

**MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL
APRIL 19, 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 7:30 p.m.

Members present:

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

Members absent:

Also present:

John Elsesser – Town Manager
Amanda Backhaus – Finance Director - remote

2. Pledge Of Allegiance:

Council members and Staff stood to recite the pledge.

3. Audience Of Citizens:

(30 minutes – 5 minutes per person, 750-word count maximum)

Submit comments of a general nature to be read aloud to: audience@coventry.org (Deadline 4 p.m.)

Blanchard and O’Brien, Sr. read the comments from the following citizens. Their statements are attached to these Minutes.

James Flores, Willimantic resident – Writes to say he sometimes has a problem being admitted to Patriots Park.

Catherine Kennelly, 2293 Main Street – Writes to urge the Town Council to approve a declaration that racism is a public health crisis and that the community will support all efforts to identify and eliminate racism in our town.

Joseph Jankowski, President of the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library Board of Trustees, 3899 South St. – Writes to say the recent generous donation inspired the Library to

participate in Library Giving Day. As of today more than \$110,000 of the fundraising goal of \$150,000 has been donated to the supplemental fund for the renovation project.

Jason Blakesley, 27 Berry Avenue – Writes in support to declaring racism a public health crisis and mentions incidences of racial slurs in town. He writes some of the worst violators of system racism lie in Town Hall and the school system.

Linda Blakesley, 27 Berry Avenue – Writes about a previous email demanding Coventry declare racism a public health crisis. This was referred to Steering Committee but no report, decision, or vote on this has been made. Today she is demanding the Town Council take action on her demand.

Linda Blakesley, 27 Berry Avenue – Writes to support the efforts to establish a playing field for the girls’ softball league.

Rick Martin, 195 Northfield Road – Writes in support of the Town Council declaring racism a public health crisis. He mentions letters responding to Ms. Blakesley’s initial letter as attacking her request.

O’Brien, Sr. mentioned there are now explicit instructions about statements having a word limit of 750. This letter was over that and he asked this person to adhere to the limit in the future.

Carolyn Arabolos, 132 North Farms Road – Writes of the conversation regarding declaring racism a public health crisis. Taking action does not mean Coventry is a racist town. She asks that action be taken by the Town Council to declare racism a public health crisis.

Samantha E. Apgar, 88 Prospect Street, Apt. B – Writes that she finds it alarming that numerous residents think they play no role in the racism that exists in Coventry, in the country, and in the world. She knows that racism exists in town. She asks the Town Council to see the problem that is racism in Coventry and declare it a public health crisis.

4. Acceptance Of Minutes:

- **March 29, 2021 Special Budget Meeting**

Motion: I move to accept the minutes of March 29, 2021 Special Budget meeting.

By: O’Brien, Sr.

Seconded: Thomas

With the following corrections:

- Page 2, second paragraph – change to indicate there is “20k – 25k in bond premiums; the remainder is from bonded money from the elevator that has not been spent around \$40k and savings from another project of \$30k – \$40K.”
- Page 2, third paragraph, add at the end of the paragraph – “We also looked to update the costs of things there were already included in the budget.”

- Page 2, fourth paragraph, second sentence – add “additional” before “revenue”; and “The amount the ARP could be able to put forward the same amount that is in there at the end of the year.”.
- Page 2, fifth paragraph, first sentence – change “\$10k” to “\$27k”.
- Page 3, second paragraph, first sentence – add “increase” after “10%”; add “premiums” after “insurance”; add “Backhaus said the BOE could do with a 5% increase because they have substantial reserves.”; remove the second and fourteenth sentences.
- Page 4, first paragraph, add after the seventeenth sentence – “There are no stipends in the current year’s budget”;
- Page 4, first paragraph, add to the eighteenth sentence – “and we want to include points for events for that that qualify.”; add “to our budget proposal” after “\$5,500 - \$6,000”; remove “to the \$80k”; add before the second to last sentence – “O’Brien, Sr. asked if we can do fundraising and Elsesser said we would look into that. O’Brien, Sr. said he thinks that we should do that.”.
- Page 4, second paragraph – add “at revenues” after “looking”.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

- **April 5, 2021 Regular Meeting**

Motion: I move to accept the minutes of April 5, 2021 meeting.

By: Thomas

Seconded: Hand

With the following corrections:

- Page 6, item 6.C.1.F., Discussion – change “Breena” to “Brenna” throughout.
- Page 7, paragraph after Steering appointments – add “O’Brien, Sr. asked that the related letters be referred to Steering to be used in their discussions about this subject.”
- Page 7, last paragraph – remove the first sentence; add “Elsesser said the Finance Committee did a review of the initial report of the Girls’ Softball Committee and forwarded that additional information to Wendy Rubin for an update of the report.”
- Page 9, second paragraph – add after the first sentence “O’Brien, Sr. also looked at the March 8, 2021 meeting; he and Thomas were reassured the initial request was \$20k. Thomas also spoke to Bud Meyers and Jim McLoughlin.”.
- Page 9, fifth paragraph, fourth sentence – remove the fourth sentence.
- Page 10, first paragraph, eleventh sentence – add “not necessarily” after “no”.
- Page 10, last paragraph, last sentence – add “to” after “Council”.
- Page 11, last paragraph, fifth sentence – add “points” after “6,998”.
- Page 12, third sentence – change “that” to “than”.
- Page 14, first full paragraph – remove the fourth and fifth sentences.
- Page 14, third full paragraph – add “%” after “.98”, “.35”, “.44”.
- Page 15, first paragraph – change “ARF” to “ARP” throughout.

