MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL
APRIL 20, 2020
TOWN HALL ANNEX & VIRTUAL
7:30 P.M.

1. Call To Order, Roll Call:
   The meeting was called to order by Blanchard at 7:38 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

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

3. Audience Of Citizens:
   (30 minutes – 5 minutes maximum per citizen)
   Submit comments to be read aloud to: audience@coventry.org

   The following comments that were received via email were read into the record:
   Sandy Simon, 425 Geraldine Drive – wrote about concern for the Twitter comment of
   O’Brien, Jr. Her statement is attached.

   Dorothy Grady, 42 Cornwall Drive – wrote to encourage the Town Council to support the
   library. Her statement is attached.

   Deborah Walsh, 110 Nathan Hale Road – wrote to urge the Town Council to forward the
   proposal for the library renovation to the voters. Her statement is attached.

   Joan Lewis, 48 Antrim Road – wrote in support of the library project. Her statement is
   attached.

   Valdis Vinkels & Sylvia Griffin, Riga – wrote in support of the library project and wish that
   it be brought to and referendum. Their statement is attached.

   Jillian Minor & family, 13 Hetzel Lane – wrote in support the library project and encourage
   it be brought to referendum. Her statement is attached.
Kathleen Ryan, 18 Maryanne Drive – wrote in support of the library project as proposed by the Library Renovation and Improvements Committee. She knows the value of the library to the town. Her statement is attached.

Jillian Wood Reviczky, 110 Wall Street – wrote to thank the employees of the Town and the citizens for doing their best to keep up safe and well during the pandemic. However, others protest. Her statement is attached.

Marty McIlkovic, 856 Dunn Road – wrote in support of the library project. His statement is attached.

Stephanie Dakin, 113 Armstrong Road – wrote in support of the library project going to referendum. Her statement is attached.

Marie Gallo-Hall, 40 Old Tolland Turnpike – wrote in support of the library. Her statement is attached.

Claire Twerdy, 605 Pucker Street – wrote in support of the library for the proposed renovations. Her statement is attached.

Hannah Pietrantonio – wrote the library needs funding for repairs. Her statement is attached.

James Parda, 68 Monument Hill Road – wrote about his belief the Town Council should send the library proposal to referendum in 2020. His statement is attached.

Eric Thomas, 255 Geraldine Drive – wrote in support for the library renovation project. His statement is attached.

Carolyn Arabolos, 132 North Farms Road – wrote to request the Town Council bring the library project to referendum. Her statement is attached.

Emma Eaton, 41 Sean Circle – wrote to thank John Elsesser for keeping town employees safe during this crisis and to Coventry Human Services for maintaining a food supply. Also, she expressed her feeling about O’Brien, Jr.’s support of reopening the state. In addition, she feels bias is shown in the minutes of the Town Council. She is in support of the library project. Her statement is attached.

Jason Blakesley, 27 Berry Avenue – wrote that he is looking for answers regarding Sgt. Hicks and the condition of Daly Road. His statement is attached.

**Motion:** I move to hear item 8.D. at this time.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Thomas

Voting:
For: Hand, Conant, Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Williams
Against: None
4. **Acceptance Of Minutes:**

April 6, 2020

**Motion:** I move to accept the minutes of the April 6, 2020 meeting.

By: O’Brien, Jr.  Seconded: Hand

With the following corrections:

- Page 1, item 3 – add a space between “30” and “minutes”.
- Page 3, item 6.A., first paragraph, first sentence – remove the “s” from “creates”.
- Page 3, item 6.A., second paragraph – change “roll” to “role”.
- Page 3, item 6.B. first paragraph, sixth sentence – change to “The company wants to build in a calculation for lost service; the Town pushed back on such a stipulation.”.
- Page 4, fourth bullet – change “CHS” to “CGS”.
- Page 4, sixth bullet, first sentence – change to read “An executive order came from the Governor’s office that would allow the Council to reduce the interest rate to 3% for taxes that were billed April 1–July 1 or the other option is to defer payment of tax bills for 90 days.” And remove the next sentence.
- Page 4, item 6.F.3., sixth sentence – remove “went out” and replace with “completed work on their home”.
- Page 5, item 6.F.6., last sentence – change “having the search” to “having to search”.
- Page 5, item 7.A., second paragraph, fourth sentence – change “next Monday” to “at their next meeting”.
- Page 5, item 7.A., second paragraph, seventh sentence – change to “Based on feedback, the Council can change the budget.”.
- Page 5, item 7.A., second paragraph, twelfth sentence – change to “O’Brien. Sr. is concerned we don’t know how much money will be coming in from the state since an executive order said you shall set the mil rate.”.
- Page 5, item 7.A., second paragraph, seventeenth sentence – change “revenue” to “budget”.
- Page 5, item 7.A., last paragraph – add “O’Brien, Sr. recommended that the Council be able to complete the vote on June 2nd if the Council was unable to pass the budget on June 1st.”
- Page 10, item 8.D., second paragraph – add “Walls Committee” between “CHS” and “Chairperson”.

**Voting:**

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

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: Sr.  Seconded: Hand

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

6. Reports:
6.A. Council Chairwoman: Julie A. Blanchard
    Blanchard hopes everyone is staying safe in these trying times and the many changes
    we are going through. She is taking it as a positive the numbers are less for
    hospitalizations and people are recovering.

6.B. Council Members:
    O’Brien, Sr. reported two citizens contacted him to voice support for the library. He
    met with Deb Walsh and Elsesser after the meeting.

    Thomas would like to congratulate Coventry’s Future Problem Solver’s. Thomas
    brought this program to town and it has grown beautifully. This year’s state
    conference was hold virtually. As usual, Coventry’s problem solvers emerged as
    champions. Thomas read the following conference placements of Coventry students:

    **Coventry 6th Grade Medallion Award**
    Ava Topliff

    **Coventry 7th Grade Medallion Award**
    Andrew Addo

    **Coventry 8th Grade Medallion Award**
    Jayda McKenley

    **State Medallion Award** (One award is given across the entire state)
    Adam Verosky

    **Art Component**
    1st Place (Junior Division) Clara Anderson
    3rd Place (Junior Division) Seamus Milikowski
    1st Place (Middle Division) Genevieve Griswold
    2nd Place (Middle Division) Amber Hayes

    **Scenario Writing**
    1st Place (Junior Division) Charles Dunlap - INVITED TOINTERNATIONALS
    3rd Place (Middle Division) Paige Belsito
Scenario Performance

1st Place (Junior Division) Izabella Duva - INVITED TO INTERNATIONALS

2nd Place (Middle Division) Braden Kearney

3rd Place (Middle Division) Jayda Mckerley

GIPS Individual Booklets

1st Place (Junior Division) Luke Miner - INVITED TO INTERNATIONALS

3rd Place (Junior Division) Christian Nguyen

1st Place (Middle Division) Reagan Hawkins - INVITED TO INTERNATIONALS

Community Problem Solvers (CmPS) Individual

1st Place (Middle Division) Lindsey Carl

GIPS ZIPPY Team Booklets

2nd Place (Middle Division) Emma Chase, Benjamin Magrey, Jaxson Rach, Katherine Tindal

GIPS Team Booklets

1st Place (Junior Division) Brooke Blouin, Jiana Foran, Griffin Myshrall, Christian Nguyen

-INVITED TO INTERNATIONALS

1st Place (Middle Division) Christina Chemiske, Jocelyn Foran, Kaitlyn McQueeney, Giana Vicki

-INVITED TO INTERNATIONALS

3rd Place (Middle Division) Kaitlyn Gill, Reagan Hawkins, Alexandra Magrey, Ashlyn White

-INVITED TO INTERNATIONALS

Thomas commends these students in being able to do this well under these circumstance.

Thomas added thanks to the town, the schools, and the safety staff and Police Department for the work that is being done during this unique time. Folks are setting up book swaps and food drives. Rallying around each other is critical. People are roaming outside to bust boredom but don’t be careless. It is disheartening to hear criticisms of the safety measures that are being put into place. Such statements is spitting in the face of dedicated medical staff. There are thirty-three dead from Windsor’s Kimberley Hall. The measures are to make sure this is going to flatten out. We all have a responsibility to be a part of flattening the curve. Thomas has neighbors infected with COVID-19 and friends that are dealing with the virus while battling cancer. Stay safe, be well.

Hand mentioned a bright spot in town is cafeteria workers distributing school lunches. The distribution is being done well and is well received. The workers are doing a great job and the process is very smooth. Thank you.
O’Brien, Sr. commented so people are aware the school cafeteria is going to be distributing weekend meals beginning on Friday. Hand added any child under the age of 18 can sign up for this.

