

**MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL &
PUBLIC HEARING ON NEIGHBORHOOD ASSISTANCE ACT
MAY 3, 2021
7:15 P.M. – PUBLIC HEARING & REGULAR MEETING
TOWN HALL ANNEX & VIRTUAL**

Public Hearing, 7:15 p.m.: Neighborhood Assistance Act

Blanchard opened the public hearing at 7:15 p.m.

Elsesser said under this act a public hearing has to be held and the Council has to endorse the type of project that CLCC is using on the Neighborhood Assistance Act application.

Patrick Byrne was present. He said this act allows firms to donate to the non-profit organization to receive a tax break on certain projects. The DRS website lists the projects and the amount of funding being sought. Last year's project for CLCC was an energy efficient greenhouse on the property. CLCC received one donation of \$4,931 from United Illuminating. CLCC hopes to get that project off the ground this year. The organization has two years to complete the project.

This year CLCC will be seeking donations for energy improvements to some existing buildings on the property – adding insulation to the farm stand and adding heating and cooling to what is basically a garage so that it can be used year-round for programs. The costs for these projects are minimal. CLCC is being cautious in what it is seeking this year.

O'Brien, Sr. said the Council is happy to help in endorsing the application. O'Brien, Jr. said he has no objection to the projects. Elsesser said action on this matter is on the agenda for later in the evening.

1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

The meeting was called to order by Blanchard at 7:32 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

Members absent:

Also present:

John Elsesser – Town Manager

2. Pledge Of Allegiance:

Council members and Staff stood to recite the pledge.

3. Audience Of Citizens:

(30 minutes – 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 following audience statements submitted to the email address. The statements in their entirety are attached to these Minutes.

Richard & Carol Marcinek, Goose Lane – Writes to comment on Ms. Blakesley email of 2-16-2021.

Richard Martin, 195 Northfield Road – Writes to comment on the word count of Audience of Citizen letters.

Blanchard said the Council has discussed this. The word limit was set to correspond to the time limit that has been in place for in person statements. She would appreciate citizens working with the Council on this. This is about trying to make adjustments to statements being read instead of being spoken by their author. Thomas noted the meeting is not on the YouTube channel this evening because we have no technical support. Spectrum is being spotty. The meeting is being recorded and will be available at a later date. The meeting is being aired live on Spectrum channel 191.

Linda Blakesley, 27 Berry Avenue – Writes that she is disappointed the Town Council has failed to address her request of February 16th to declare racism a public health crisis.

O'Brien, Sr. asked Elsesser to speak on this. Elsesser said the Council has asked the Human Rights committee to look at a number of things including, at least on an annual basis, reviewing interactions with the public and the police department and town policies for unintended implicit bias. The affirmation action plan rewrite was done to get to a richer employee workforce. The Council combined the Human Rights Advisory and Youth Advisory committees into one. The BOE is planning community conversations project to talk about community equity and richness. These actions came about because people have the right to speak their mind and gave input to the Council. The Steering Committee is diligently discussing the matter raised of racism as a public health crisis. It is not being ignored and is underway with a sense of urgency. Workshops will be held over the summer to learn about ourselves and what we need to do. O'Brien, Sr. said the Council has taken a position on racism by opposing it in all forms. Steering has achieved a good amount of work on the matter but the Town does not work on the residents' timetable. The Council had a budget to put together.

O'Brien, Sr. said Elsesser looked at past meeting data to see if an audience statement was limited to a word count earlier in the year. That research found that a count had been addressed. It has nothing to do with political affiliation or audience comments.

Howard Haberern, 80 Cassidy Hill Road – Writes about declaring racism as a public health issue, the selective word counting of audience statements, and the limit of statements of 750 words.

O'Brien, Jr. said if a letter is addressed to a specific Council member perhaps someone else should read it.

4. Acceptance Of Minutes:

- **April 19, 2021 Regular Meeting**

Motion: I move to accept the minutes of April 19, 2021 Regular Meeting.

