MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL
MAY 4, 2020
TOWN HALL ANNEX & VIRTUAL
7:30 P.M.

1. Call To Order, Roll Call:
The meeting was called to order by Blanchard at 7:35 p.m.

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

Members absent:

Also present:
John Elsesser – Town Manager
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:

Catherine Alfano – Wrote about her concern for cutting the Board of Education budget. Her statement is attached.

Lisa Dunn – Please pass the BOE budget without further cuts. Her statement is attached.

Jason Blakesley, 27 Berry Avenue – Thanked Amanda Backhaus for responding to questions. Also mentioned was the spiritual gathering at Memorial Green. His statement is attached.

Emma Eaton, 41 Sean Circle – Wrote in support of the BOE budget as proposed. The BOE budget is as lean as can be. She feels it is important to safeguard the quality of our education system. Her statement is attached.

Robin Gallagher, 984 Main Street – Thanked the Members for their leadership during this time. She is writing about ensuring financial support for the schools. The BOE runs a tight ship. Her statement is attached.
Chris Morgan, 62 N Ayers Road – Put an end to the library committee project. This is round three of the same project during the worst financial times. His statement is attached.

Christine Pattee, 98 Brookline Road – Wrote about Human Services and Senior Center expenditures, internet access for school children and seniors, and COVID-19 cases in town. Her statement is attached.

Jennifer Burdette, 154 Bear Swamp Road, Andover, CT – Reported her conversation with Sergeant Ted Opdenbrauw and her daughter, the victim of Officer Hicks, regarding the investigation. Terminate Officer Hicks now. Her statement is attached.

4. **Acceptance Of Minutes:**
   **April 20, 2020**
   **Motion:** I move to accept the minutes of the April 20, 2020 meeting.

By: Hand Seconded: Conant

With the following corrections:

- Page 1, item 3, 5th citizen – change the second “and” to “a”.
- Page 1, item 3, 6th citizen – change “Minor” to “Miner” and add “of” after “support”.
- Page 2, item 3, 8th citizen – hyphenate the citizen’s last name and change “up” to “us”.
- Page 4, item 6.B., first paragraph – change the second sentence to read “He met with Deb Walsh and Elssser on Wednesday following the Finance meeting.”.
- Page 4, item 6.B., second paragraph – remove the “’” from Solvers and change “hold” to “held”.
- Page 5, sentence following the awards listing – change “in” to “on” and add an “s” to “circumstances”.
- Page 5, first paragraph, first sentence – remove the first “and”; sixth sentence – change “is” to “are”.
- Page 6, item 6.E.1. – change “CRA” to “CRRA”.
- Page 7, first paragraph, first sentence – change to read “Elsesser reported Annmarie Sundgren started today as Director of Human Services.”.
- Page 7, item 6.F.1., paragraph after bullets, second sentence – change “for” to “with”.
- Page 8, second paragraph, last sentence – change “in” to “on”.
- Page 8, fifth paragraph, last sentence – change “will” to “could”.
- Page 9, first full paragraph – change “shifts” to “shift”; add “capital” before “budget”.
- Page 9, second paragraph – change sixth sentence to read “O’Brien, Sr. recommended to the BOE to target a $350,000 - $375,000 reduction.”; second to last sentence – add “savings in” after “from”.
- Page 10, fourth paragraph, second sentence – change “Finance” to “We are”.
- Page 10, fifth paragraph, second sentence – change “state” to “shape”.
- Page 10, seventh paragraph – change the sentence to read “O’Brien, Sr. said, “If there are no objections then we will move forward and give this goal to the BOE”.”
- Page 11, third paragraph, sixth sentence – and after “cash” “and our decisions would affect our lake associations as well”; ninth sentence – change “$2 mill.” to “$4 mill.”
- Page 11, fourth paragraph, third sentence – add “property” before “taxes”.
- Page 11, fifth paragraph, last sentence – change “$150” to “$75 per month for two months”.
- Page 12, item 8.C., second paragraph, last sentence – change “to” to “on”.
- Page 13, first paragraph, first sentence – add “per year” after “$3,000”.
- Page 14, item 8.F., first paragraph – remove the last three sentences and change to “In order to use the building going forward there are projects that need to be completed including maintenance, code work, water intrusion and a number other things. In O'Brien, Sr.'s estimation, it is his own approximation as he does not have documentation, a project of that nature would cost between $1 and $1.1 mill. and with a $250,000 renovation grant from the Library Board that would cost taxpayers between $750,000 and $850,000. If the Committee can use those funds to leverage the grant and bring more value to the library and to the town O'Brien, Sr. would be in favor of that.”