Conant commented on Human Services Needs, the Budget, and Social Media. Her comments are attached.

6.C. Finance Committee: Matthew O’Brien, Sr., Chairperson
O’Brien, Sr. reported on the Finance Committee meeting and submitted the attached documents in support entitled:
- 4-13-20 Coventry Town Council Finance Committee Report
- Discussion Points for 4-13-20 Town Council Finance Committee Meeting – discussion with Board of Education Finance Committee
- 4-15-20 Message to the B of Ed Finance Committee following the 4-13-20 Finance Committee Meeting

Thomas added the BOE stated possible savings from schools closing due to Covid-19 is still unclear. Thomas does recall them saying if BOE does realize savings 50% will be turned over to the Town and 50% could go into the capital account. That account can be used for an emergency and they could come back to the Council for funds. This was a gesture made by BOE. O’Brien, Sr. agreed BOE did state this intent. The BOE is willing to make some accommodation and is willing to help with meeting the Council’s budget target.


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

6.E. COVRRA – John A. Elsesser:
Elsesser reported the transfer station was open on Saturday for brush and tree removal from storm damage. It will be open again this Saturday for brush and tree removal only and no one will be manning the station to assist in unloading.

6.E.1. 19/20-61: Consideration/Possible Action: Approval Of Trash Collection And Disposal Contracts
Motion: I move the Council authorize the Town Manager to execute the contracts as presented.

By: O’Brien, Sr.  Seconded: Hand

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

O’Brien, Sr. stated COVRRA will receive a settlement from MIRA; these are funds left over from CRA.

6.F. Town Manager – John A. Elsesser
Elsesser reported Annmarie Sundgren started today. Sundgren will help us keep up with need that we know is coming. A couple of months down the road will show a lot of needs for human services.

Backhaus stated the Parks & Rec site can be used for online donation to Human Services. Backhaus suggests adding an additional $2 to the contribution to cover the cost of the credit card fee. Backhaus indicated donation by check is the cheapest for processing.

6.F.1. Projects Update
Elsesser reported:
- Cumberland Farms has stopped work indefinitely.
- The rabies clinic, Memorial Day parade, and Coventry Fest have been cancelled. Memorial Day will have some recognition to honor our veterans. What we can put together under social distancing is being worked on. Coventry Cares had to make the decision about Coventry Fest; many businesses donate for that event and money will be tight with all of the shut downs.
- Bids are open for CGS parking lot and HVAC at the high school.
- The State’s final review for Folly Lane Bridge was received. Some minor adjustments are needed making us worried about having enough time in the construction season; we are already two weeks behind.

Also reported: Coventry will be receiving the funds approved in last year’s budget from the State Bonding Commission. The towns are still meeting for CERC to go through marketing plans and slogans. They are trying to get to what best represents the region. This is a couple of weeks away. The POCD is going to public hearing in May.

6.F.2. COVID-19 Update
Elsesser reported Staff is starting work on FEMA applications. His theory is towns that get things rolling early for the programs will get the money. Coventry will be submitting for the upgrades of laptops and the issues with the Citrix server. These were discussed with FEMA representatives who indicated these expenses sound reasonable for reimbursement. The final decision on the payment of these expenses through FEMA will come later.

Coventry has set up a bunkhouse at the South Street fire substation for essential workers who may be nervous to return home.

Elsesser stated we are purchasing PPE. We have an inventory of PPE. The inventory makes it easier to order PPE for the whole organization. People are making face shields for the police department.

There have been fire/ambulance/police vehicle parades – one by Windham Hospital, one in front of Town Hall, and one near small businesses. These parades mean a lot to people and the esprit de corps is important to the fire and police departments.
Staff is listening to people and making changes where we haven’t gotten it right.

Building inspections continue. People are continuing with projects and appreciate being able to have inspections. Permitting forms can be obtained in the foyer as a self-service option. Staff is working on ways to get documents back to the people. Joe Callahan wants to keep people working. Many other towns have shut down building inspections. There is a lot of work happening with building additions and projects which is an indicator that people are confident in moving forward. Staff is doing a good job in working through issues.

O’Brien, Sr. expressed thanks to staff who have been innovative and the community is pulling together well. O’Brien, Sr. read an article about another town ordering masks for citizens. He forwarded the article to Elsesser and asked if Coventry could get these under FEMA as this will be a requirement soon and it is difficult to get good masks. Elsesser is waiting for an answer to that question. The answer may depend on the type of mask. There is reluctance to give out needed medical equipment versus mask types for walking around. They would be FEMA refundable with Coventry paying 25% of the cost.

Thomas asked if the PPE that may be ordered for citizens are the one-time use variety? Elsesser can find out about this. The towns are all starting to talk about what they are doing on this issue.

Elsesser is getting a rapid start for the pending grants of federal money. Eric Trott, Director of Land Use, is doing a lot on business retention and loans. O’Brien, Sr. asked if people know about the business aid opportunities? Coventry is working with the Chambers of Commerce on this. Conant asked if the town is seeing new grant funding, state or federal, that may be coming out soon. Elsesser replied we are starting to see that flow. Our Senators and Representatives are sending emails. Many are not really for us at this time. They are tied more to universities than towns. The USDA put out a flyer for financing. We may be able to get a 40-year loan at 2.75% for the library project. Elsesser, Trott, and Bud Meyers are jumping on the grants that have a short time frame to application due date. Staff is not going to have enough time to apply for all of the opportunities; they are applying for those we think we will be awarded the grant.

7. **Unfinished Business:**

7.A. **19/20-51: FY20/2021 Budget**

A budget process memo was provided to the Council members as a refresher of the past meeting.

Hand stated Elsesser’s recommendation was a good one that was adopted through the resolution. Now the Council is taking guidance from the Finance committee to see what can be shuffled around in the budget. Hand feels safety issues should be done
sooner rather than later. We will be looking for shifts and fine tuning while making more difficult decisions.

Elsesser continued saying Backhaus has put together a model including opportunities to shifts things out of capital. The staff vehicle that was to replace the one that is six years old has been pulled out. The current vehicle will be made to last for another year. The goal is to get debt service and capital to where they were last year bringing the budget close to a zero dollar increase.

O’Brien, Sr. reported Blanchard asked him to work with Backhaus and Elsesser to get a handle on what we need to do to get to the Council’s budget goal. Good suggestions were put forth. A little more than $1 mill. in cuts are needed to offset a tax increase. Finance took a lead in speaking to the BOE. Cuts are being sought because of the current situation everyone is facing. Finance recommended to the BOE to target a $350,000 - $375,000 reduction. Thomas commented the suggestion to the Town Council then is about $600,000 in savings or reduction. Are there specific areas that O’Brien, Sr. has already looked at? O’Brien, Sr. replied Backhaus and Elsesser are looking where reductions can possibly be made without hampering services. Elsesser stated we can freeze hiring and if staff cuts are needed part-timers would go first, such as lake patrol or Senior Center part-time staff. We have maintained the staff level so far and make do with the people we have. Some items were renegotiated. No dime is too small for review for this budget. Elsesser continued we are going through every line and see what we can do and live with, such as reductions in training and travel. O’Brien, Sr. suggested everyone go through budget notes and bring forward ideas and considerations on where to consider further reductions and increases, if you think those are appropriate. This activity is being actively worked on by town departments. Elsesser commented we don’t want to dig too deep of a hole for next year. His fear is that next year will be worse. Thomas has a concern to raise – going forward because of this crisis there are likely to be needs we have not anticipated for Human Services. We don’t want to dig a hole and not be able to take care of the citizens. Human Services needs because of COVID-19 will remain for quite some time; as a community we should be able to meet those needs. O’Brien, Jr. thinks it is a reasonable target with the Council budget and capital being cut of just over $650,000. Williams wonders if it would be better to make the cuts on a pro-rated basis on what each side spends. The BOE budget is so much higher than the Council’s. Should we ask them to find more savings on the BOE side rather than the town side? Hand asked if we have a sense of how deep these types of cuts would mean to the BOE? Are they digging into staff cuts? Do we have a sense of that? O’Brien, Sr. feels there may be areas from the COVID-19 closing of the schools that will generate savings and not have as much impact on next year’s budget. Those avenues could be under negotiations that will take place with school transportation, etc. O’Brien, Sr. continued the number to fill the gap is ~$1 mill. The Council has no control on how the BOE is going to get to their target. Backhaus suggested a target number should be given to BOE now so they have time to start going through their budget. Cuts may be in not filling new positions or not filling positions that are vacant as the Town side does. These will not be the only cuts. Thomas suggested one area of savings in this year’s budget would be in not having to hire substitutes for the remainder of the school year. That is not applicable for next year’s budget though. O’Brien, Sr. added some items may be purchased from this year’s budget rather than from next year’s budget. Savings from this year may reduce the impact of having to pull expenses from next
year’s budget. This is a very unusual time period where we have to make cuts without creating holes. Blanchard added we will try to mitigate furloughs or lost jobs.