- Page 15, first paragraph, after the second full sentence – add “O’Brien, Sr. responded his proposal does not include using any ARP funds for this budget.”
- Page 15, first paragraph, third sentence – change to read “O’Brien, Sr. said the suggestion is that the funds from the food services account be used for food services expenses.”; add to the end of the paragraph – O’Brien, Sr. read the following – the allowable expenditures include educational expenses, facility repair and maintenance, and a transfer of funds to the General Fund to cover other Board of Education budget issues.
- Page 15, Motion Discussion – change “.17%” to “.17 mil”
- Page 15, last paragraph, ninth sentence – change to read “Williams asked if we can increase revenue projected for building permits.”
- Page 15, last paragraph, thirteenth sentence – add “we” after “said”.
- Page 16, last paragraph, third sentence – change to read “Elsesser said it would reduce the increase in the Capital budget to less than 1%.”
- Page 19, first discussion, eighth sentence – add “and” after “held”; add to the end of the discussion “O’Brien, Sr. was in favor of including the Microgrid project but had reservations of the sidewalk project.”

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: Hand

Seconded: O’Brien, Jr.

Discussion: Conant asked to have item 9.A. removed from the Consent Agenda. O’Brien, Sr. asked that item 9.B. 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 wants to ensure that everyone is aware we have an Annual Town Meeting this Saturday, April 24th, at 10:00 a.m.. It will be held in the Veteran’s Auditorium of the high school respecting the Governor’s Executive Order for appropriate precautions, social

distancing, etc. She asked the Council to get a head count of who may be coming. She envisions on the stage being the Town Manager, herself, the Finance Director, the Superintendent and, if he chooses his Chairperson, maybe his Finance person. Blanchard will recognize any Council members that are seated in the audience in order to maintain social distancing on the stage.

On April 29th there is a Land Use Consortium scheduled. Elsesser said this will be held via Zoom at 7:00 p.m. Presentations and sharing of screens will be done. One of the Council's goals was to have three per year. The main topics are the recap of the Plan of Conservation and Development, an update on the lake issues, and a third issue that escaped Elsesser. Eric Trott is working on the agenda and will be getting it out. Preregistration may be required for this Zoom meeting. If the meeting is conducted from the Annex it can be shown on YouTube for the public to watch live.

On April 30th the Human Services department is going to be having a food drive. People can drive up to the circle in front of Town Hall if they are in need of receiving food from the food bank. Elsesser said there are still some fresh products from the Department of Agriculture program.

6.B. Council Members:

Thomas said the Town Council Spring newsletter is out. There is hardcopy and is available on the home page of the town website. The newsletter provides useful information and provides opportunities for people in the community. Thomas suggests the letters received for this evening's audience of citizens also be sent to Steering so all the letters on the issue are going to Steering. Thomas has been keeping an eye on three pieces of legislation and the Governor's budget this year that are important to the community as well as our part of the state that she sent testimony in on. The first is House bill 6503 which streamlines permitting of anaerobic digesters. It is about our farmers taking organic waste and turning it into energy. Hytone Farm has an application in with PZC to be able to do this. The energy produced by the digesters provide another source of revenue for the farmers and helps with organic food waste. Another one is House bill 6646 which is a very important crumbling foundations bill. It seeks to make sure there is enough funding for homeowners. It is critical to Coventry and eastern Connecticut. The third bill is SB701 which is specific to Coventry and will allow us to have our sewer expansion at the end of the line in Bolton. In the Governor's budget there is funding specifically targeting recreational trails and greenways, open space and watershed land acquisition, and state park infrastructure investment. These are things that are critical for us. Those are things that hopefully will be woven into tourism and ways to generate revenue in our community and throughout our part of the state. We can leverage our natural resources. Thomas has personally expressed her support for them. SB is the Senate bill. Elsesser said it came out of the Committee unanimously. It was being called for the vote but was held on Monday. Senator Champagne is still optimistic it will move forward out of the House. It is still alive. O'Brien, Sr. said it can still use our support. Thomas said our legislators need to hear from us, from all of the towns that are involved. Blanchard said the Council voiced support early on. Elsesser said if the Council directs him to he will follow up on this matter. Blanchard said absolutely.

Hand said after hearing all the letters from the previous meeting and this meeting he looks forward to a robust discussion in Steering on declaring racism as a public health crisis for all of the things that entails and all of the stakeholders including members of our own community. O'Brien, Jr. said this is on the next Steering agenda. Elsesser said to put it into perspective we were trying to get a budget passed so Steering only had 30 minutes for their meetings. O'Brien, Jr. said he promises a full and hearty discussion; he is looking forward to it. O'Brien, Jr. said at the last meeting he asked for letters from supporters because we heard from dissenters and is encouraging anyone who would like to comment to send a letter in to Steering. Blanchard said they can get the Members' email addresses from the webpage; they can write to us as a group, they can write to us individually.

Conant mentioned she was at the Village Celebration of Spring this weekend. It was quiet when she was there. As usual they did a great job. There were some limited activities. The Village partners are hoping to bring this back to life once we are passed the pandemic. Also she wants to support what Hand and O'Brien, Jr. was saying; she looks forward to that discussion.

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

O'Brien, Sr. read his report:

Coventry Town Council Finance Committee
Report to the Council April 19, 2021

We held our Finance Committee meeting on April 12, 2021.

Our Finance Director, Amanda Backhaus reported we have collected 100.02% of the projected property tax revenue through March. The same period last year we saw property tax revenues at 98.86% of anticipated revenues.