By: O'Brien, Jr.

Seconded: Hand

With the following corrections:

- Page 5, third paragraph, last sentence – change “product” to “produce”.
- Page 5, item 6.B., eighteenth sentence – add to the end “by submitting testimony to the relevant committees.”.
- Page 5, item 6.B. nineteenth sentence – add “701” after “SB”.
- Page 6, first paragraph, first sentence – add “it” before “entails”.
- Page 6, second paragraph, fifth sentence – change “passed” to “past”.
- Page 6, second paragraph, sixth sentence – change “was” to “were”.
- Page 8, first paragraph, last sentence – change “that” to “than”.
- Page 10, item 6.F.7., third paragraph – change “Echo Systems” to Ecosystems Consulting Service” throughout.
- Page 13, item 9.A., thirteenth sentence – add “grant” before “funding”.
- Page 14, item 9.B., fifth sentence – change “eliminated” to “eliminating”.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

5. Consent Agenda:

All items listed with an asterisk (*) will be acted on by one motion. There will be no separate discussion on these items unless a Council members so requests, in which case, the item will be removed from the consent agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the agenda.

Motion: I move to accept the Consent Agenda.

By: Conant

Seconded: O'Brien, Jr.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

Motion: I move to add an item to the agenda of a brief discussion about the Audience of Citizens portion of the meeting and perhaps forging a different path for that portion.

By: Williams

Seconded: O'Brien, Sr.

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 reminded everyone of the budget vote tomorrow. Polls, at the two fire stations, will be open from 6:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. All COVID-19 safety procedures will be in place. Bring your ID.

6.B. Council Members:

O'Brien, Sr. said he attended the ribbon cutting for Courtside Nutrition. Kristina Russo is the owner bringing this store to the community and is excited about it. Tim Ackert, Dan Champagne, and John Elsesser also attended. Fifteen or more people were present. O'Brien, Sr. said this is a great addition to the town. Elsesser said he hopes the community supports the store. This owner chose Coventry; she did not grow up here.

O'Brien, Sr. chaired the Consortium meeting. Conant and Thomas were in attendance. These meetings are helpful to learn what is taking place in town by volunteers and staff. Blanchard said there is a recording of the meeting; Elsesser said he will check to see if this is available on the website. Elsesser said he is not aware of any other town that holds this type of meeting. This type of meeting brings everyone up-to-date and provides the sense of the teams that work on the boards and commissions. Conant said it was a really good big picture meeting. Some committees have overlap and the synergy created is utilized.

Hand said the consortium meeting aligns information about the boards, commission, and staff. He represented the Council at the tree dedication on the Green. The dedication was well attended and included moving tributes to Chuck Conklin. The newly planted trees are a living legacy of the impression Conklin left on the town. Conant and Elsesser were in attendance.

Thomas said O'Brien, Sr. asked at a previous meeting what the Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee does. An example of their work is for the past two Saturdays they have held trail work parties to make sure the trails are maintained. Thomas reiterated encouragement to people to get out and vote on the budget referendum.

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

O'Brien, Jr. provided a recap on the discussion regarding Avery Shores Road. The Association has not met several requirements for the town to take over the road. The Town Attorney has been consulted for the next steps Steering should take. Also, there was an open and honest discussion regarding a declaration that racism is a public health crisis. There are very passionate people for and against such a declaration. There is research to back up that the experience of racism has a negative effect to physical well-being and it can shorten life spans. O'Brien, Jr. said all people are welcome in Coventry. People against a declaration believe that by stating it is an emergency indicates we are a racist town. O'Brien, Jr. said the views of the two sides cannot be more different.

6.C.1. Reappointments:

6.C.1.a. Ad-Hoc Coventry Lake Advisory & Monitoring Committee: Imhoff

Motion: I move that the Council reappoint Carly Imhoff to the Ad-Hoc Coventry Lake Advisory & Monitoring Committee, new term to expire 5/4/2024.