Williams feels we should give a higher number to the BOE. Let them find the savings this year and cut their budget for next year. They will have to find where the reductions are to be made. We are going forward differently now. As positions come vacant, they don’t necessarily need to be filled or someone else steps in to take on some of those tasks. There are savings there. We can’t get stuck on the fact that every municipal employee will have a job next year. Open the contracts and ask for give back of some of the raises. A lot of people are not getting raises that were expected. It is time for people to step up, and the teachers in town, to give back some pay raises to offset some of the pain that is coming. As a small business owner he is making decisions every day that affect his bottom line. Why do we always have to spend more money every year? It is time to take another look at it.

O’Brien, Jr. is hoping the BOE is not looking to cut teachers. It is hard to find good people. The union reps are urged to come to a good decision so we don’t lose anyone. If there is no other option we will lose people.

O’Brien, Sr. stated we do not have control over the BOE so we will not identify where the BOE should cut back. Finance is looking for a goal to give to the BOE. We can then review and make decisions on what they propose. There is some support for this budget goal level. The BOE is willing to work together to get there.

Blanchard agrees with the proposals. The State is not going to be in the best state and they will be looking at cuts in the next budget. This year is going to be tough and next year more difficult.

O’Brien, Sr. mentioned these cuts are a way to try to get through this period. The State is suffering. Something has happened that is making us all look at how we do business. The Council, BOE, and Town are pulling together through this crisis to find savings. Those savings should be reverted to the Town.

O’Brien, Sr. will make the recommendation of the amount to be cut to the BOE.

7.B. 19/20-58: Consideration/Possible Action: Call To Town Meeting For Purchase Of Portion Of Stewart Property On Knollwood Drive For Open Space And Future DPW Use (Not Ready For Action)

8. New Business:
8.A. 19/20-62: Consideration/Possible Action: Municipal Tax Relief
O’Brien Sr. reported Coventry can offer one or both of the programs.

The first program is to defer payment of property taxes and sewer payments. Trash payments are not included in this. The due date is changed from July 1 to October 1 and must be paid in full. There is the option to obtain an affidavit from the resident stating they have been affected by COVID-19 or to offer the deferment to every taxpayer.
Option 2 is to give taxpayers a lower interest rate of .25% per month for 90 days on taxes owed. Currently overdue payments are charged at a 18% annual rate. With this option there is the requirement to make some kind of payment or the lower interest rate is waived.

Finance recommends the second option be chosen.

Elsesser indicated the option chosen impacts the WPCA and the lake associations. It is felt the deferment option would create a big hole. Backhaus submitted a memo that recommends the same option as the Finance committee. This will allow Coventry to maintain normal operations. Emergencies would not be able to be covered, road projects scheduled for this summer may be impacted, and capital projects would be delayed. This option would put Coventry at a break-even position and at risk of running out of cash. Elsesser added the lake associations would have no money during the summer when it is needed. Thomas stated Tolland decided to go with the deferment option. Would the lake associations and WPCA be affected if we choose option 1? Backhaus replied Coventry has $2 mill. tiered in CDs creating ready cash issues for us. Elsesser added Portland is doing the lower interest rate method as are smaller towns in eastern Connecticut. Most towns will use the deferment method because it is easier to administer. If we can’t do any of the scheduled projects the cost of those will rise. The lower interest rate option will mean more work for our staff and software vendor. We don’t have enough cash to go the deferment route.

O’Brien, Jr. asked how many taxpayers will pay their bills on time? Backhaus reported $6.9 mill. will come from escrow accounts and those payments have to be made on time. The total amount of taxes is $31 mill. The difference between the total taxes and escrow payments cannot be replace with the general fund balance of ~$5 mill.

Hand feels the recommendation from Backhaus and Finance committee makes the most sense for our town at this time. Backhaus believes the lower interest rate period begins on August 1 as the first month typically does not accrue interest. O’Brien, Sr. gave the example on a $3,000 tax bill under the low interest rate would have an extra charge of $150.

**Motion:** I move to recommend the Town Council of the Town of Coventry to participate in the Low Interest Rate Program as outlined in the Governor’s Executive Order 7S, Section 6, excluding escrow accounts.

By: O’Brien, Sr.  Seconded: Thomas

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

**8.B. 19/20-63: Consideration/Acceptance: FY 19/20 Year-End Transfers**
Finance did recommend these transfers at their meeting except for the last transfer as that was not ready for review. Backhaus went over the documented details for these
transfers. A project has been in the planning to upgrade the Citrix and CAD service and upgrade the five vehicles with computers. She is hoping this will come back through FEMA. Backhaus is adding a transfer of $1,200 from Electric to Licensing.

**Motion:** I move the Council approve the transfers as presented with the additional $1,200 detailed this evening.

**By:** O’Brien, Sr.  
**Seconded:** Thomas

**Discussion:** Hand asked if the fire detectors for the fire stations are supposed to be CO/NO2? Generally, the “o” is capitalized. Backhaus replied that was her error; Hand is correct.

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

**8.C. 19/20-64: Consideration/Possible Action: Approval Of Conduit To DPW Facility**
Blanchard stated this came from Finance to discuss as there has been some options changed in regards to pricing. Williams expressed concern about this at the Finance meeting because of the price. He wanted this discussed at the Council meeting to find out the value of this to the Town.

Elsesser mentioned the current vendor, Charter, controls the speed we have to run on the internet. The microwave solution for the DPW is not stable. To run Charter cable from Main Street at Fern Road to the DPW would cost $10,000. With this option of fiber, internet use at DPW would be stable and we would not be speed restrained. The fiber would be run from the town garage to Main Street, into the high school, and back out to the Town Hall to tie into the CEN network. We are paying the lease for that distance and we have exclusive use. The VOIP phones in inventory could be installed at DPW. The Town Engineer’s office is at the town garage and he needs to get large CAD files to Town Hall for printing. Now he has to save the files to a thumb drive to bring it to Town Hall for printing. This option will have a huge impact to everyday operations.

Williams stated we would be paying $42,709 for service to that building for five years. That’s a lot of money for internet! How do engineering firms move stuff around? We’ve been operating this way at DPW for a long time. Hand commented we only pay for five years but the service would continue for much longer. Backhaus added the Public Works director mentioned this has been a problem since they moved into the building. There is no cell service in the building and we can’t put a booster there. They cannot do business there. We could get service from Charter for about $250 per month with shared speed. Since people are working from home and students are distance learning, Elsesser has been experiencing delays or disconnects using Charter. Huge savings can be gained with the VOIP phones rather than the traditional phone lines. Had we installed the VOIP system with the current situation we couldn’t count on the phones to work. This is a business need just like electricity is. Hand commented we can offset the cost with increased productivity. Dropbox won’t work for the Town Engineer’s files so he has had to drive around to deliver electronic plans.
O’Brien, Sr. stated the difference in the options is $3,000 over five years. Hand added we pay staff to do their jobs so it would behoove us to equip them with the means to get them up to speed. Let’s get the most out of the money we are paying the Town Engineer to engineer and others to do their jobs at the garage. Elsesser indicated we are looking for part-time help to free up the Town Engineer from driving around. Williams does not disagree with this information; he did want a discussion to take place about this.

Motion: I move the Council authorize the Town Manager sign the contract with Wanrack for 100 Olsen Farm Road choosing the upfront cost of $13,469 and the monthly cost of $490.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Williams

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

8.D. 19/20-65: Consideration/Possible Action: Ratification Of Town Manager’s Appointment Of Interim Fire Chief Of Department 18: Coventry Fire/EMS
Elsesser reminded the Council what the Fire Transition team suggested for the process of filling interim positions. The merger committee recommended Bud Meyers for the position of interim Fire Chief. Meyers serves as Fire Marshal and the Chief of North Coventry Fire Department. Elsesser received the recommendation along with Meyers’ resume and supporting documentation, did background and reference checks, and interviewed Meyers for the position. Meyers’ experience and course completions include all but the needed NIMS 400 course for Homeland Security and he has a year to complete that should he wish to be considered for the permanent position. Elsesser feels comfortable to offer Meyers the position.