General fund revenue collections are 90.24% of anticipated compared to 88.85% last year. Amanda reported that the Board of Education expenditures are at 66.34% of their approved budget compared to 68.79% last year.

As of March 31st, COVRRRA is projected to end the year with a balance of about \$190,000. We finished last year with a fund balance of \$406,000.

The Sewer Use fund is in good shape and as we discussed, the Recreation fund is projected to end the year with a deficit of \$95,000 before the anticipated infusion of ARP funds to offset lost revenues. The Chair also provided information about the Covid Grant Funding that the Board has received in the form of ESSER I funds of \$117,663, an initial direct payment to the Board of Education of \$53,211 from CRF and an additional \$47,613 in additional CRF funds from the Town.

We discussed the Board's responses to our earlier questions and the Board of Education Management Report. The Chair provided a memo that reported the month-to-month data on each month's Management Report that the Board identified as Covid expenses on their reports. It was noted that the expectation was that when the Board received grant money for these expenses they would be removed from the Board's reports and moved to a separate grant fund detailing those expenses. There were no notations on the monthly management reports to provide any guidance, and it was not possible to identify reductions in the reported Covid expenses, on any of the management reports that corresponded with the receipt of the grant funds. The chair also noted that the Superintendent, at our joint meeting, when listing savings for the current year, identified items that should be categorized as Covid savings but none of

these savings are identified in the management reports – only the Covid expenses. The chair created a set of follow up questions asking for more clarity on these issues and the Town Council Chairwoman forwarded them to the Board Chairwoman.

The Committee then discussed the Covid-19 Board of Education Reserve Fund. At the joint meeting with the Board of Education, the Superintendent indicated that the Board did not anticipate needing to apply for those funds. The Chair sent a message, through the Town Council Chair, asking the Board to please let us know by June 1st, formally, if they intend or anticipate applying for those funds because of the need and after meeting the criteria set forth in the fund. If these funds are not needed and can be released it would increase the Town's unrestricted fund balance by the \$99,999 and may have a positive impact when the Town goes out to bond other projects.

Amanda discussed the list of proposed internal transfers between departments, that are included in tonight's agenda for your consideration. The Finance Committee endorsed recommending to the Council that we approve these transfers tonight.

The Committee also reviewed the proposed potential Appropriations from the Council's 1 ½% authority. During discussion, we learned that there is need to also appropriate an additional \$4,000 for engineering costs that are running over. We included the \$20,000 for the fire department's special equipment that was not included in the budget. The Committee recommended that the Town Council approve the entire list of appropriations tonight.

The Town Council has asked that Finance consider the financial implications and impacts of the Town considering taking over the roads in Avery Shores. We discussed the history of this request that has occurred over several years and requested additional information from John and Amanda.

We briefly discussed the Softball Field Study Committee's report and pointed out some additional information that was learned about after the Committee had voted to make the recommendation that we received. This included a reduction in the projected costs for the basic field construction of two fields at the landfill of almost \$70,000, due to some new calculations about the gravel used,; some information that was received in response to questions of the Town Engineer that showed that the gravel pit field construction would have an impact on parking and may result in some additional costs. The chair had also asked about any impact that the proximity to the nearby swamp might have on the gravel pit option. The Town Engineer could not make a prediction of any impact due to smell or bugs and said that additional work would need to be done to determine this. It was noted that the second field would be just 70 feet from the swamp. The first field would be a bit further away. The chair also asked if we had received any additional information about the expected final results that the STEEP grant landfill project will have on any future considerations about the methane gas that the project is intended to deal with. We asked John to forward the points in our discussion to the committee so they can be prepared to discuss them when they come to our next Finance Committee meeting.

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

Matthew O'Brien Sr.
Chairman, Finance Committee

6.C.1. * Monthly Financial Reports

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

6.E. COVRRRA – John A. Elsesser:

1. Request to purchase additional recycling bin

Elsesser said from time to time we have people who just can't fit everything into one bi-weekly recycling bin. We've discussed with the hauler of providing another container and at what expense for the container or of an extra fee while the truck is there. In some cases the virus has increased the amount of recycling because of being home. In other cases people can learn better habits. Should we have a discussion to find out what the impacts would be? The bins are more expensive that you would think.

Hand said as a point of clarity this sounds like they are purchasing a bin. These bins don't belong to the resident, they belong to the waste hauling company. Elsesser said that is correct. Hand said so we are talking about if there would be an extra charge for the pickup, correct. Elsesser said that is not correct. There is a capital expense to the company to provide that container. O'Brien, Sr. said that is beyond our contract. Elsesser said we have a contracted expense to provide one of each bin type for each household. The question is do we bill more and at what expense and consider the cost of collection. O'Brien, Sr. said there is a cost per barrel to be provided by the waste management company. Blanchard said what are Elsesser's thoughts on our Tax Collector being able to adjust the bills on a case-by-case basis. Elsesser said it is a software nightmare; it is complicated. Is there interest in pursuing this to find out if there is a solution here besides having a lot of extra stuff to be hauled somewhere. We do take recycling at no charge but you have to bring it to Public Works or the Transfer Station. We don't want it to go into the trash barrel because we are paying less for recycling than we are for trash. Hand said at least look into this, we encourage recycling. See what the financial impacts would be to keep things out of the solid waste stream. Thomas said we have had people ask us in the past for an additional recycling barrel; there is some demand, we don't know how strong that demand is. Elsesser said what people really want is to go to weekly recycling and that is extraordinarily expensive. Elsesser does not know the willingness of the hauler to pick up two barrels from one location. Thomas said it doesn't hurt to ask. Elsesser said he will have a discussion with the hauler to see what their thoughts are. This is about picking up two barrels every other week. There would not be a run for recycling pick up every week.

