanchard noted the longevity went up by $400. Backhaus stated there are two; an increase was left out of this year’s budget. Backhaus will remedy this with a transfer request.
      - Board of Assessment Appeals – This budget is lower based on historical spending though we have to be cautious about the minimum wage increases.
      - Treasurer’s Office – The additional funds are for a prorated salary increase.
      - IT – Backhaus indicated software licenses have gone up using the cloud-based system causing a tripling in price. The previous version is no longer supported.
Cyber security training is budgeted for. This is part of the disaster recovery plans with the BOE. The Eblast application will be upgraded to include graphics and allowing for more than text only. Coventry has a 100-seat license with Zoom, which is the lowest level available. The cost is $200 annually. The license is shared. Other platforms were researched; Zoom seems to be the easiest for people to use. O’Brien, Sr. asked what can be used for larger meetings of over 100 participants, like Town Meeting? Elsesser stated they have looked at options. Those are expensive and come only as a yearly subscription; we would need something that has controls to stop multiple votes from one person. Thomas contributed saying there are some services that verify where the cell call is coming from. Even Zoom has a polling feature. $24,000 is a big increase in this budget. Elsesser informed the Council one service was eliminated last year. There is a big-ticket item and a lot of the items are not optional. There are a few employees that need the full version of Adobe. Filling out FEMA forms is arduous and will get bounced back if not filled out correctly. We partnered with Tolland and Mansfield to get a lower cost for the training. The third-party backup is Veem.

- Planning Office – The increase is for salary and tuition reimbursement. We are trying to support the Assistant Planner in his quest for a Master’s degree.
- ZBA – There is no large change here. Salaries went up 10% with the majority being the ZEO’s.
- Conservation Commission - $750 is targeted for trail maintenance equipment.
- Economic Development Commission – There is no significant change. Service contracts have been lowered somewhat. EDC will fund Arts on Main.
- Inland Wetlands – Elsesser reported the contracted Inland Wetlands Agent submitted her resignation. She was the alternate IWA to Todd Penney, freeing him up for his work as the Town Engineer. Emily Perko started October 1, 2019 and was working 18 hours per week with no fringe benefits. Having an alternate IWA was working really well. There are staffing companies that have these professionals such as the Conservation District with a Soil Scientist program.
- The Planning and Zoning Commission – This budget is reduced by $1,100. With the Plan of Conservation and Development finished the one-time printing expense was taken out. Elsesser indicated Halloran & Sage has given the Town notice their rates are rising. Their rates remain a bargain. When we get through some issues this budget may be knocked back. O’Brien, Sr. asked if other law firms were considered? Elsesser replied any other firm would charge a higher hourly rate. The advantage of Halloran & Sage is the depth of the team. Duncan Forsyth and Rich Roberts often act as a tag team. Coventry is well served by this firm. O’Brien, Jr. noted we don’t pay a retainer. Elsesser confirmed this is the case; with most other firms this is the norm. Coventry pays by the hour. This is a $29,000 increase. We have spent $58,000 through February so we are on track to spend $85,000. Hand raised the question if that amount of increase is enough? Elsesser indicated he can’t answer that. We have had a bit of an unusual year. O’Brien, Sr. added it is hard to determine if the increase is enough. Hand noted we are on track to max it out. Thomas added in addition to expenses we retained another labor attorney. Do we need to think about retaining other Counsel? Elsesser stated that cost would come out of this budget, but not go beyond July. If additional money is needed Elsesser would ask that it come out of the Council’s 1.5% which would be an appropriate use. Elsesser has asked that staff try to be judicious in using attorney time.
- Probate Court – This budget reflects what is asked for by the shared district court.
• Recording and Licensing – This budget has been cut down based on recording volume.

• Elections – The department has requested an increase of $11,500. Only the Democratic registrar responded. Salaries are up quite a bit because they are working more hours. All workers are slated for a wage increase. Ballot printing and service costs are up. Conant asked Elsesser to confirm there is no need for budgetary concerns from the state’s Enforcement Commission with the irregularity happening during the Republican primary? Elsesser is not aware of any liability to the Town for this matter.

• Town Office Building – This is for custodial staff. A custodial person quit last week due to concern of Covid-19. Backhaus stated one full-time person worked out better than part-timers. BOE has not had luck with part-timers and the quality of the work was sub-par. Repairs are up $2,000. The electric amount changes based on history. Backhaus added electric is running closer to $30,000. Blanchard wondered if we are not realizing any savings from solar. Elsesser stated that we are. Elsesser thinks it is due to air conditioning, not lighting. Or it could be the computers; the servers don’t go to sleep at night.

• Essential supplies – This is down slightly as we are using less postage in favor of more email.