Motion: I move the Council approve the appointment of Bud Meyers to the position of interim Fire Chief.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Thomas

Discussion: Hand stated he gives Meyers his full endorsement. Blanchard thanked the committee and the Board of Fire Officers for stepping up and moving the process along. She appreciates Meyers’ skills and willingness to serve. We have found someone who is appreciated and respected in the department. Blanchard hopes Meyers will stay with us after the interim period. This is still a volunteer position. Meyers is honored by the trust and faith bestowed by others to serve as the first chief of Station 18.

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Conant, Thomas, Williams
Against: None
Abstain: None
Elsesser reported he had the opportunity to buy a fire trailer for $50. He was told not to do so as the generator was not working so it would have been a money pit. We are going to have good fire department leadership going forward.

8.E. 19/20-66: Consideration/Possible Action: Designation Of Eric Trott, Director Of Planning And Development, As Liaison To Coventry’s Neighborhood Assistance Act
Elsesser commented money donated through this act would be a tax write off. Creative Living is interested in participating in the program; they have different sectors that may donate toward what is planned by Creative Living, such as a teaching greenhouse that would provide opportunities for their clients. Eric Trott would act as Municipal Liaison.

Motion: I move the Council designate Eric Trott as Liaison for Neighborhood Assistance Act program proposals.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Hand

Discussion:

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

8.F. 19/20-67: Consideration/Possible Action: Request For Library Improvement And Renovation Committee To Revise Their Request Not To Exceed $1.7M, And Adjust Their Request To Reduce The Grant Match To $850,000
O’Brien, Sr. reported Finance discussed this. If the library project committee can preserve the $850,000 grant the Council would contribute up to $850,000. The library has a number of issues. This originally came from the last Council. Finance wants the committee to look at what is needed to move forward to preserve the building. O’Brien, Sr.’s guess is this would be a $1 mill. project and the committee could apply for a $250,000 grant. If they can leverage the project to the grant money of $850,000 he would be in support of the matching funds from the Council.

Motion: I move the Council direct the committee to continue the work with the following guidance with scope and funding. If the committee can keep the $850,000 grant then the Council would be willing to consider matching the grant dollar for dollar up to $850,000. If the grant remains in place, this would enable the committee to consider a project with a cost of up to $1.7 mill. with the taxpayers portion being up to $850,000.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Williams

Discussion: Thomas expressed concern about the way the motion is worded as the Council “would” consider matching. She would rather it be the Council “will” match. “Consider matching” could keep the committee on the hamster wheel. We need to approve the project. We have been given a good plan developed with a lot of expertise behind it. O’Brien, Sr. suggested being in this world as it now is since March 13th it is
hard to support the presented plan based on the cost. He is comparing those numbers
with trying to fix what needs to be fixed and doing it in a way to make the library
easier to navigate. Finance is recommending the plan be scaled back and kept within
the $1.7 mill. framework. Thomas would like to give the committee the ability to rely
more on the Council with their plan. O’Brien, Sr. replied if the committee meets all of
these requirements the plan would be supported. Thomas stated the Committee has
presented a really good plan with the recent proposal and they have been creative in
addressing the issues. The final product would increase the ability for the public to
use the building. They looked at this as a resource for the community and made a
library that will work well. Hand is concerned with having the committee scale back.
The grant money could be scaled back and, therefore, the matching funds. If the plan
is scaled back further will the grantor maintain the $850k level? If the grantor feels
the plan has become a renovation project, grants at that level are $250k. We are
hamstringing the efforts that have been made and we could be throwing away the
approved $850k grant. Blanchard added the committee presented a project. If they
make changes they will have to make sure they can still get the approved amount.
Conant commented it would depend on how much the scope of work changes whether
they have to present the new plan to the grantor. If the changes are worked within the
parameters in the grant award and proposal, the committee should be okay to still
receiving the grant even with a reduction in overall cost. If there are significant
changes, the project would have to be reapproved. Conant feels keeping the language
of “will match” in the motion is important. It is important that there is a commitment
from the Town. The Council has to approve any projects that come forward before
sending it to referendum. We will get the final approval and they will get the match.

Amended motion: I move the Council direct the committee to continue the work
with the following guidance with scope and funding. If the committee can keep the
$850,000 grant then the Council upon final approval of the project will match the grant
dollar for dollar up to $850,000. If the grant remains in place, this would enable the
committee to consider a project with a cost of up to $1.7 mill. with the taxpayers
portion being up to $850,000.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Williams

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

9. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:

10. Adjournment:
Motion: I move that the Council adjourn at 10:34 p.m.

By: O’Brien, Sr. 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.
John Elsesser

From: Sandye Simon <sandysimon@sbcglobal.net>
Sent: Saturday, April 18, 2020 8:36 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Audience Comments

Sandye Simon
425 Geraldine Dr

I was appalled to see Matt OBrien Jr's Twitter comment calling Social Distancing, Socialist Distancing, and his implication that Gov Como is running the State of Ct. To date in Connecticut over 16,000 people have Covid 19 and over 1,000 have died. Social Distancing saves lives. Thank G-d that States are working together to keep us all safe. Rather than posting negative political posts maybe he can find a way to support his neighbors during this tough time. I along with others in Town am making cloth masks for anyone who needs one, at no cost. I ask if people are able to donate to the Coventry Food Bank. You can contact me on Messenger or email me at sandysimon@sbcglobal.net. I will continue to make masks until there is no longer a need. Stay Safe, Stay Kind, please support and keep our community safe. Thank You.

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPad
Last fall my son, his wife and baby moved from Hawaii to Coventry. As a newcomer attending a yoga class at the library and then getting her library card, introduced Huyen to our welcoming community. I want to encourage the Town Council to support this wonderful resource in the budget. It is important for all ages no matter how long they call Coventry home.

Dorothy Grady
42 Cornwall Drive
Coventry, CT 06238
John Elsesser

From: Deb Walsh <debwalshbell@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 20, 2020 10:17 AM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Library Renovation proposal

To: Coventry Town Council
From: Deborah Walsh, Chair, Library renovation and Improvement Committee
110 Nathan Hale Road
Coventry, CT

I'd like to once again urge the Town Council to forward the proposal submitted to you on March 2 for the renovation of the Booth and Dimock Memorial Library, to a vote by the people of Coventry. Our committee has spent a year of intensive research, working with experts in the field of Library renovation to determine the best, and most cost effective way to address the serious infrastructure needs of our Library. Our proposal addresses the charge we were given in a comprehensive plan which solves the water intrusion, code compliance, technology upgrades, and site improvements needed to best address the needs of our library-using community. While I truly understand that you are under enormous fiscal pressures in your yearly budget process, the Library renovation is not a short term proposal. We are trying to make an upgrade to a resource that can be used by the whole Town. We currently have over 7,800 card holders. This renovation will improve the library for years into the future. The Library renovation requires a referendum vote by our citizens no later than November if we are to receive the State library Grant award. I respectfully request that the Town Council send the question to referendum as presented, and let the voters decide.
Dear Town Council members:

My name is Joan Lewis and I live at 48 Antrim Road, Coventry, CT. I see that library funding is on the Agenda. I am writing to indicate my support for the library project. The library plays a vital role in our community providing the free use of computers, books, movies and other materials as well as many great programs for citizens of all ages. I visit the library on a weekly basis and see the library in action - people using the computers, reading the newspaper, browsing the shelves, parents with children and students arriving for programs after school.

I strongly encourage the Council to move forward with a referendum on the library project and not forfeit the matching grant of $850,000. This would be a great loss for our Town. Thank you. Joan Lewis

Sent from my iPad
John Elsesser

From: Valdis Vinkels <vinkels@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 20, 2020 10:33 AM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Library project

From Riga: we support the library project and wish to have the matter be brought to a referendum.
Sylvia Griffin
Valdis Vinkels

Sent from my iPhone
To the members of our Town Council,

I would like to express my support for the funding of the Booth and Dimock Memorial Library project, and would encourage the council to bring this to referendum.

Given the current situation with COVID-19, our family is noticing the huge void that the library filled in our lives. My children would typically leave the library with more books than we could carry, and I was guaranteed a few hours of peace and quiet when we arrived home with a fresh stack of library books.

We are looking forward to the day when we can replenish our supply of library books and gather at the library with friends!