6.F. Town Manager – John A. Elsesser

6.F.1. Projects Update

Updates to Elsesser's distributed report are:

- The LED crosswalk blinkers are installed.
- The intern working with the Lakes Monitoring Committee has finalized the Watershed Health Pledge. There will be an online pledge that people can click on to take the pledge. Those that do will get a static cling sticker. Thomas suggested if someone takes the pledge that it can be linked to the person's Facebook page indicating "I took the Coventry Watershed Pledge" to help promote it throughout

the community. Elsesser said the lake is about 2.5” below the summer level right now.

- The school roofs will not be able to be done this summer. There are some pricing issues with the prices per square foot doubling. We will be out to bid this fall or winter for work being done next summer.
- The water tank pad is ready for Miller Richardson. The goal is to get the irrigation system up and running.
- We planted the trees in honor of Chuck Conklin so they are ready for the Arbor Day ceremony at 11:00 a.m. We will have guest speakers. The city of Hartford’s Arborist who interned with Chuck Conklin will be at the ceremony.
- CT DOT is starting work on the culvert in front of Meadowbrook Plaza. There will be some minor traffic delays but most of the time there will be two-way traffic throughout the process.
- The selection process for the officers of the Fire Department have been made. There is one candidate for Fire Chief who will be going before the outside interview panel for the Town Manager’s review and then forwarding the recommendation of the candidate to the Council. Then the Fire Chief will select the other officers. We are still on track for the July 1 date.
- The Hytone Farm digester project mentioned earlier is very significant for the farm. In addition to the outside income it will also reduce the smell of manure. The outside income is very significant to keep these farms alive.
- There is a purchase agreement for Sanborne’s garage. It’s a family owned business that specializes in Japanese car repairs and sales. There are very few environmental issues to clean up there and the family is aware of those.

O’Brien, Sr. said of item twelve to repair the turf issue with STEAP - this has impact on the softball project as well and they are actually taking care of the methane problem. Elsesser said yes, the methane venting is for the landfill that was closed almost thirty years ago. There is not a lot of settling going on right now. O’Brien, Sr. said it is important for people to know that problem will be alleviated by this project.

6.F.2. COVID-19 Update

Elsesser said masks and social distancing are very, very important. Thomas said the last couple of updates from the Health District have the numbers climbing in town. Elsesser said the state is doing better than our region. It’s specifically younger people, not necessarily students. We are about 50% vaccinated as a town. The University of Connecticut has a lot of vaccines available.

6.F.3. Microgrid Update

Elsesser said DEEP has decided part of their jurisdiction is to oversee rate cases and that is typically the Office of Consumer Council that we have already had meetings with. In this legislative session they may pull PURA out of DEEP to separate them again. There is a meeting scheduled to have the Office of Consumer Council, DEEP, and our microgrid group on one phone call. The Office of Consumer Council that is statutorily charged is very comfortable with where we are headed. Until DEEP feels comfortable they will not release the revised plans.

6.F.4. Town Of Coventry Participation In Twin Cities Summit 4/23/2021

Elsesser has been invited to give greetings to Coventry, England along with about 30 other towns and cities around the world including Coventry, RI.

6.F.5. Legal Notice, Annual Town Meeting & Budget Referendum

Elsesser said the copy of the legal notice is on the back of the newsletter for Saturday, April 24, 2021, at 10:00 a.m.

6.F.6. CT DOT: High Friction Surface Treatment: Request To Waive Public Information Meeting

Elsesser said CT DOT will hold a public information meeting if the town really wants it. He asked about the noise level because of it being a rougher surface. They have a good handout that explains what the high friction surface is. It would only be in front of the Daniel Rust House. We are going to make the information accessible by means of other than a meeting.

6.F.7. Notification: Aquatic Invasive Species Grants

Elsesser gave a shout out for the Planning offices in both Mansfield and Coventry. We got two grants. We are getting \$50k for our lakes. Kudos to our team that came up with money not only for chemicals but to give us money for research. The research is to see how the chemicals act on the tubers so there is a long-term strategy to see how we can start using less chemicals and use less money while having effective and quality control. For the Willimantic River and Eagleville Lake we will work with the kayakers, the people who fish, and the lake area residents to see what areas we should focus on treating the fanwort. A river management study is being done. We are looking to reduce the cost and the amount of chemicals used by targeting priority areas.

O'Brien, Sr. expressed kudos also and asked if this might have an effect on our mil rate. Elsesser said we can't cut the expense because we still have the expense this year. It is a pass through like any other grant. Elsesser said it will be in the mix for setting the mil rate in June. The cost of the research is a one-time expense so we are not building a hole. Thomas said she knows these grants were extra competitive this year. To have received both is really a testament to the work that was done.

Elsesser said Echo Systems, Dr. Kortmann's company, has been sold to GZA. Dr. Kortmann will be working part-time and continue doing volunteer work. The company is staying in town for the foreseeable future. Echo Systems builds environmental products that are sold around the world that Dr. Kortmann has patents on. GZA does not have the space to manufacture these products at its current office in Glastonbury. We are blessed to have Dr. Kortmann in town and know when we get an answer from him it is right.