By: O'Brien, Jr. Seconded: Hand

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.C.1.b. Ad-Hoc Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee: Beausoleil

Motion: I move that the Council reappoint Vernon Beausoleil to the Ad-Hoc Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee, new term to expire 5/31/2024.

By: O'Brien, Jr. Seconded: Conant

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

6.C.1.c. Ad-Hoc Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee: Glenney

Motion: I move that the Council reappoint William Glenney to the Ad-Hoc Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee, new term to expire 5/31/2024.

By: O'Brien, Jr. Seconded: Blanchard

Voting:

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

6.C.1.d. Ad-Hoc Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee: Thomas

Motion: I move that the Council reappoint Eric Thomas to the Ad-Hoc Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee, new term to expire 5/31/2024.

By: O'Brien, Jr. Seconded: Hand

Discussion: O'Brien, Sr. said he has known Eric Thomas for many years. He is hard working on this committee and loving of the protected spaces in town.

Voting:

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

6.C.1.e. Building Code Board Of Appeals: Fournier

Motion: I move that the Council reappoint Kathy Fournier to the Building Code Of Appeals, new term to expire 6/1/2026.

By: O'Brien, Jr. Seconded: Conant

Voting:

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

6.C.1.f. Energy Conservation/Alternative Energy Advisory Committee: Croutch

Motion: I move that the Council reappoint Cameron Croutch to Energy Conservation/Alternative Energy Advisory Committee, new term to expire 3/2/2024.

By: O'Brien, Jr. Seconded: Hand

Discussion: O'Brien, Sr. asked if Croutch is a registered voter in Coventry; the interest form does not say. O'Brien, Jr. said this is a reappointment; that requirement was probably checked on the initial interest form.

Voting:

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

**6.C.1.g. Energy Conservation/Alternative Energy Advisory Committee:
Dennis**

Motion: I move that the Council reappoint Kristine Dennis to Energy Conservation/Alternative Energy Advisory Committee, new term to expire 3/2/2024.

By: O'Brien, Jr.

Seconded: Conant

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

Blanchard thanked all who continue to serve which O'Brien, Jr. echoed and Hand seconded.

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

6.D.1. * Minutes: April 12, 2021

6.E. * COVRRRA – John A. Elsesser:

6.F. Town Manager – John A. Elsesser

6.F.1. Projects Update

Highlights to Elsesser's distributed report are:

- We have received word that \$1.5 mill. has been granted for the Orchard Hills renovations. The Housing Authority will get that project going.
- Representative Courtney can only submit ten projects for earmark funding. He submitted the continuation of the sidewalk on Main Street for Coventry.
- A reminder was given about the Memorial Day parade. The committee must decide how wide open this is made. Children are not being vaccinated yet so the committee is sensitive to that. The parade will not be the full-on event as in the past. There will be a ceremony and a fly-over is scheduled.
- Coventry Fest remains cancelled. The older volunteers coordinating the events had to make a very difficult decision 4 – 5 months ago to cancel for this year. Contact Coventry Cares about fireworks in future.
- Elsesser was invited to participate in a twinning with our sister city of Coventry, England. Fifty-four towns sistered with Coventry, England. This started as a program to reach out to countries that were decimated in WWII with peaceful pacts to help with recovery. It keeps in mind that we have partnerships around the world.
- Planning is in the final stages for the Swamp Road/Bread and Milk Street realignment.
- The South Street project is firing up.
- A schedule is being put together for the Summer Roads project.

Conant said she is wondering if it is feasible for Coventry Cares to team up with the Arts Fest to hold a fireworks display later in the summer. Elsesser said it was discussed to be held at the end of summer but before school started. Coventry Cares needs to raise \$10k - \$12k for the fireworks; the town does not fund this. It was decided years ago that the fireworks display is a community celebration but not to be funded by the taxpayers. The conversation about Conant's idea can be opened but this is a big project and volunteers will be needed. The Town has requirements to be sure the event is safe. Coventry Cares is running a food truck fair at the high school. They have even had a hard time getting that organized.