Thank you so much,
Jillian Miner and family
13 Hetzel Lane
Coventry, CT 06238
To be read into the record of the Town Council meeting's Audience of Citizens on Monday evening, April 20, 2020:

I fully support the Library renovation and improvement project as proposed by the Council-appointed Library Renovation and Improvements Committee. As a Coventry taxpayer, library patron, and Library Association member for over 40 years, I know the value of the Booth and Dimock Memorial Library to our town over those decades. Support to move the project forward is crucial at this time so that the state library grant may be applied to this worthy project, thereby saving the Coventry taxpayer additional project cost. The project’s validity has been documented time and again before the Town Councils. Project delays only cost the town more. The time to tackle this greatly needed project is now.

Kathleen Ryan
18 Maryanne Drive
Comments to Coventry Town Council Meeting – April 20, 2020

I want to simply thank town employees and the majority of Coventry’s citizens for doing their very best to keep us all safe and well during these frightening moments. It is hard to plan for a situation like a pandemic, but I commend those who are doing what they can do to keep us safe. I am proud to be a member of this community.

People do great things in difficult situations. But, they also do awful things. This is on display today right here in Connecticut. Instead of helping to protect our citizen’s health, a sorry group has gone on display to “protest”. Yes, some of our jobs have ended and that is very difficult. But, to protest in order to get a haircut, or to actually block entrances to hospitals and testing centers as has been done in other states is despicable.

If they believe Government is so wrong, I hope they send their federal stimulus check back, don’t take any form of unemployment, or take any paid family leave days from their jobs. They should send their pension and Social Security checks back. Remember – those are just “handouts”.

Aren’t we proud of our parents who are a part of the “greatest generation”? Here is our chance to be a part of the next great generation. Do what is right, even if it hurts a little or even a lot. It will hurt less than if a member of your family or a friend or neighbor dies because you needed a haircut.

Jillian Wood Reviczky
110 Wall Street
Coventry, CT 06238
To the Coventry Town Council,

I am writing to support the library project, a modest proposal that will maintain that important resource for the people of Coventry.

Thank You.

--

Marty Milkovic
856 Dunn Road, Coventry CT 06238
martymilkovic@netscape.net
203-437-0442
As an avid library user, I'm saddened by how little regard the majority of the Town Council seems to have for a place that widely benefits the people of our town.

My kids have been feeling the weight of missing out on checking out books, tween & teen programming (though our librarians have been doing a good job of making do with the current situation, it's just not the same), and being able to hang out at the library with their friends.

I've heard the argument tossed around that "the people already voted no", but I would like to respectfully point out that the people voted no to THAT particular plan. I have spoken to many people in Coventry that see the value of looking ahead to the future of our Town, the ability to continue to provide programming for all ages and to entice people to read more, and they should have the right to see this proposal at referendum.

The Booth & Dimock library serves as a place where people can go for tech help, for help with job searches and résumé writing, as well as help with research, homework, book recommendations, and so much more.

The Tween Advisory Board guides kids in 4th-8th grade in leadership skills, program planning and execution, expressing their opinions to others, and gives them a voice in book purchases for their age group.

It is irresponsible to allow budget cuts from the last library renovation (in 1989) to continue to deteriorate our library (in the form of water intrusion, for one). With a proposal that has been reduced by 56% from the original, and an $850,000 grant, it makes sense to make changes that are already necessary, and have our tax money returned to our town in the form of this grant.

Walter Cronkite said "Whatever the cost of our libraries, the price is cheap compared to that of an ignorant nation."

An investment in our Town library is an investment in our Town's future.

I am asking you, the Town Council, to please allow the library proposal to go to referendum.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Dakin
113 Armstrong Road
I write in support of the town library. Please include appropriate funding in the 2020-2021 budget.

Thank you.

Marie E. Gallo-Hall
40 Old Tolland Turnpike
Coventry, CT 06238
John Elsesser

From: Claire C. Twerdy <judgect@aol.com>
Sent: Monday, April 20, 2020 4:48 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments for April 20, 2020 Town Council Mtg Audience Of Citizens - Re Library

To: Members of the Coventry Town Council

April 20, 2020

While I am a member of the Board of Trustees for the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library, I write this letter as a private citizen, Coventry property owner, and as an individual who has appreciated and enjoyed libraries all my life.

Regarding necessary renovations to the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library, I fully support the proposal as presented to the Council by the Library Renovation & Improvement Committee for the current plan of $2,400,000 of which $850,000 will be paid by the State.

The minutes of the April 13, 2020 Finance Committee indicate a desire to revise the project to reduce the town’s financial contribution thereby reducing the overall total cost. If this happens, there is a distinct possibility that the $850,000 grant will be jeopardized, at least in part. This loss of funds should not be disregarded lightly.

Additionally, if the plan must be revised, costs will be incurred to redo the plan. To continue down a path of revision and reduction over and over, I fear the end result will not achieve meaningful savings, neither financially nor to the needs of the library structure.

The Booth & Dimock Library is Coventry’s Public Library. The original part of the building screams history, it is a beautiful building and should be appreciated and cared for. The 20 year old addition has aged and requires maintenance that cannot be postponed any longer, so this is the perfect time to incorporate modest renovations to modernize the utility of the library, all at reasonable cost. Experience teaches us that to reduce, revise and delay inevitably results in a higher price tag for less in return than an original proposal.

All my long life, I have been an avid user of many different libraries – as a youngster, as a student and as an adult continuing to this day with Booth & Dimock. My son and daughter used Booth & Dimock as children, my granddaughter now uses Booth & Dimock, as do large numbers of Coventry’s population, from toddlers on up to our senior members.

Because of the critically important issues under consideration, I ask that Town Council members vote in the affirmative to send the current Library Renovation & Improvement plan to referendum to allow the citizens of Coventry to make the final decision, which is our right.

Respectfully,
Claire C. Twerdy
605 Pucker Street
Coventry, CT 06238
I hope I’m not late to submit my statement- The Coventry Booth and Dimock Library NEEDS funding to fix vital repairs!
Safe community access and the ability for our librarians to run our town library is at stake. Thank you- Hannah Pietrantonio Sent from my iPhone
James Parda
68 Monument Hill Rd, Coventry, CT 06238
As a member of the Library Renovation and Improvement Committee I believe the Council should send the proposal presented on March 2 of this year to referendum in 2020. The vote should occur in a timely manner so as not to lose the $850,000.00 grant that has been approved to cover 35% of the project. Another study to meet the insurance and code repair requirements for a reduced project cost and a 50-50 match will require more spending and jeopardize the grant. This project will not raise taxes.
The Committee has met the requirements of its charge. Code compliance and insurance issues for safety, sanitation, technology, availability to all persons, and building maintenance have all been addressed. Respectfully submitted to the Town Council on April 20, 2020.
James Parda
Good evening,

My name is Eric Thomas and I live at 255 Geraldine Drive. I have been a Coventry resident for over 30 years. Tonight I am providing support for the necessary renovation work at the Booth and Dimock Memorial Library. I have used the library in many ways over the last 3 decades and plan to continue using the library as I roll through my life chapters. I have used the library for UConn graduate school work when I was unable to get to the UConn library. I visited the library on many occasions to read up on magazines and local bulletins to learn more about topics of interest but unable to afford personal subscriptions. I regularly visited the books, programs and other attractions of the children's library with my two daughters and their friends (and parents). Later, I used the library as a repository for Conservation Commission maps and documents to provide a larger public access to these important local documents, prior to the Internet era. I do pop in from time to time today to review new book titles and catch up with a local newspaper that I don't subscribe to. And what was the constant during those many years? A safe, clean, friendly atmosphere. The proposed renovations included in this year's Town budget will provide for that constant as our community moves forward. For me, my family, my neighbors, my friends. I urge the Town Council to retain recommended funding levels for library repair needs within the next Town budget.

Thank you.

Eric Thomas
Good evening – I am asking for my statement for AOC be read aloud and included in the minutes; below and attached. Thank you.

Coventry Town Council, Audience of Citizens, April 20, 2020:

I am requesting that the Town Council bring the library vote to referendum. The long overdue improvements are sorely needed. The building continues to fall into disrepair, there are serious code concerns, and the available space and layout isn’t sufficient to support the needs and interests of the library’s patrons.

Town libraries have long been part of the fabric and traditions of this country and the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library is no exception. Our library is a town treasure that should be preserved.