6.F.8. * Spring 2021 Town Newsletter

7. Unfinished Business:

By: O'Brien, Sr.

Seconded: Hand

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.C. 20/21-68: Consideration/Possible Action: Request Of David Gooch To Purchase The Town Owned Properties Located At The Intersection Of Forest And Bissell Roads (Assessor's Map P, Block N, Lots 11 & 12), Pursuant To CGS 8-24

Elsesser said there are two lake lots at the corner of Bissell and Forest that have been requested by Mr. Gooch to purchase them. We went through the process for the sale of Town lots. The process is to go before PZC; they did not find these lots to be of interest to the Town. Next the abutters are approached and then the Association; none of these parties were interested. The next step, with the policy of the Council, is that it can now be offered out to competitive bid. It cannot be built upon as it is still dedicated open space. Mr. Gooch is not an abutter. Gooch indicated in his letter through buying these lots he would have beach rights in the Association. As Elsesser mentioned in his letter he has mixed feelings about this. Over the years we have not sold these lots under the premise that it would have to stay as open space anyway. On the other hand under private ownership it may be tended to better. O'Brien, Sr. asked if the Association was asked if they have an issue with someone buying the lots for beach rights. Elsesser said letters were sent to the lake association and no response was received. Thomas asked how big of a piece of land is it. Elsesser said it is not buildable; the property is a liability to us as we don't maintain these places. It can't be built on but it could be clear cut and a boat can be parked on it which may not be horrible. It could start a trend of people buying these lots around the lake to acquire beach rights. That has happened in the past and then they are abandoned; this may be the start of that type of cycle.

Motion: I move that the Town Council approve the request of Gooch to purchase the Town owned properties located at the intersection of Forest and Bissell roads (Assessor's Map P, Block N, Lots 11 & 12), pursuant to CGS 8-24.

By: Thomas

Seconded: O'Brien, Sr.

Discussion: Elsesser said to be clear this will not go out to competitive bid; it is a sealed bid. PZC says whoever asks for it can be sold to that party. The Council's policy dictates that it goes to sealed bids. Thomas asked if the motion should not say 'the request of Gooch'. O'Brien, Sr. said there is an expense to go out to sealed bid. Elsesser said he thinks we have to go out to sealed bid because someone else may want to have the right to do this.

Amended Motion: I move that the Town Council approves going to bid according to the Town Council policy of the Town owned properties located at the intersection of Forest and Bissell Road (Assessor's Map P, Block N, Lots 11 & 12) pursuant to the Council's policy.

By: Thomas

Seconded: O'Brien, Sr.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.D. 20/21-69: Consideration/Possible Action: Acceptance Of Welfare Lien

Repayment

Backhaus said this is no longer an action item. The property went to tax sale on Saturday. It sold for \$85,000; \$24,000 will go to the town of Windsor for taxes and the rest will be held for six months for the opportunity to redeem the property within the six months after the tax sale if someone so chooses. Then the money will be turned over to the State at which time we can collect our lien. No longer an action item but potential money for the town. The base lien is \$25,324 and 32 years of interest is \$32,415 for a total of \$57,738. Elsesser said he believes the State has waived their welfare liens due to Covid. Procedurally, the State is ahead of us and if they have a large lien they could suck up all the money. If they get out of the way we might get our money as we are next in line over other people. Blanchard asked Backhaus to keep the Council up-to-date and pursue what she can.

9. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:

9.A. * ARP Municipal Aid – Recommendation Of One Percent For Arts & Culture

Conant wonders if the Council wants to consider this suggestion by the Southeastern CT Cultural Coalition. We have a lot of arts-related tourism in town. We have studios, the Farmer's Market, the sculpture fields. The sculpture fields are not only a local attraction but a national and international attraction. Conant spoke to Backhaus who estimates we may be getting \$3.3 mill from ARP. So if we were to go ahead with this suggestion it would be a set aside of \$33,000. Conant does know of an artist in our community who has shared they were deeply impacted by Covid losing a lot of revenue as many of the cultural and arts institutions have. O'Brien, Sr. thanks Conant for the presentation and said it is worth considering. O'Brien, Sr. does not think we have all of the information we need yet about the ARP funds; what they can be used for and what the restrictions are and what our needs are going to be. O'Brien, Sr. said we should definitely take this conversation up again once we have all of the information; I don't want to commit now. Conant asked that this be added to the list for later consideration; it is definitely worthwhile. Covid has impacted everything in so many ways and this is another one. Thomas said our Arts Guild which started out from some funding has really taken the lead in the events that we've had on our Main Street and downtown so this could be a way we can continue to support and encourage that. Anything we can find to sink our teeth into to build ourselves as an attraction which is part of the goal of the David Hayes Sculpture Field and part of the whole Arts Guild network. Even when we think of our antique shops and Jim Berks place incorporates a whole arts component. They had to close down for a while because of Covid. Conant said that Coventry is part of an antiques trail that she did not know existed. Elsesser will add this to a list he has for this aid. A request was received from the EDC for looking at some long-term development strategies. We are still waiting for the regulations but he is thinking this type of discussion could take place in June once the regulations come in. As a side note, Elsesser forwarded to Eric Trott that there is significant money coming out for restaurants. Trott is getting information out to our community for lost

revenue. Trott is our recovery person and these will end up being outright grants for lost revenue. Some of our restaurants and food provisions types of businesses may really be made whole which will be phenomenal. Our plate is full but we are still reaching out to make sure people know of the opportunities that are out there.