Blanchard said the library is doing fundraising. With the generous donation of \$75k they have raised a total of \$125k. Elsesser said the library continues to accept donations and is looking for grants. There is Rescue grant money for furniture. Also, there is a grant for the engineering needed for the old section of the building that is not part of the renovation project. This could be a historic preservation grant with a match. The State Historic Commission must make a decision about proposed changes on the inside to create an area of rescue.

6.F.2. COVID-19 Update

Elsesser said rules are changing so the Town is starting to mapping out a strategy toward reopening. The region and State are doing well with cases but Coventry had 18 cases last week because of group gatherings. We must get the number of vaccinated people up. EHHD will be coming into the high school to vaccinate students who are over 16 years old. The vaccine does wonderful things; it does reduce the severity of the virus.

Conant said she wants to emphasize getting the vaccine as well. She knows of two people who were fully vaccinated but both got Covid. Hand said the consistent element is that the age group of 16 – 25 years old is accounting for one-third of the cases in the district. He encourages those in that age group to clamp down a bit longer.

6.F.3. Microgrid Update

Elsesser said the team is working on getting additional funding. A financing meeting was held with Greenbank. There are two other companies to meet with. One uses a different approach where the Town would own everything and it would be a lease/purchase back to the vendor. Although not unheard of this approach will take a lot more discussion and it becomes more complicated.

A letter between DEEP and OPM on the sewer issue was received. If DEEP is not responding to OPM it is assumed DEEP does not have a problem with it. The Town Attorney will review this letter.

6.F.4. * Quarterly Report: January – March, 2021

6.F.5. * Staff Meeting Minutes, 4/21/21

7. **Unfinished Business:**

None

8. **New Business:**

8.A. 20/21/70: Consideration/Possible Action: Acceptance Of Conservation Easement Conveyance, Durkin Subdivision On Zeya Drive And Bread And Milk Street

Motion: I move the Council accept the conservation easement conveyance, Durkin Subdivision on Zeya Drive and Bread and Milk Street.

By: O'Brien, Sr.

Seconded: Thomas

Discussion: O'Brien, Sr. confirmed with Elsesser that the PZC forwarded this to the Council. Elsesser said by looking at the map you can see all the wetlands on the property. This parcel has been for sale for some time. With all of this land they are able to get two lots carved out of the wetlands with access from Zeya Drive.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.B. 20/21/-71: Consideration/Possible Action: Acceptance Of Easement For Public Highway And Related Purposes, Duke Special Permit, 111 Lake Road

Motion: I move that the Council accept the easement for public highway and related purposes, Duke Special Permit, 111 Lake Road.

By: O'Brien, Sr.

Seconded: Williams

Discussion: Elsesser said this is trying to square off the street lines.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.C. 20/21-72: CLCC Neighborhood Assistance Act Application For Improvements To Farm Stand for a total of three buildings on 10 acres property.

Elsesser said this will be a modest proposal for energy conservation and heating and cooling for the farm stand and one other structure CLCC currently uses. This ensures that the Town is aware of the application and the proposed activities.

Motion: I move that the Council approves of CLCC applying for the Neighborhood Assistance Act for improvements to the farm stand and another building on the 10-acre property.

By: O'Brien, Sr.

Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Hand supports this.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.D. 20/21-73: Consideration/Possible Action: Authorization Of Senior Class Awards

Blanchard said that the Council has historically done this.

Motion: I move that the Council authorize the Senior Class Awards.

By: Hand

Seconded: O'Brien, Jr.

Discussion: Blanchard said the Awards ceremony date is May 26, 2021.

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

8.E. 20/21-74: Discussion About The Audience Of Citizens Portion Of The Meetings.

Williams said he raised this because we seem to be getting closer to allowing the public to come to the meetings. He thinks we should look at the Audience of Citizens procedure to come up with a policy. Thomas said there have been conversations around this. It was decided the standing rules of procedures did not need to be changed. The 750-word limit was equated to a 3 – 5 minute statement per person during the pandemic to allow as many people as possible to have their statements read.