Carolyn G. Arabolos
132 North Farms Road, Coventry
Emma Eaton, 41 Sean Circle

Good evening,

We find ourselves in unprecedented times right now, with unprecedented decision making processes facing our elected officials at all levels, and an unprecedented level of loss and uncertainty in all facets of our lives. Surely this was not what any of you thought you had signed up for, but I thank you for continuing to show up for our town.

I want to thank John Elsesser for his work to keep our town’s employees safe during this crisis, and also Coventry Human Services who are doing everything they can to maintain a food supply for families in our community who most need support. Please, if you are able, consider a donation to them. I’d also like to thank Council for working to continue providing an avenue for residents to be heard during these remote meetings, and for maintaining residents’ ability to participate in government from afar through the live feeds of meetings.

I feel compelled to write tonight to address a few issues.

First, I am deeply troubled by Mr. O’Brien Jr’s support of reopening the state in the midst of this pandemic. This past weekend, as a march was being planned in Hartford to blockade access to a hospital and protest the social distancing and self-isolation measures in place to flatten the curve of this deadly disease, Mr. O’Brien Jr. tweeted “It seems like CT is getting stir crazy from socialist distancing. Maybe we should #OpenCT. What do you think CT Gov Cuomo?” This kind of derisive commentary made by an elected official of this town is reprehensible by itself, but beyond that it spits in the face of Coventry families who are even today dealing with life-threatening illness in their homes or even, unimaginably, the loss of a loved one. I find it hard to place any trust or confidence in a town official who would promote this kind of reckless, dangerous behavior in other citizens. You are given a platform to speak by being elected. Abusing it in this way is morally inexcusable and endangers the lives of those who believe what they are told regardless of accuracy or truthfulness.

Second, the bias shown in the minutes from Town Council meetings has become increasingly visible over the last several months. Previously, residents have discussed during audience of citizens the omission of some people’s statements from the minutes when they had requested attachment, and other small variances. Understandably, the minutes from a Council meeting will require editing and revision. It’s not a small task to keep an accurate record of the proceedings. However, most recently in the minutes for the March 16 meeting, there is a distinct discrepancy in the Audience of Citizens section of the minutes in how much of a person’s statement or opinion was listed in the minutes themselves, as opposed to being attached. I would ask that Council be thoughtful about this document maintaining a strictly factual representation of the meetings by either having a standard way to communicate a constituent’s statement is attached, or by having those statements included in their entirety in the body of the minutes. Giving more weight to some speakers and less weight to others creates inconsistency within what should be a neutral document.

Third, I want to express my firm support for maintaining the library project as it was proposed to Council by the Library Committee. These are, as we know, deeply uncertain times. We have seen, in the last few weeks, just
how much our community leans in during times of crisis in ways big and small. As we live through this crisis, the choices our elected bodies make and the paths they guide us down will be looked back on in the future to see whose interests were truly at heart and in mind. We will, doubtless, enter a period of recession in the aftermath of this virus. More people than ever will need our library to help them with job searches, resources, and community. Families will need a place to ground themselves back into whatever our new normal looks like. Jobs will be created and maintained throughout the construction project itself, likely employing residents here in Coventry. We will be able to make full use of the $850,000 grant the Library Committee has secured for us and create a hub for this community that meets legal codes and safety guidelines and provides somewhere for residents to congregate to rebuild and repair our town’s community presence after this period of isolation. Now, more than ever, we must support this project and stand together.

I request this statement be entered into the minutes in its entirety.
Coventry Town Council, Audience of Citizens, April 20, 2020:

I am requesting that the Town Council bring the library vote to referendum. The long overdue improvements are sorely needed. The building continues to fall into disrepair, there are serious code concerns, and the available space and layout isn’t sufficient to support the needs and interests of the library’s patrons.

Town libraries have long been part of the fabric and traditions of this country and the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library is no exception. Our library is a town treasure that should be preserved.

Carolyn G. Arabolos
132 North Farms Road, Coventry
Hi. My name is Jason Blakesley, 27 Berry Avenue, Coventry, CT.

I am looking for answers or information on the following questions.

Is Sargent Hicks still being paid by the taxpayers? How much compensation has he received since his suspension last October 2019?

Why is the asphalt on Daley Road deteriorating once again?

Cook at home. This will save lives.

Thank you.

Jason Blakesley
Coventry Town Council Finance Committee:
April 13, 2020

At the beginning of the meeting we were joined by some members of the Board of Education Finance Committee, superintendent David Petrone, and Bob Carroll, the Board Finance Director.

We shared with them that the Council plans to put forward a “no tax increase” budget for FY 20/21. We discussed how the Council needs and would appreciate the Board working with the Council to make this possible. We discussed that this could take the form of reductions in the FY 20/21 proposed budget and savings in the FY 19/20 budget that can be used to reduce the impacts on taxpayers in the FY 20/21 budget.

We discussed the Governor’s Executive Order 7R and its impacts on the Coventry School District. This includes the opportunity to negotiate with the District’s Transportation Companies and the Special Education Companies that the District contracts with. We discussed this in the context of it being an opportunity to save money in the FY 19/20 budget and the possibility of making those funds available to help offset the impacts of the proposed tax increase in the FY 20/21 budget. And we encouraged the Board to look to identify any other savings that could possibly be made available for that purpose.

We discussed the report that said that the District’s spring ECS grant payment will be reduced by $45,000 this year. It had been anticipated that the ECS grant would be reduced by $12,000 and the Board had returned that $12,000 to the general fund last year. These funds resulted from an overpayment from the State for Special Education services last year. Bob Carroll explained that the state had received claims of underpayment from several districts and that resulted in a different calculation to determine what Coventry owed because it impacted the total percent of charges that the state reimbursed each district for. We will be receiving $33,000 less than Coventry had anticipated. Special education funds go directly to the district to offset their costs and the ECS grant is paid to the Towns. So according to the state, the District received a total of $45,000 more than they should have in last year’s budget but the District anticipated that the amount was only $12,000.

We also discussed the Board’s tuition account that receives funds from out of district students who come to Coventry for services – usually special education. We discussed that the account holds about $97,000 now and anticipates that $110,000 will be available at year end. These funds are not included in the Board’s budget and are completely under their discretion. The Chairman asked the Board and Dr. Petrone to consider using some of these funds to help offset the tax impacts of the 20/21 budget.

We discussed the Board’s Pre-School account. The Superintendent had stated on a few occasions that he thought that the split of expenses in the Pre-School should be 40% District and 60% Pre-School. It was noted that the census of the Pre-School shows that the District is only financially responsible for 20 of the approximately 100 Pre-School students. The Superintendent put forward his reasoning and we agreed that we would continue this discussion at a later date. It was also pointed out that the Pre-School has paid 100% of some small maintenance or capital expenses on occasion.

We discussed the Board’s projections for savings for the District due to the school closures and asked them to provide the Council with updated projections through the new May 20 school closure date and also through the end of the year. The unusual budget process and timeline that the Town Council is following this year was
discussed and we asked the Board to help us with up to date information throughout the process. It was noted that this will be added work for the Board’s staff as well as for the Town.

I distributed a memo with Discussion points for this meeting and then sent out a follow up memo to everyone after our meeting that I am including with my report and would like included in the Town Council minutes.

We discussed the Municipal Tax Relief programs that were included in the Governor’s Executive Order 7S. The EO created two programs. One would allow the town to defer tax payments for 3 months from the due date for those taxpayers negatively impacted by the coronavirus crisis or include others as we wished. The second program would allow the town to lower the interest rate on payments to .25% per month for 3 months from the due date. After a presentation by Amanda Backhaus about impacts, the Committee recommends that the Council move forward with the second option offering greatly reduced interest rates.

We discussed the possibility of running black fiber to the Public Works garage on Olsen Farm Road during the ongoing fiber project. We received information about pricing. The Committee did not put forward a final recommendation for the Town Council and asked that more discussion occur during the Council meeting to come to a decision.

We discussed the proposed year-end transfers requested by Amanda Backhaus and recommends that the Town Council accept these recommended transfers.

We discussed new contracts for Trash Collection and Disposal and the Committee recommends that the Council approve and accept these contracts.

Lastly, we discussed the Library Renovation & Improvement Committee Presentation to determine what direction we would recommend that the Council give to the Committee. We discussed that we do not recommend moving forward with the $2.4 million project that was proposed. The current crisis and bleak economic outlook were also discussed. The chair stated that this project continues to be discussed at this time, only because the Library Renovation committee has received approval for an $850,000 grant to support a project and that this grant expires, if not extended, at the end of November, 2020.