9.B. * Board Of Education: 4/8/21 Minutes

O'Brien, Sr. said on page 4 and 5 the Board considered the vote for the FY 21/22 budget and there are comments from the Superintendent that he thought people should be made aware of. The bottom line is they are not taking away from any programs or eliminating programs instead coming back with updated prices. O'Brien, Sr. read – "Dr. Petrone added that we have to take into perspective that this list is a fine tuning of the prices for these items as they were originally quoted a few months back. He also said that our hope is, we can use the additional monies coming from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to help make up for what may need to be cut, as the Board approved... Dr. Petrone responded that the cut suggestions are not taking away from programs or eliminated any programs, but instead coming back with better prices. Dr. Petrone continued to explain that we took a hard look at line items and tightened up some of the quotes on items. He said that he doesn't want anyone to think any programs are being cut." O'Brien, Sr. said what they didn't do was to choose to use any of the over \$100k that is available in their food service account or the \$146k that is available in their tuition account. They still have lots of money available through other revenue sources that they are not tapping in order to make up this shortfall if there is any. O'Brien, Sr. wants to assure people that the Board was able to find those without impacting any programs or cutting any services.

10. Executive Session

Motion: I move that the Town Council enter into Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1- 200(6)(A): discussion concerning the employment, appointment, performance, evaluation, health or dismissal of a public officer or employee with the following in attendance the seven members of the Council, Town Manager John Elsesser, and Finance Director Amanda Backhaus.

By: O'Brien, Sr.

Seconded: O'Brien, Jr.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

The Council entered Executive Session at 9:53 p.m.

11. Adjournment:

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

By:

Seconded:

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: James Flores <jamesflores57@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, April 16, 2021 10:14 AM
To: Coventry Audience; Lisa Thomas
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Declare Racism A Public Health Crisis In Coventry CT

Dear Coventry Town Council members

I am black / Latino from Willimantic CT. Sincerely, I have entered Coventry Patriot Park many times without any problem, However on some occasions I have been told that I cannot enter because the park is only for residents. After few minute or argument I was able to enter, Being black has been a problem for some people who work in the park.

If you have any question please contact me at 860 208 2907

James Flores
Former Windham Town Council Member

Amanda Backhaus

From: Cathy Kennelly <cakennelly@hotmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 18, 2021 7:15 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Town Council Remarks re a Racism Declaration

I am writing to urge the Town Council to approve a declaration that racism is a public health crisis and that, as a community, we will do our utmost to support all efforts to identify and eliminate racism within our town. There are people opposed to this because they have not personally witnessed acts of racism or feel that it is a political issue. To the contrary, the effects of racism are much larger than, but include, our town: it is a national issue, of which this town is an integral part.

Racism goes back to 1619, when slaves were first brought into this country. Through racism, which did not go away when slavery was abolished, people of color are still victims of the long-term damage caused by racism. It has long been known that racial and ethnic populations have higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, obesity, asthma, and heart disease when compared to white Americans. Additionally, they endure stress, trauma and mental anguish dealing with racial bias, and a life expectancy that is four years lower than that of white Americans. These are not political facts; rather, they are health facts that are recognized by the Centers for Disease Control.

We live in a community that has a very small minority population, so it is understandable that some who are opposed to this declaration think it is unnecessary (because they have not personally witnessed acts of racism) or is political. I am sure that conversations with minorities in our town would confirm acts of racism, as abhorrent as they are, exist. However, the facts also indicate that it is a public health issue that results in a diminished quality of life, higher health care costs and a lower life expectancy. As a town, we need to join the more than 170 municipalities nationally that have embraced this concept. Acceptance of this declaration acknowledges that Coventry wants to be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem, to this national public health crisis.

Thank you for your consideration.

Catherine Kennelly
2293 Main St., Coventry

Amanda Backhaus

From: Joe Jankowski <jjanko@sbcglobal.net>
Sent: Monday, April 19, 2021 7:12 AM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Audience of Citizens - April 19, 2021

Inspired by an incredibly generous donation made by Sondra Astor Stave, Booth & Dimock Memorial Library this year participated in Library Giving Day, a national day of community support for public libraries, celebrated this year on April 7th. The donations received will be used to supplement the town and state funding of our library's renovation project, being planned and overseen by the Town Council's Library Renovation and Improvement Committee. These supplemental funds will allow the project to purchase items eliminated from the plan prior to the November referendum. As of today, more than \$110,000 of the supplemental fundraising goal of \$150,000 has been donated.

On behalf of the library Board of Trustees, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to Sondra and all of the other donors in our community who have made this possible. The generosity and support of the Coventry community is truly extraordinary! It should be noted that donations from individuals and businesses are still being accepted as we continue to try to reach the goal.

We will look forward to the day when the renovation project has been completed and the pandemic restrictions have been lifted. Together, we will be able to gather again at Booth & Dimock Memorial Library to celebrate and use our beautifully renovated public library.

Joseph Jankowski

President, Booth & Dimock Memorial Library Board of Trustees

3899 South St.

Coventry, CT 06238

Amanda Backhaus

From: Jason Blakesley <jasonblakesley@live.com>
Sent: Monday, April 19, 2021 10:59 AM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Declare Racism A Public Health Crisis
Attachments: Affirmative Action Plan_Town of Coventry Rev. 1-21-2021.docx; Data Summary for Coventry Board of Ed 2020.pdf

Town Council Audience of Citizens:

Although, I would prefer to read my letter in person and put my face to my comments, this is just another example of the erosion of our free speech.