Williams' concern is how do we get back to having residents come into the building as rules are being lifted. Blanchard said we have to think about such things as - do we have people line up outside the door and allow one person in the room at a time to speak, do we have them sit in the room, do we have them make an appointment. Williams thinks it is about time we start thinking about getting in person speaking going again instead of the letters. O'Brien, Sr. said in person meetings may start to occur again at one of the June meetings. Elsesser said you want to look at this procedurally. He is not sure that we are ready for big audiences in this room. We have to figure out where they speak from, how to get a camera angle on it, and how to queue up. For now, we can start with having people come in one at a time. Thomas said could we reposition ourselves during audience of citizens with all Members near the blackboard allowing the rest of the room for a person to speak at the podium and entering by one door and leaving by the other door.

Blanchard said this matter will be left on the agenda for additional discussion at the next meeting as Unfinished Business.

9. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:

9.A. * Board Of Education: 4/29/21 Agenda

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 and John Elsesser, Town Manager.

By: O'Brien, Sr.

Seconded: Hand

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

Motion: I move that the Town Council enter into Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1-200(6)(E)-discussion of any matter which would result in the disclosure of public records or the information therein contained described in sub-section (b) of Section 1-210 with the following people in attendance the seven members of the Council and John Elsesser, Town Manager.

By: O'Brien, Sr.

Seconded: Williams

Voting:

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

Against: None

Abstain: None

The Council entered Executive Session at 9:13 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.

To: Coventry Town Council
From: Richard & Carol Marcinek
Re: Coventry Racism

Members:

If the Town Council wishes to question us or needs any other information, contact us at this email address.

We would like to comment on Ms. Blakesley's email, Email to Audience of Citizens 2-16-21 Declare Racism a Public Health Crisis. We reference our previous letter to the Council (emailed to audience@coventryct.org, March 3, 2021).

Ms. Blakesley states, "The town of Coventry must declare racism a public health crisis." Our research defines a public health crisis as an urgent situation in an area when the health status of the general public or a significant part of the population is adversely affected.

It's unclear whether Ms. Blakesley believes the town of Coventry, its residents, or both are inherently racist. She speaks of residents being impacted, but fails to identify exactly *which* residents are being impacted, *how* they are being impacted, or *who* is responsible. She fails to identify any group or even one single individual that is being impacted, and *whom* they are being impacted by. She talks about the children, but she fails to indicate how racism is impacting them or who is responsible.

She states, "Just because we live in a majority white town, does not mean that racism is not impacting our residents." She is concerned about black people and people of color (we're unclear on who exactly 'people of color' are), but she's already stated that the majority of the people in Coventry are white. Since by definition a public health crisis requires a significant number of residents to be adversely affected, some whites would also have to be included. If they aren't adversely affected, it cannot be considered a public health crisis.

We also note that when she speaks of racism, she only mentions black people and people of color. Other minorities may be affected by racism too. Is she only concerned about racism against blacks or people of color?

She states that health inequities affect millions of black people and people of color through systemic barriers and social determinants. She fails to provide any figures from trusted sources. She also fails to indicate which barriers or determinants are in play, or how the town of Coventry or its residents are responsible. She provides no proof that any of this is occurring in Coventry.

Coventry doesn't provide health care for its residents, the state and federal governments do. Ms. Blakesley provides no evidence that Coventry residents are being denied health care because of race, and she hasn't provided any evidence that racism exists in our town. Since she is making the claims, the onus is on her to prove or demonstrate what she claims.

Ms. Blakesley states, "The town of Coventry must declare racism a public health crisis." In our opinion, Ms. Blakesley's tone is rude, inconsiderate, and disrespectful of the Council. She's in no position to demand anything, especially given that she hasn't provided evidence or supporting data to prove her case. We believe that she can suggest, request, or offer to work with the Council to do something or to help investigate, but we don't believe she can demand anything. One would think that someone who's concerned about a problem would be willing to discuss solutions intelligently with the Council, and not just deliver ultimatums. She gives the Council two choices, to either uphold or break down, she hasn't stated she is willing to work with the Council or Coventry's residents to effect a solution (if and only if needed).