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: Conant  
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 reported she spoke to Librarian Margaret Kahn to see how the library has been proceeding with finding out the savings they may seeing with the facility being closed. They will be meeting this week and will report back to the Council on any savings being realized. No employees have been laid off yet. There is no date in mind for opening yet. Hand asked if they are providing any services virtually? Blanchard reported they are providing some online services, such as story times and other remote services.

6.B. **Council Members:**
Conant asked Elsesser if there are any updates on increased or different needs being seen through Human Services? Elsesser reported Human Services is doing okay. The food bank at Patriots Park is empty. The one at Town Hall is okay and citizens remain generous in donations. A major restocking will be needed at Patriots Park in the
future. We have shared some supplies with clients at Orchard Hills. If citizens continue to donate as they have we will not be pushing the panic button.

Conant gives a shout out to Jen Bynes who is on the Recreation Committee. Bynes presented the idea of having first responders provide birthday celebration parades. Hand seconds the shout out.

O’Brien, Sr. commented he watched the meeting of the library renovation committee and was surprised by the comments of Staff and Members of the committee. O’Brien, Sr. will have additional comments when this comes up later on the agenda.

Hand commented he may be biased but this is Teacher Appreciation week. There is a new sign in front of the high school. Teachers are doing their jobs in new and different ways. He wants to recognize the lengths they are going through now. It may not be perfect, but they are trying hard. Thomas seconds these comments.

6.C. Steering Committee: Matthew O’Brien, Jr., Chairperson
O’Brien, Jr. reported there are a lot of items in front of the committee that they are working through. Items may be moving slowly but they are moving and everything will be addressed.

6.C.1. Appointments:
O’Brien, Jr. commented that all people expressing interest in this position are highly qualified to serve.

Motion: I move the Council appoint Cathy Mitchell to the Economic Development Commission, term to expire February 1, 2025.

By: O’Brien, Jr. Seconded: Hand

Motion: I nominate Carolyn Gerrity to the Economic Development Commission.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Blanchard

Motion: I nominate Cathy Mitchell to the Economic Development Commission.

By: Hand Seconded: Thomas

Discussion: Thomas asked if the Steering Committee interviewed each of the interested parties. O’Brien, Jr. replied yes and the Steering Committee is recommending Mitchell. O’Brien, Sr. is nominating Carolyn Gerrity. Thomas continued that we have the Statement of Interest on Mitchell. What is the background information on Ms. Gerrity? O’Brien, Sr. read Gerrity’s certifications and experiences. Her resume is also available. Thomas stated the other applicant is a small business owner in town. Mitchell helps run the Daniel Rust House and does other things in town. It appeals to Thomas that Mitchell is part of the small business network and is familiar with the town.
This makes her the stronger candidate as economic development is localized.

Hand stated in Steering we recognized the credentials of both applicants make them good for this position. Things that differentiate the candidates are that Mitchell is a small business owner in Coventry for thirteen years while Gerrity has been in town for ten months. You look at contrasts when you have more than one qualified candidate and in this case that is their time in town and one being a small business owner.

O’Brien, Sr. stated he knows Carolyn well; she is incredibly talented, committed, and driven. New blood is a good thing. O’Brien, Sr. has a good idea that new blood is needed for this committee. What Gerrity can bring to the Commission is valuable.

Conant added both of these women bring a wealth of talent and knowledge. Conant has to reiterate the difference of degree in terms of Mitchell being in town for thirteen years. Mitchell has a good feel for what the local economy is like and what the businesses are doing. This is rural friendly. Conant wishes there were two positions to be offered. For Steering it came down to the differentiations.

Hand added after interviewing the candidates at Steering it was noted we are lucky have many quality applicants. We can try to find another Board or Commission vacancy for Gerrity.

O’Brien, Jr. added we try to utilize everyone who comes forward. O’Brien, Jr. did not vote at the Steering meeting as he was undecided between the candidates. O’Brien, Jr. agrees with what Hand and Conant stated in that each brings different qualities and experiences. O’Brien, Jr. is good with either candidate. We will look for a good position for the person that is not chosen and keep everyone involved who has volunteered.

Voting in favor of Cathy Mitchell:
For: Hand, Conant, Thomas
Against: None
Abstain: None

Voting in favor of Carolyn Gerrity:
For: Blanchard, O’Brien, Sr., Williams, O’Brien, Jr.
Against: None
Abstain: None

O’Brien, Jr. will reach out to Mitchell about filling a vacancy on a different Board or Commission as she has a vested long-term interest in Coventry.

6.C.1.b. Parks & Recreation Commission: Carlson
Motion: I move the Council appoint Beverly Carlson to the Parks & Recreation, term to expire January, 1, 2021.