I'm writing in support to Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis, especially, after listening to the letters of those that are against this declaration.

Madame Chair, last year a hemp farm owner's car was graffiti with the words Spic and other racial slurs. I'm sure Madame Chair won't read the racial slur, so it rhymes with Hicks. In April 2020, A young boy in Coventry was called a racial slur while riding his bike. I went to the rally to support this family. Have any of you been called a cracker or honky while riding your bike in town? The answer is no you haven't. Last November, a teenage boy was peppered spray by an adult man at a dueling Trump and BLM rally. Real men don't carry pepper spray! Members of our community will flick us off for just holding a Black Lives Matter flag or sign. Some are well known and very recognizable residents. I have heard many residents including former council members blame out of towners for needles down at Patriots' Park, not the white people that live here. Perhaps, people of color notice when they come to Patriots' Park that they're searched for alcohol. While the all white members of the RTC, illegally consume and distribute alcohol with children present at Patriots' Park with no compunction.

Madame Chair, one of the worst violators of systemic racism and most despicable signs of racism lies within Town Hall and our school system. According to data that has been provided to me from Amanda Backhaus, finance director, and Christina Small central office secretary of Coventry public schools, which I've attached, the town of Coventry employs about 290 people. Only one is black. Out of 290 town employees, only one is black. Our town manager and superintendent have failed miserably with equity. Currently, in Town Hall there is not one black employee. The Public Works Department is all white too. Not one black person is teaching our children in the classroom either.

Providing employment to a person is the best way to lift a family. Families will most likely live in communities they work in. Madame Chair, please help and remove the obvious red line that has been drawn around Town Hall and our school system that is not inclusive for black people.

Obviously, the town of Coventry needs to declare racism a public health crisis to make the changes that are long overdue and absolutely essential.

Thank you, Jason Blakesley
27 Berry Avenue
Coventry, CT 06238

Amanda Backhaus

From: Linda Blakesley <lindablakesley@outlook.com>
Sent: Monday, April 19, 2021 1:47 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Declare racism a public health crisis

Dear Town Council,

Back in February, I wrote an email demanding that Coventry declare racism a public health crisis. This demand was referred to the Steering Committee chaired by Matt O'Brien Jr., who opened up the floor for an initial discussion on the matter on February 22, 2021. While there seemed to be support by some members of the council and steering committee to move this matter forward, there has been no report, decision, or vote on this request since that time. In fact, the appearance given is that this issue will simply die and lose steam.

Given the recent denials of racism in our town by town residents, local press coverage on the matter, community rally support and current data available, the Town Council needs to make a determination on this. Do you believe that racism is not a detriment to the people of this town? Do you believe that racism is only a few isolated incidents that have been dealt with appropriately? Do you believe that the policies that guide this town are not influenced by hundreds of years of white supremacy and racism? Take a few moments to reflect on these questions and consider how you feel about them. What other questions do you have?

As white people, we cannot truly understand the health effects suffered by Black people as a result of everyday microaggressions, social detriments to health care, and systemic racism. What we can do is educate ourselves, collect and review data through a racial equity lens, and evaluate systems and structures that potentially inhibit access to health and social needs. Health and socioeconomic outcomes should not be determined by race.

We also must know who the people are in our community and ask them about their experiences. Let's lift up the voices of the marginalized and honor their stories by listening to them and then by implementing sustainable and adaptive change. It is easy for white people to say that this town isn't racist or we have not seen or experienced racism. In fact, that statement is ignorant and dismissive of the racism experienced by Black people and people of color every day.

Racism has been shown to negatively impact the physical and mental health of Black people and people of color. A quick internet search results in countless studies and papers on the topic. From access to transportation, healthy foods, food insecurity, healthcare discrimination, trauma and PTSD, to toxic work environments and more, racism is impacting the health and wellbeing of Black people and other People of Color. This has far reaching effects on all parts of society. Taking a deep dive into the policies and practices set forth by this town will demonstrate a major commitment toward equity and ending racism. The town has everything to gain by doing this.

Today, April 19, 2021, two months after I first wrote the town council, I am demanding that the Town Council take action on my demand to declare racism a public health crisis. I expect that a discussion or report be made on this demand at tonight's meeting or by the next council meeting.

Regards,

Linda Blakesley

27 Berry Ave
Coventry, CT 06238

Linda Blakesley

Amanda Backhaus

From: Linda Blakesley <lindablakesley@outlook.com>
Sent: Monday, April 19, 2021 2:27 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] support for Girls' Softball Field

Dear Town Council,

I am writing to support the efforts to establish a playing field for the girls' softball league. Girls' softball promotes healthy activity, stimulates teambuilding and community, and fosters leadership skills. The skills and values they learn here pay dividends for decades to come to the girls and the community at large. We can demonstrate support and recognition for the girls and young women in town through creation of a softball field they can call home. Given we are living in a time where NCAA Women's basketball teams are still getting subpar practice rooms when compared to the boys, Coventry must take a stand against this gender inequality that pervades cultures and practices starting from a young age. Let's do better by our home team! Build a softball team for Coventry Girls' Softball!

Regards,

Linda Blakesley
27 Berry Avenue
Coventry, CT 06238

Linda Blakesley

I am writing in support of a Town Council Resolution declaring racism as a public health crisis. Ms. Linda Blakesley, a Coventry resident, wrote a letter that was read at the Audience of Citizens. Her letter was well thought out and she gave coherent reasons as to why this is needed in town.