She speaks of dismantling the system(s) (which ones?) affecting health inequities, but we don't believe the town of Coventry can control the country's or state's health care systems. We cannot believe a shotgun approach to dismantling unspecified systems is good. This kind of language is corrosive and destructive, and does not work toward effecting an equitable and intelligent solution. We believe our nation has a reasonably good health care system and attempting to dismantle it is overreaching, foolhardy, and far beyond the ability of the town of Coventry to correct. Our nation's or state's health care woes are not the result of racism in Coventry (if it even exists).

We noticed in a newspaper article that a Council member had noticed what she thought were racist comments on the town's forum. Whether we like it or not, people have the right to have racist views, and even to assemble publicly (National Socialist Party of America v. Village of Skokie, a landmark Supreme Court case). The NSPA are a neo-nazi group who marches in uniforms, displays swastikas, and presents white supremacist rhetoric. Freedom of speech allows people to hold these beliefs and discuss them. Although many people feel this is objectionable or makes them uncomfortable (us too), the Supreme Court has upheld this right on numerous occasions. So just because someone sees or hears what they consider to be racist dialog, it may be Constitutionally protected free speech, and doesn't *necessarily* mean that one lives in a racist community.

While people are free to discuss racism, people do *not* have the right to make racial comments, spoken or written, that demean, insult, or threaten people of other races. They also can't institute procedures or rules that place limits upon them. Nonetheless,

just because people have these beliefs doesn't necessarily mean that they berate others whenever they encounter them.

We believe that Ms. Blakesley has not proven that racism is a public health crisis in Coventry, therefore, the Town Council should consider that before making any final decisions on this matter.

We do not believe that the town of Coventry and/or its residents are racist, and no one in town has ever expressed an opinion that minorities of any race are undesirable or unwelcome.

We thank you for the opportunity to present our views.

Rich & Carol Marcinek

Amanda Backhaus

From: RICHARD MARTIN <rfmartin65@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 3, 2021 12:19 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] My letter

I am writing to the Town Council to offer my sincerest apologies for a letter that I wrote concerning racism.

It appears the length of my letter violated a super-secret rule of the Audience of Citizens concerning the word count a submission to the Audience of Citizens can contain. Unfortunately, as I penned my epistle, I could not find any Town Council rules regarding a limitation to the word count of letters, so that must be why there is a super-secret rule that is only known to a privileged few.

I did notice that on the first page of the agenda for tonight's Town Council meeting, there is a qualification stating the requirements of a letter submitted to the Audience of Citizens. However, I reviewed previous Town Council Agendas, and none of them make mention of a word count limitation. Thus the mystery deepens. What happened between the April 5th and the April 19th Town Council meetings? And who made the decision to add this requirement to the meeting agenda?

As to my April 19th correspondence, Mr. Matt O'Brien, Sr. bestowed the rare privilege of reading my letter. He rarely honors writers of letters in this manner. However, I must say he is accomplished in knowing exactly where to place an emphasis on words, when to lower his voice for dramatic effect, and when to make a facial expression to indicate his agreement or, in most cases, his disagreement with the writer's opinions. Also, I can only imagine how arduous it must be to read a dispatch while wearing a face mask. His sacrifices for Coventry are duly noted by this author.

Now I have several questions concerning this super-secret rule of the Audience of Citizens:

1. If my letter exceeds the limitation, can I write a second letter to continue my thoughts?
2. Who counts the words in a letter?
3. Does the Town Council use a town employee to count the words?
4. If a town employee is used for "Word Counter," is it part of their job description?
5. What qualifications are needed to be an "Official Word Counter"?
6. Does Mr. Matt O'Brien, Sr. count the words in each letter?
7. Who checks the work of the "Word Counter"?
8. Do different rules apply to other political affiliations?
9. What happens if the "Word Counter" disagrees?
10. How do we protect against bias in the "Word Counter"?
11. Does a letter writer have to count punctuation marks?
12. Do numbers count as words?
13. If a couple sends in a letter, do they get to write 1500 words, you know, 750 each?
14. Is it the public stockades for a letter that exceeds the word limit?