After discussion, the committee is unanimously recommending that the Council direct the committee to continue work with the following guidance on scope and funding. We recommend that, if the committee can keep the $850,000 grant then the Council would be willing to consider matching the grant dollar for dollar up to $850,000. If the grant remains in place, this would enable the committee to consider a project with a cost of up to $1.7 million with the taxpayers portion being up to $850,000.

We also discussed that there are code issues, maintenance issues and water intrusion issues that must be taken care of, in any case, in order for the building to continue being used as our town library.

If the committee is not able to receive, or loses, the $850,000 grant for any reason, we recommend that the project be reconsidered and new guidance be given to the committee.

Respectfully,
Matthew O’Brien Sr.
Chairman Finance Committee
Discussion Points for 4-13-20 Town Council Finance Committee Meeting – discussion with Board of Education Finance Committee

1. Discuss the Town Council’s decision to do everything we can to put forward a 20/21 Budget that will not increase taxes on Coventry taxpayers due to a growth in spending, during this unprecedented crisis. Discuss how the Town Council and our staff and the Board of Education and their staff can work together to make this happen in a manner that will cause as little disruption as possible under the circumstances. Discuss how savings resulting from the coronavirus crisis and shutdown of our schools may assist the Town in achieving this goal.

2. Discuss the Governor’s Executive Order 7R impacts on Coventry School District –

   A) Discuss status of employees employed by the district. How has this impacted Temporary teachers and staff? How has this impacted any contract employees?

   Discuss the status of any employees and their positions who have resigned, been terminated, or are on leaves of absence and had not been replaced prior to the shut down and all those that occurred since the shut-down, Will these positions be held open until 2020-2021?

   B) Discuss the District’s efforts and opportunities to save money during the shut-down.

   C) Discuss the status of the Town and Board’s diesel fuel, oil, gasoline contracts for 2019-2020 and for 2020-2021. Is there an opportunity to save money on these contracts? Is there a way to leverage the unusually low costs for these items currently to save money in the 2020-2021 budget year?

   D) Discuss the opportunity to negotiate with the Special Education Providers (SEP) that we contract with to provide services to our special needs students in or out of the district. The Governor’s executive order 7R directs school districts to make payments to the special education to enable them to compensate their active employees and provide them health insurance and it requires the SEPs to provide documentation of the fact that it is charging only the actual and reasonable cost of sustaining wage and health insurance payments for their active employees and are engaging best efforts to avoid unnecessary costs. Executive Order 7R also states that “Nothing in this provision shall allow for contracted companies to be enriched beyond the actual and reasonable costs incurred for the purposes set forth above.”

Points for discussion about these negotiations:

• Request detailed documents showing the companies’ salary and insurance costs and clients who were being served (while protecting privacy rights).

• Determine if their staff were only servicing Coventry students during the duration of our contract with them. If not take steps to determine the proportion of their time that was being spent servicing Coventry students to develop a plan for proportional payment of their salary and health insurance.

• If any of their employees have been laid off and qualified for unemployment benefits during the stoppage, determine the amount they have/will receive from unemployment payments will equal or exceed their last salary/wage payments.
Coventry should offer to proportionately make up any shortfall in those payments. Keeping in mind that the Federal Government stimulus bill provides an additional $600 per week added to their weekly benefits.

- Coventry should also offer to proportionately pay for any payments the SEP has made to continue their employees’ health insurance.
- Determine a date that the SEP will rehire their employees and then negotiate Coventry’s portion of their salary and health insurance going forward.
- Have the SEPs continued to provide any services to Coventry students during the shut-down? Any payments Coventry has agreed to pay for services during the shut-down should be used as an offset toward Coventry’s proportionate payment of the above costs.

E) Discuss the opportunity to negotiate with the companies who provide transportation of Coventry students to the SEPs or elsewhere. The Governor’s Order 7R directs school districts to make payments to enable the Transportation Company to compensate active employees and provide them health insurance and their fleet costs and it requires the Transportation Companies to provide necessary documentation.

- Request detailed documents showing the companies’ salary and insurance costs and fleet costs for the employees who specifically provide these services and the vehicles used specifically to provide these services to Coventry students.
- Determine if the companies’ employees are exclusively providing services to Coventry students or if they are also servicing students from other Districts. Determine a proportion of their employees’ time and fleet expenses for these specific vehicles, that are directly attributable to the services Coventry students receive. Are these vehicles and employees used to provide any regular education transportation services?
- Do the Transportation Companies own these specific vehicles or are they making lease/rent/purchase payments monthly? If they own them, this would reduce the attributable costs to be included in our negotiations with them.
- If any of their employees, detailed above, have been laid off and qualified for unemployment benefits during the stoppage, determine the amount they have/will receive from unemployment payments will equal or exceed their last salary/wage payments. Coventry should offer to proportionately make up any shortfall in those payments. Keeping in mind that the Federal Government stimulus bill provides an additional $600 per week added to their weekly benefits.
- Determine if the Transportation Companies have provided health insurance benefits to their employees. Many/some may be part-time employees with no health insurance benefits.
- Coventry should also offer to proportionately pay for any payments the Transportation Company has made to continue their employees’ health insurance.
- Determine a date that the Transportation Company will rehire their employees and then negotiate Coventry’s portion of their salary and health insurance going forward.
F) Discuss the opportunity to negotiate with the companies who provide transportation of regular education Coventry. The Governor’s Order 7R directs school districts to make payments to enable the Transportation Company to compensate active employees and provide them health insurance and their fleet costs and it requires the Transportation Companies to provide necessary documentation.

- These negotiations should generally follow the same process and information requests as suggested in the negotiation with the Transportation Companies providing transportation services in Section E above.

3) Discuss the Board of Education Report For All Activity ending 3/31/20.

- GHR Budget Balance: ($38,425)  Feb: ($39,750)
- CGS Budget Balance: $236,563  Feb: $241,501
- CNHS Budget Balance: $193,003  Feb: $182,386
- CHS Budget Balance: $161,265  Feb: $138,022
- Special Education (PSSS) Budget Balance: ($301,406)  Feb: ($309,671)
- Central Office/Business Office: $335,794

A) Discuss the trajectory of each of these budgets. What is causing the large shortfall projected in Special Education (PSSS) spending?

- Has the District you added in-district Special Education students since the beginning of the school year or added PSSS staff since the beginning of the school year? Please explain.

4) Discuss the possibility that the state will be reducing the District’s spring ECS grant payment by $45,000.

5) Discuss the 3/31/20 Board of Education Management Report

- Instructional Supplies 611 – Encumbrances: $53,545; Budget Balance: $22,795; End of the Year: $76,341; Balance Available: $0
- Custodial Supplies 612 – Encumbrances: $7,945; Budget Balance: $13,000; End of the Year: $20,945; Balance Available: $0
- Instructional Improvement 333: Encumbrances $9,239; Budget Balance: $42,416; End of the Year: $42,416; Balance Available: $0
- Contracted Services 430 – Encumbrance: $73,373; Budget Balance: $46,517; End of the Year: $141,490; Balance Available ($21,600)

6) Discuss the Pre-School Account

- The October 1, 2019 pre-school census report listed 20 students who were the financial responsibility of the District
- The total number of pre-school students has remained consistent throughout the school year.
- Doctor Patrone has stated on several occasions that the District/Preschool Fund split on expenses should be 40/60
- What split is the Pre-School using to determine the percent of costs that the District is/or the Pre-school fund will be paying
- Please provide an explanation as to why the split should be 40/60
7) Board of Education Tuition Account

- Please provide an overview of the activity that has occurred in this program during the 2019/2020 school year
- What are the total revenues realized in this program during the 19/20 school year
- What expenditures have been made with any of these funds?
- How much is remaining unspent?
- What plans does the District have for these funds?
- Please provide any documentation and additional information that will confirm that no District money has been used to provide these services including confirmation that excess capacity on the part of staff, or for equipment or supplies have been included in the District budget to provide this “excess capacity” within the District.

8) Stimulus Funds

- What if any stimulus funds might the District receive / anticipate receiving from the federal government, the state government?
- Will the district possibly be eligible for any FEMA funds?