By: O’Brien, Jr. Seconded: Thomas
Discussion: Elsesser clarified this person is moving from an Alternate to a full member.

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

6.C.1.c. Senior Housing Alternatives Study Committee, Designation Of Orchard Hills Representative
Motion: I move the Council accept Laurie Bradley’s choice of Roberta Wilmot to represent the Housing Authority on the Senior Housing Alternatives Study Committee.

By: O’Brien, Jr. Seconded: Hand

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

Thomas asked that those Members physically present at the meetings allow the Chair to run the Zoom meetings. We need one person steering the ship to avoid confusion.

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

6.E. COVRRA – John A. Elsesser:
Elsesser reported:
The Town is starting to work towards getting the Transfer Station open. It will start with being opened only on Saturdays. We are working on an announcement to this effect. There are scheduling issues so the two certified water treatment plant operators are not working together. The helper works at the Transfer Station and on refuse projects around town. Having someone staff the station will require overtime.

Elsesser commented that there are plans to get the DPW employee’s working on the Transfer Station. The DPW employee covers the yard waste paper recycling. We are working on getting the DPW employee back to doing those tasks as well.

Distancing work for the DPW includes putting stickers on recyclable containers. Williams commented he thought the sticker was a great idea. It gives clarity of what goes into the bin for better recycling.

6.F. Town Manager – John A. Elsesser
6.F.1. Projects Update
- The EDC will hold a Town Hall Forum on Thursday at 7:00 p.m. This should be a good event with additional speakers. A surprise announcement will be unveiled at the forum. It will be worthwhile for ten or so businesses in town that want to volunteer. Tim Liptrop’s Zoom invitation will allow for up to 100 people to connect and there will be a yes/no poll. We are hoping to live stream the meeting on YouTube.
- Three bids were received on Friday for the HVAC project at the high/middle school complex. These are being reviewed by Fuss & O’Neill. The bids were dramatically over budget. The oil tanks came in way over. The
HVAC proposals are over by $100,000 to $1,000,000ish. We won’t meet the anti-noise standards with the lower bid but it will be much quieter than what is there now. Tying into the microgrid and air conditioning the buildings would be $4.4 mill.

- The asbestos bid went out today for the removal of tile over the flooring in the cafeteria. The work is set to be done by July 3, 2020. The BOE wants to remove a wall with their funds after the asbestos work. This has Elsesser nervous because of possibly moving the August primary for presidential candidates and state and local officials to the cafeteria. Advertising a location where you know you are doing construction is nerve racking.
- Eleven bids were received for the parking lot at CGS ranging from $32k to $1.1 mill. over budget. We are evaluating the low bidder.
- We are waiting for the final go-ahead from CT DOT to go out to bid for the Folly Lane Bridge. Elsesser is getting nervous about losing much more of the road construction season.
- A task force of Town employees has been working with CRCOG to correct GIS errors from originally photo scanned old paper maps using interns from CCSU. The errors from the original method have been cut in half. To correct the GIS mapping in entirety will be a long-term project.
- Backhaus reported projects that have been worked on because of staff working from home include Bridget in the Billing Department making headway on the cloud-based view permit.

O’Brien, Sr. asked if the money received from TAR has already been spent. Elsesser stated we are sticking with the three-year plan. Backhaus added there is some encumbrance for this year’s TAR money. We had some bond money to move as an out-of-state company for a project will not be coming to CT as they cannot stay in hotels. We are still working on an amended schedule and will get as much work done this year as possible.

6.F.2. COVID-19 Update

Elsesser stated plans are being made for the safe reffunctioning of Town Hall. Staff has provided some feedback on this. There will be a 4’ section of plexiglass that visitors can stand behind and it will be portable to be moved to different offices. The Town Clerk office will have a full acrylic wall for safety reasons. We are getting ready for when the Governor says it is safe to be open. The Billing office is to be commended.

Summer camp guidelines have come out and they are arduous. We are working to find ways to make something functioning in the way of camps. Summer camp is a very important child care issue. Right now it looks like a camp of 10 people with sections for up to 30 people. We would have to hire a nurse and purchase medical equipment. Wendy Rubin is trying to figure out a way to make a camp work. She has been on conference calls with the Director of Health. We understand the importance summer camp is to the community and its revenue runs other programs. We are waiting for guidance from the State in regards to the beaches. Lifeguards are on hold to see if they have a job or not. We did use GIS to see that there is enough parking for social distance
capacities. Elsesser did not hear about any issues at the beaches this past weekend. We have two weeks to know what to do about the beaches.