I am asking these questions for clarification. When Mr. Matt O'Brien, Sr. finished reading my Audience of Citizens letter, he remarked with a vexed tone that it had exceeded the super secret word count rule of not exceeding 750 words. My letter was 817 words.

Another reason I am asking is that, during the Audience of Citizens on April 5th, 2021, there was a letter read by the distinguished Town Council Chair Julie Blanchard. This letter was from a Mr. & Mrs. Richard & Carol Marcinek of 530 Goose Lane Coventry, Ct. 06238; their letter, not counting punctuation marks, was 910 words long, and no direct comment was made by Mr. Matt O'Brien Sr. as to that letter's verbosity.

So, the question of fairness has to be asked of Mr. Matt O'Brien Sr. Why was my letter singled out for a negative comment about its loquacity when a previous letter's prodigiousness, which exceeded the length of my letter, avoided such an immediate critique?

Is it a safe assumption to say that Mr. Matt O'Brien Sr. did not like my letter's content, thus invoking his negative comments? In contrast, I assume he agreed with the contents of the letter from Mr. & Mrs. Richard & Carol Marcinek, and was overcome by such an intense wave of the warm and fuzzies that his euphoric state made it impossible for him to vocalize a condemnation.

In closing, I hope Mr. Matt O'Brien, Sr. and the rest of the word counting hawks on the Town Council find this truncated missive appealing to their sense of succinctness and personal boundaries.

P.S. This letter is (including this P.S.) clocks in at 735 words.

Sincerely,

Rick Martin

195 Northfield Rd. Coventry, CT

Amanda Backhaus

From: Linda Blakesley <lindablakesley@outlook.com>
Sent: Monday, May 3, 2021 12:36 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] declare racism a public health crisis

Hello. I am Linda Blakesley and I live at 27 Berry Avenue.

I am disappointed that the Town Council has failed to address my request made on February 16th to declare racism a public health crisis. This lack of basic acknowledgement and refusal to even bring to a vote speaks volumes about where this council stands on this matter. The silence and lack of action is denial of the problem in my eyes. In light of this, I am urging all eligible voters to vote no on the proposed budget tomorrow, Tuesday, May 4, 2021. I will not support a budget that is potentially and probably upholding racist structures and systems without this acknowledgement and commitment to investigate and evaluate all areas that impact Coventry residents' health, opportunities, and quality of life.

Additionally, I wonder why this council continues to suppress the voice of the people. Since the pandemic, the council has progressively limited input from the citizens of Coventry. Here is a brief timeline.

- First, residents were able to join the Zoom calls and be present on the call for the meeting.
- Next, the Zoom information was removed from the agenda so residents could no longer access the meeting in that way.
- Audience of citizen emails were originally asked to be submitted by 7 p.m. on the night of town council meeting.
- Audience of citizens email submission time was changed and now must be received by 4 p.m. on the night of the council meeting.
- Audience of citizen letters were moved to be read at the end of the meeting at least once, as opposed to the usual scheduled time at the beginning of the council meeting.
- Discussion ensued about censoring some letters. All letters were eventually read.
- Letters are now restricted to 750 words.

The above is just a summary and can be filled in with dates and additional information if needed. However, it does demonstrate a move by the council to suppress and limit citizen voices. Why has the council not considered other methods to encourage and expand input from its citizens? Other towns offer live call ins to their meetings so the citizens can read their letters themselves. Why can't citizens sign up for a time and wait in their car to present live in person? We have now all become proficient with COVID safety protocols and have applied them to everyday situations such as this. I am confident that we can conduct a safe, in person, audience of citizens. I ask that the council begin a discussion to determine how to enhance and expand the audience of citizens. I expect that a swift decision on this can be made and look forward to participating in a more welcoming and accommodating manner for the audience of citizens.