9) Have the Board of Education project District savings through the new May 20, 2020 shut down date and also have them calculate District savings through the end of the Fiscal Year/School Year. If the Board were able and would like to calculate savings on a weekly basis after May 20, 2020 that would be great. Recognizing that we are in a very unusual budget process and that the Town Council will put forward a proposed budget by May 18th (so we will need updated information from the Board by that date) and then the Town Council can make further changes to that proposed budget based on community input and any new information before voting on a final budget on or about June 1st. It will be necessary to have up to date information as soon as is possible throughout this process.
To: The Board of Education Finance Committee and Staff

I wanted to follow up and provide you with feedback and ideas that were generated by our meeting on Monday, April 13, 2020.

If the District successfully negotiates with the Special Education Providers that service Coventry students out of district and (as you are able) reduces the amount that Coventry will pay those providers during the 19/20 FY the Board has expressed concern that this will result in an overpayment to the District this year - because grant payments will be made based on the information available on March 1st (I believe) of this year and result further in a reduction in the Town’s 20/21 ECS grant payment as an adjustment.

Any excess funds received this year in the excess cost grant should be identified and not spent during the 19/20 FY and returned to the Town to hold to offset the potential reduction of the 20/21 ECS grant.

This will not result in any hardship on the District because those funds will not be necessary to meet the District’s financial obligations this year and if nothing had changed, would have been passed on to the Special Education Providers in the form of payments from the District.

These funds would not have provided the District with any additional resources to fund operations, etc. and should be identified, set aside, and returned to the Town to offset the anticipated loss of ECS grant money in FY 20/21.

This should in no way be considered a disincentive to drive down the District’s obligations to pay these Special Education Providers as the Governor’s Executive Order specifies. Any Coventry District funds not paid to these providers for services the District is not receiving this year, will be a benefit to the District and the Town. Our taxpayers, our community, our state and our country are all hurting and many are in desperate situations. The Town Council will be eliminating the proposed increase in property taxes due to the total Town’s proposed increase in spending (and may consider further action). This will require the help of the Board of Education and the school district. Every dollar that is saved due to the shut-down of our schools caused by the coronavirus crisis, that can be used to offset the impact of the Board’s 20/21 budget’s proposed increase in spending, will help preserve as much of the Board’s proposed 20/21 budget as is possible.

During our Town Council Finance Committee meeting on Monday it was said that the District is not negotiating from a position of strength. I disagree with that statement. Prior to the Governor’s Executive Order, the Special Education Providers and Transportation companies were faced with the very real possibility that they would not receive any payment for the services not being provided to Coventry during the school shut down. These companies want to receive payment and the Governor’ Executive Order provides an avenue for them to receive something (vs. nothing). The Governor’s order is very clear as to what the obligation of the district is and what costs the District must pay to these companies and what the companies are obligated to provide to facilitate them receiving these payments. The Executive Order prevents the companies from being enriched by the payments Coventry will be making beyond what is required. Coventry should not make any payments until the providers fulfill their obligations and Coventry can be confident that any payments we do make are reasonable and are obligated by the Governor’s order — and nothing more.

This is all happening in a very short time frame. That is true for the providers as well. Their companies are also under financial pressure and need to settle as quickly as is feasible.

The Town Council and our Town Staff would be happy to assist the Board and District in any way we can. Please let us know how we can help.
Beyond these negotiations it is clear that the school district will be realizing substantial other savings during the 19/20 FY as a result of the closure of our schools. The district will be saving money by not paying for substitute teachers; not filling any positions that have opened due to retirements, resignations, terminations and leaves of absence; all costs associated with our sports programs such as travel, equipment, coaches, field and gym maintenance, etc; savings in instructional supplies, custodial supplies, any disposable goods; utilities including electricity, fuel, etc; savings in instructional improvement; savings in contracted services; and much more. I am sure that you are on top of all of these items. The point is that every dollar that can be saved and turned toward reducing impacts in next year’s budget will help minimize reductions that may be needed to be made in the 20/21 FY budget. We need your help. We are all in this together.

I understand that the Board of Education has voted to return 50% of any savings that result from the closure of our schools to the Town. This vote was made when the closure was scheduled to end on April 20, 2020. It has already been extended to May 20, 2020 and there appears to be a very real possibility that the closure will be extended into June and possibly for the rest of the school year. This will generate a great deal more savings than was known at the time of your vote (based on the April 20th closure) and I hope that you will see what savings can actually be generated and then make a decision at a later date to share more than 50% of those savings with Coventry’s taxpayers.

These are unprecedented times. The impacts of this crisis will not end quickly. Our economy has been devastated. Our taxpayers and citizens are all being impacted. Many have been laid off or have had their pay reduced in response to the dramatic change in economic activity. Many businesses are completely closed. Others are seeing their business drop off dramatically. People are finding it hard or impossible to pay their mortgages, their rent, their car payments, and even their daily expenses. I don’t expect this to turn around soon.

There is great uncertainty about whether the Town can expect to receive at least a good portion of anticipated property tax payments - even after we offer some relief for 90 days. With every town and city in the same situation, we have no idea if we will be able to sell and use tax anticipation bonds over the short term because the bond market is/will be under so much pressure. The state is taking in dramatically less in sales taxes, gas taxes, and have delayed even receiving income tax payments until July and they will also be greatly reduced. We don’t know what relief the state and the town may possibly receive from the Federal government but we have to expect there are going to be limits on this. At some point, the state will be forced to reduce their expenses – and that will likely include reducing grants to towns and cities. This is almost inevitable.

The Federal government is printing money and attempting to replace at least part of the money that the economy is not generating. They will not be able to sustain this for long and they will likely never completely replace all that is being lost.

I know that the Board wants to do everything that it can to help our citizens during this very difficult time and I know that all of this is happening in a very compressed time frame and is unprecedented. The Town Council is feeling similar pressures.

We have to work together and all of us must do whatever we can to protect our tax payers while still providing the services, including education, that our citizens need.

Please keep an open line of communication. Let the Town Council know what we can do to help you - with negotiations; ideas; strategizing and planning; etc.
Coventry is blessed with strong leaders in our Town Manager and our Superintendent and with wonderful, dedicated, and caring staff in the town and in the district. All of them are working under very difficult circumstances, being asked to change the way that they have always worked, and some are being prevented from doing their jobs. We need to recognize and appreciate all that they are doing to keep Coventry safe and keep our Town and District operating as best as we can through this crisis.

We are all in this together – and we will get through it.

Matthew O’Brien sr.
Vice Chair Coventry Town Council
Chairman, Finance Committee
Town Council Member Report

Lisa Conant

- Human Services Needs

  - Residents have been asking what sorts of ongoing needs our town food pantry has, so I’d like to report on this on a regular basis as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

  - Anything non-perishable would be appreciated but the highest needs right now are canned veggies, soup, tuna fish, cereal, peanut butter, jelly and kid friendly snacks. (Please, no expired items.)

  - Donations may be dropped off 24/7 in the lower left vestibule of town hall. Gift cards and checks are welcomed and can be dropped off too, in a lock box at same location.

  - The Town is currently working on a way to donate by credit card right now. Unfortunately some non-town options (such as for 501(c)3s) have a 2.2 % fee assessed, which is taken off the top of the donation so less money would go to the Food Bank but not be an add on to the donor. PayPal charges a fee to the donor. More to come on this later.

- Budget

  - While our work on the budget has unfortunately been delayed because of this public health emergency I believe we need to use this time to look further at the details of the budget and continue to craft something that will be responsive to our residents’ needs, both currently and for the longer term. While I completely support holding the line on taxes I would not support a budget that undercuts or diminishes services that will be critical to residents during this time. Those services include education of our children, public safety, and human services.

  - I believe we need to re-examine some of our previous priorities and make sure that money is being directed to areas where it’s needed most. For example, I believe that purchasing more PPE for our first responders or supporting overtime costs takes precedence over new decals on fire trucks. I also believe we should be reassessing what our human services needs will be during the coming year.

  - Additionally, while I’m disappointed that the finance committee did not accept the recommendations of the library renovation committee, I do hope and expect the Republican
leadership to stand by the $850,000 grant match to address urgently-needed repairs and code issues, and not work against it prior to any referendum that might be in the offing.

- Social Media

* It was brought to my attention over the past weekend that a member of this council made a social media post that referred to the current public health and safety measures that we are ALL enduring in Connecticut and nationwide as “socialist distancing.” While everyone is entitled to their own personal opinions and we all enjoy free-speech rights, I find it very disappointing for a council member to politicize this current public health emergency in a manner that is both misleading and divisive. At this time it is critical that we all follow social distancing measures to protect all of residents and our loved ones. Language such as what was used in the post unfortunately reduces these measures - that again are intended to protect ALL of us - to a political effort, and therefore easily disregarded or dismissed by the public.