• Public Works, tab 5 – Building inspections increase is basically about salary. Elsesser stated the inspector is very busy seeing more commercial permits and another that may be coming. This will be discussed in Executive Session because it abuts town land. Housing permits were doing well until recently; now renovation work is coming in. Joe Callahan is a dedicated employee who continues to do inspections. Builders are respecting social distancing. Callahan is staying out of people’s houses right now. Work can still happen. Pictures are being taken. Follow up can be done later as needed. We want to keep the workers working. Hand conveyed thanks to Joe Callahan.

• Health Department – Elsesser is on the Board of Directors. The Board was able to hold them at a 5% increase. New hires have had a big hit on health insurance.

• Debt Service – There are minor changes here. One lease of $38,000 dropped off. This was replaced with a seven-year lease for $32,000. Some capital items are being moved to dept payment. Detailed information was included regarding this. O’Brien, Sr. is in favor of these changes. Thomas sees the BOE grant for the van is still under consideration. Elsesser replied BOE is exploring D. Petrone’s idea of pick up or drop off at a town location that is not a school. Four questions were asked and we are still waiting for an answer. Thomas figures the options are to take it out consideration for purchase or add $43,000 if the grant does not materialize. Elsesser stated the van is critical to the BOE and it is only a question of how long the current one will last.

O’Brien, Sr. stated the Council could vote on this budget next Monday. Elsesser would then know if we are heading on the right path or if he needs to do a lot more work. The larger mower was deferred until next year. The Police Department has asked for two new cruisers. When was the last time vehicles were purchased? Backhaus does not know. O’Brien, Sr. heard two different dates. The Chief’s car has to be taken off line. O’Brien, Sr. asked if there is a reduction in use hours with a fewer number of officers being active? Elsesser replied in the negative. Hand reminded the Council the department would be buying hybrids and realize significant fuel savings. O’Brien, Sr.
stated the fuel savings show up under DPW with $6,400 next year. O’Brien, Sr. asked about the premium money of $175,000. Elsesser wants that money to be held onto for project expenditures, such as the road bond, as it was for Jones Crossing, and school bond. This money is used for the project or to offset debt in the project budget. There is a high probability that these project types will run over. If it is still there after the projects it can be applied to debt service. Elsesser cautions against applying all of those monies to debt service because next year we would have to make up that amount. Backhaus suggested some could be taken from around the edges. Elsesser added we do not have firm prices on some of the projects that are currently out to bid. State approvals have not come in. Bond proceeds could be used to extend the heat between the buildings for the microgrid/cogeneration project although this continues to be an unresolved issue.

- **Tab 10, page 12.3, Water Pollution Control Authority – WPCA is not proposing to increase the rates. The rebuilds of the plant that have started are being paid for in cash. There is a good plan to rebuild parts of the plant that are 35 years old. Jacobsen Engineering is part of the rebuilds. O’Brien, Sr. asked where we stand with the State for the sewers. Elsesser answered we have not heard back about the recent inspection. We have been status quo for the last ten years or so. The WPCA has stretched out the sewer plant longer than we through we could.**

- **COVRA can be a discussion at the next meeting. There is a revised proposal from waste collection. We are hoping to soften the blow by extending the contract period. On section 12-8 Backhaus did a comparison. The fees need to be reviewed. This is not unique to us. O’Brien, Sr. added this has been talked about in the Finance subcommittee. The changes imposed have been dramatic. O’Brien, Sr. does not know if $10 is enough. An effort should be made to make people aware of what is causing the change. Perhaps we should go to $15 this year. Thomas added that we have been fortunate that we have not had an increase in many years. The Town has done what it can to be fiscally responsible to taxpayers. O’Brien, Sr. stated this could turn around. Elsesser added plants are starting to be built to handle plastics in the United States. O’Brien, Jr. asked what the maximum would be? O’Brien, Sr. replied the increase is not an absolute if the issue stabilizes. The thought is $10 - $15 this year.**

- **Self-supporting recreation fund – In general, it does self-regulate. All special funds can go negative and then have to rebuild and repay the debt. We have one of the best programs in the area. Backhaus stated it will be just about breaking even if everything stays as is through the end of the year.**