There were several letters in response To Ms. Blakesley that I also found interesting and I was not surprised that not one of the letter writers who responded denounced racism, not one, but they were quick to denounce the person who broached the subject of racism in the first place.

Her request was attacked as “vile & reprehensible” and an attempt to divide our community. There is no attempt made to explain why it is vile & reprehensible. In fact, there is nothing further from the truth. A discussion on race in town can only bring the town closer together. One letter in particular said that it was a “narrative of hate by those on the left” I would like to remind the writer that it is not the political left that is marching in the streets with their Nazi and Confederate flags and declaring their hatred for people of color, Jews, Catholics and claiming that we are a white nation under God.

One letter writer asked for evidence of racism in town. I have lived in this town for 36 years and yes, I have witnessed outright racism in town. I have witnessed it in our local restaurants, on our public beaches, from a prominent citizen and on social media. Racism is there, all one has to do is open their eyes and you will see it.

Another writer attacks Power Up and their declared aims. The letter writer distorts the true aim of Power Up so that it meets his preconceived notion of the group. The writer is opposed to any form of anti-racist and diversity training for our students and town employees. I have to ask the following question. What is wrong with teaching our students the history of racism and that racism has no place in our society? I also wonder why anyone would oppose it for our town employees. The majority of Fortune 500 companies have diversity and racial training for their employees because it is the right thing to do and they understand that acceptance of all peoples is good for business.

Another letter writer claims that the more we focus on racism the worst it gets. So, her logic is if we ignore it racism will simply go away. Shining a light on racism clearly shows how deep it is ingrained in our society and town

There is one letter that attacks Ms. Blakesley for something that has nothing to do with the issue of racism. This is a tactic that is used to divert attention from the real subject because they cannot logically support their own pitiful case. The only claim that they make that is correct is that racism cannot be cured by drugs or any other medical intervention. The only way I know of curing racism is by exposing those that believe in it and you cannot do that unless you are willing to talk about it.

The letter writer also attacks BLM as a Marxist organization with no proof to substantiate their claim when in fact The FBI and law enforcement say there is nothing further from the truth.

Our country was founded on a set of principles that have inspired the world for centuries, unfortunately at times we have not lived up to those ideals but for the writer to say we were never a country of oppression or racism shows a complete lack of understanding of our history. From the original sin of

slavery to the attempts to exterminate Native Americans to the reign of terror by the KKK to the discrimination practiced against Jews, Irish, Catholics, Italians and Eastern Europeans during the great flood of immigration of the early 1900's to the implementation of Jim Crow Laws and now the emergence of far-right wing white supremacist groups like Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Boogaloo Boys and 3 Percenters who make no effort to hide their racist doctrine.

Racism is still a plague on our country and to think that Coventry is exempt from this sickness is foolish, dangerous and harmful to our citizens.

So, I have to ask these questions. What are the letter writers so afraid of? What do they fear? Why are they afraid to have a community conversation about race? I suspect that if we do have an honest debate about racism that it will destroy their world of white privilege and that is what they fear.

I support Ms. Blakesley in her efforts to have racism declared a public health crisis and I urge the Town Council to support this effort.

Rick Martin

195 Northfield Rd.

From: Carolyn Arabolos
132 North Farms Road

Good evening:

There has been a great deal of conversation lately regarding the request to declare racism a public health crisis. Taking action on this request does not mean that Coventry is a racist town. Rather, this declaration recognizes that acts of racism still take place, many times overtly and with the acceptance of others, and that we need to ensure true equity in our judicial, educational, health, and other systems.

Racial oppression did not end when slavery ended. Racism and oppression continued to be part of the fabric of this country, from the whitewashing of our history to the Jim Crow laws to the denial of the right to vote to inequities in healthcare delivery; the list goes on and these inequities continue today.

Not listening to others in their experiences of racism is what continues to divide us. Not respecting the experiences of others, especially when they tell you this is happening, is what continues to divide us.

I ask this Council to ensure that this request does not continue to languish in Steering and that action is taken to declare racism a public health crisis.

I respectfully ask that my statement be included in the minutes for tonight's Council meeting.

Thank you.

Amanda Backhaus

From: Samantha Apgar <samanthaapgar@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, April 19, 2021 3:56 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Statement from citizen on Racism as a Public Health Crisis in Coventry, CT

Dear Coventry Town Council,

You can't fix a problem if you can't see it. It is for that reason that I find it alarming that numerous residents of my community in Coventry, CT seem to think that they play no role in the racism that exists in our town, community, country, and world. The reason for declaring racism a public health crisis is because, quite simply, it impacts health. It impacts health when people of color acquire and die from COVID-19 at higher rates than their white counterparts. It impacts health when young black men are killed for things that I wouldn't even be arrested for.

It's easy to say, "I've never seen racism in Coventry," when you've never seen a white person shove an Asian American woman to the ground and spit on her. It's easy to point and say, "that's a hate crime and I've never seen that here." But what about less direct forms of racism? Structural racism is harder to fix because apparently, it's a lot harder for people to see it. Coventry is 95% white. Why is that? If our town didn't participate in systemic racism then I'd imagine we'd have a town that's statistically similar to that of the U.S. as a whole (73% white, 27% from other racial and ethnic backgrounds).

I am a white woman and I know that racism exists in Coventry. To the members of my community who don't see this, I ask you to please listen to others. Just because it's not your experience, doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. I ask the Town Council to join me in "seeing" the problem that is racism in Coventry and declare it a public health crisis.

Sincerely,

Samantha E. Apgar
88 Prospect Street, Apt. B
Coventry, CT
06238