I want you all to remember that the fact that so many residents wrote several weeks ago that racism does not exist in town should tell you that we do indeed have a major problem here. We are so blind to racism because, as a mostly white town, we do not experience overt racism or the effects of covert racism. Ignorance is not an excuse. At the very least, we owe it to the people of this town, especially our Black and Brown neighbors, to

open up the books and review what we do through a racial equity lens. If we do nothing, we will continue to cause harm. We have only to gain by doing this a more equitable town through its polices and culture.

Until this declaration is made, I implore all residents to vote no on the budget tomorrow on May 4, 2021. The people have the power. Make your voice heard.

Thank you.

Regards,

Linda Blakesley
27 Berry Avenue
Coventry, CT 06238

Linda Blakesley

Amanda Backhaus

From: Howard Haberern <hhhman99@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 3, 2021 2:43 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Cc: Howard Haberern
Subject: [EXTERNAL] AOC letter

I would like to address some issues and concerns to the Coventry Town Council.

The first being about declaring racism as a public health issue. It is and has been recognized as a killer by our own CDC. Furthermore, a 25-year study by Harvard Professor Doctor David Williams also concluded that it is. He stated that over 200 black American citizens die early in their life each and every day in the US and it is not from genetics, diet, etc. but from racism. He is the Harvard professor for public Health. To what degree racism exists in Coventry I cannot say but I have witnessed some of it in Coventry. If I am correct, our steering committee is supposed to be evaluating it and hopefully, it will be investigated in an open and non-bias manner.

When I served in the Army in Texas many years ago, I witnessed so much of it, that it left indelible bad memories.

I also witnessed a lot of it in my profession as a consultant , especially working in the south during the past 10 years. As an example , in 2012 as I was driving to a customer's facility in Louisiana a radio station that I was listening to actually used the N word in reference to President Obama .

The second issue is selective word counting by council member Matt O'Brien Senior. He took exception of Rick Martin's Audience of Citizens letter exceeding the suspicious 750-word limit. Mr. Martin's letter was in support of declaring racism as a public health issue. The letter had a word count of 817 words. It was read by Mr. O'Brien during the Audience of Citizens section.

At the previous Town Council meeting, the Marciniak's letter had 910 words which did not support racism as being a public health issue . Mr. Obrien never mentioned anything about that letter being too long and I suspect it is because

that letter met with his ideology and thus was very acceptable to him. If my math is correct 910 is a bigger number than 817.

The reason I suspect that Mr. O'Brien did not mention anything about that letter being too long is that he feels that there is not any real racism in Coventry. He even stated that a couple of months ago at a previous Town Council meeting. Does this mean that he has already made up his mind and really does not care about the finding of the steering committee again? He boasted about ignoring the steering committee recommendation for the candidate to be added to the Economic Development Committee. He instead voted for the candidate that has a conflict of interest. He mentioned that it was payback. It is election year and we citizens are watching you.

This is not a political left versus right issue, it is a serious issue that affects all of us. It should be addressed without any bias or prejudice. Coventry citizens deserve to have our elected officials do what is best and right for our town and we citizens.

The last issue being the limiting of AOC letters to 750 words. I am not sure how and why that happened. I feel that this is another attempt to limit our first amendment rights. Was there a vote on it? What happened to transparency? Hopefully, legal action will be taken to address this by some organization that supports our Constitution.

Thirty minutes are allotted for the AOC session and that time limit never seems to be totally used. If you are trying to shorten the length of the Town Council meetings maybe Mr. O'Brien Senior should not ask so many needless questions in his attempt to stall out important Council issues. I feel that an injustice has been done to all Coventry citizens regardless of their political affiliation.

Howard Haberern

80 Cassidy Hill Rd.