- **EMS – Elsesser stated this budget was developed with continuing with Vintec service for seven days per week. We have gone to full-time during this crisis with the service because of the qualifications of the responders. Elsesser is not certain we can go back. We have not had the opportunity to do a case flow analysis on the point system and not having the volunteers going out. Equipment of the same type should be purchased to have the ambulances equipped the same. Money was not added toward the purchase of the next ambulance. Thomas asked the reason why Elsesser feels it may be difficult to go back to volunteers for staffing the ambulances? Elsesser stated we have a hard time filling those hours during normal times. We need more volunteer ambulance people. There are not enough volunteers to go out on nights and weekends. Thomas has heard from three people in the community concerned that the volunteers will not be able to continue**
providing the service. Elsesser stated there is one volunteer person who is not going to as many calls. Tones are sent out and we are hoping someone goes out. Last week we had to call in UCONN after retoning. People are concerned about being on the ambulance. We have seen the trend going down. Elsesser is sharing a concern, not a hope. If we make this change, we may not go back. We are getting back to back to back ambulance calls. O’Brien, Sr. stated we are providing protective equipment. The community has been fantastic about looking through closets for needed supplies. Backhaus added we have ordered some stuff from China that are supposedly on the way. O’Brien, Sr. asked about the request from FEMA. Elsesser reported Jim McLoughlin is seeing those slowly coming in even if he has to pick them up somewhere. People are coming up with ideas on how to make some supplies. So far, we are doing okay and the increase in supply is slowly coming in. O’Brien, Sr. stated we are going to be taking care in case we see the surge that other parts of the state are experiencing. Elsesser state Jim McLoughlin is on this daily. McLoughlin had to promise the masks we received would not leave the county as a basis of the donation. Elsesser stated there may be a local announcement in town on Friday regarding Purell. American small businesses are being very innovative and jumping to provide or manufacture needed supplies. O’Brien, Sr. asked what a power loader is? Elsesser replied it is a stretcher that can walk upstairs and keep the heart monitor on.

- Farmer’s Market – This does not receive a subsidy from the town. They will not be applying for the farm viability grant for $15,000. It requires much paperwork. Elsesser stated we are speaking only about the summer farmer’s market. They are gearing up for the opening of the season on the first weekend in June. The annual meeting with Landmarks is coming up. We will be negotiating the lease for next year. The parking lot is being prepared.
- The full-time employees of the library are working and getting paid. If the building is closed through May what are the impacts? There are some projects taking place; Elsesser will gather more information. $512,000 is the proposed amount from the Council. This is in four quarterly payments without the Council knowing what they spend it on.
- Revenues, section 2.6 – Backhaus stated the general property increase was the last number calculated that is used to increase the grand list. This leave a 0-mil increase. O’Brien, Sr. reminded everyone that a level mil rate is not a no increase rate. If the grand list increases 5% your taxes are going to be a 5% increase.
- Sewer system reimbursement – there are a couple of years left to reduce the payment to $50,000 per year. Backhaus will send out a spreadsheet on this.
- Education and local grants – This fund is down $150,000. The student population is actually growing. This number came out of OPM. Impacts to excess special education costs will be taken out of ICS grants if we don’t provide the service. The mil rate is not set when the budget is set. It depends on the revenues.
- Section 2.7 – The Housing Authority pilot money was doubled. We are expecting it to get a bit higher this year.
- Insurance reimbursement and claims – This will be money that comes back. We won’t know until May the actual amount. Elsesser added they invest in a lot of stocks. They are more worried about worker’s comp claims.
- Investment income – This is based on historical trends. We could be taking money from here if tax bills are delayed. O’Brien, Sr. asked if we can go to short term borrowing instead? Elsesser stated there is a strange borrowing market right now.
This budget was put together at a different time. We think we can live with this. We can also talk about looking at supplemental motor vehicle tax bills.

- Backhaus added there are some other small changes such as for the preschool fund. There are no changes to Town Clerk, special duties, and small revenues.

Discussion ensued about the merged fire departments prioritization list. O’Brien, Sr. asked if Members have had a chance to review the list and have any thoughts on the issue? What is important from the Town’s perspective about the combined department? The Transition team’s first priority are uniforms and shirts. Thomas asked why the Council would ignore their wants? O’Brien, Sr. replied the town does realize that first priority is about keeping the volunteers happy. However, it may be more unifying for the town to reletter the trucks first. Elsesser added there could be partial changes over time. O’Brien, Sr. continued by saying the Council can suggest what we want to spend money on. What would have the best impact in the town and acceptance for the change? Thomas suggests the tendency should be to defer to the volunteer’s priorities. Conant added we know the Transition Team has gone through the process and they seem to have a very clear plan in place. Conant thinks there are specific plans causing them to ask for what they did. We should be respectful of that; they prioritized for a reason. Hand asked how much more can we do to satisfy the needs. Hand understands the relettering of the trucks will have a bigger impact on the Town’s perception of the merged department. Can we pitch in more money to cover some of these items? Elsesser stated we will look if more money is available. There may be more money from repairs. Backhaus stated money may be available from the BOE Encumbrances. O’Brien, Sr. feels that would be a good way to use the money that is coming back. Elsesser added the numbers on the trucks have to be changed to match the radio call sign. O’Brien, Sr. is putting this on the table as he feels the Council should make it a priority.

3. **ADJOURNMENT:**

   **Motion:** I move that the Council adjourn at 9:02 p.m.

   By: Thomas  Seconded: Hand

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