O’Brien, Sr. added he spoke to Rep. Ackert about the camp issue. Ackert is working on getting guidance and information so we can find solutions that will work. O’Brien, Sr. thanked Elsesser about the possibility of barriers in Town Hall. Does Elsesser have thoughts about O’Brien, Sr.’s suggestion about providing masks for all Town residents? Elsesser does not get the sense that there is a shortage of non-medical type masks. These masks are about $1 apiece. So if the Council wants to provide masks they would have to appropriate $13,500. FEMA is not looking at this mask type as being an urgent need. We have an adequate supply of N95 masks. Nine businesses signed up to get these. Thomas stated people are churning out masks and giving them away as acts of generosity. O’Brien, Sr. appreciates those gestures. Elsesser will add an item to the EDC forum about restaurants opening back up and the business having masks available to provide to customers that may arrive without one.

O’Brien, Jr. asked if there has been an uptick in COVID-19 cases in Coventry? Elsesser said it is not an uptick but we have had 25 cases compared to a regular flu season. We are at the edges of urban areas. We are not allowed to know where the virus affected people work to determine where the cases are coming from. For all we know, they could all have been working at Kimberly Hall. Elsesser is not distressed with this number. Windham has reported fewer cases but there is no testing in Windham. Scotland does not have any cases. Again, we are on the edge of urban areas. O’Brien, Sr. added the number is cumulative, not ongoing. According to the State’s data there have been five patients in Tolland County hospitalized. The active cases number is smaller than reported. Hand added because tests are rare you can be asymptomatic and you would not be tested. Elsesser has been working with Rob Miller, Director of Health, who is not overly alarmed. However, the severity is high for certain people. People are being vigilant and dedicated so the cases do not get wild. We cannot get data on patients by age, sex, or race on a town-by-town basis because that data is considered too identifiable.

Elsesser mentioned this previously. A Facebook post and the webpage will instruct how to connect to the Zoom meeting.

6.F.4. CT Office Of Early Childhood: Corona Virus Youth Camp Guidance
Elsesser indicated the previous information provided was for licensed camps. Municipal camps are not licensed.

6.F.5. Update: Face Mask Distribution To Essential Businesses
All that have been asked for have been distributed.

Elsesser stated this is a good report that showed target areas where Hartford can compete. There is some planning information that will be helpful for the region.
6.F.7. UConn IPP Internship Program: Francoline
Elsesser reported he was able to reach an agreement with Olivia Francoline. She is in the MPA program. She will be starting in August and lives in Manchester. Francoline has been involved in projects and a lot of volunteer work that shows leadership skills. O’Brien, Sr. stated he was impressed with her resume and feels Elsesser made a great choice. Elsesser commented there were five very good candidates. He feels Francoline will be helpful, will get along with staff, and with the business community. An introductory meeting will be held in a couple of weeks. Elsesser believes she will be working with Coventry until January or February. Francoline will be sharing space with the Finance department and Laura’s office.

This brochure is updated annually with the focus of getting this out each spring; the web pages are based on this. Tim Liptrap and his volunteer son have been working on this. The goal is to make the web page more interactive. Kudos were offered to Vernon and Glastonbury for their effort to consolidate information showing what restaurants in their towns are open and links to those business pages. Coventry is trying to figure out how to be more responsive. Web pages can get stale. Many businesses are now using Facebook pages for current information that can up updated without a web professional.

Elsesser reported someone affiliated with the Farmer’s Market took the recent course offered to businesses on how to use Facebook to promote their business and wrote a nice letter about her first day of business experience. She had $12k worth of sales in one day from all over New England. She asked how those customers heard about her and the response was from Facebook.

Blanchard asked how the Town is providing information about open businesses? Elsesser stated the website has links to business webpages; hopefully, those are updated.


7. Unfinished Business:
7.A. 19/20-51: FY20/2021 Budget
1. Discussion of potential budget modifications
O’Brien, Sr. reported a final package is not ready. Some preliminary goals have been met; there is much information outstanding. The indicated savings from the BOE because of COVID-19 is $68k. That is a pittance in his opinion. Towns 10% - 15% larger are coming up with much larger savings. The BOE will continue its efforts to find savings from the shut-down of the facilities. However, this is pushing the Town Manager and Finance Director to take the brunt of the savings needed. Backhaus sent out a working document. This shows where $193,000 is suggested to be removed from the proposed budget from a total budget of $10 mill. That compares to the BOE budget of $28 mill.
Hand asked if the BOE did not get to the goal set of $350,000 - $375,000? This was referred to as a pittance? O'Brien, Sr. referred to the $68k in savings from shutting down the schools as a pittance of true savings. The BOE did identify other savings to reach the goal set for it. Prepurchasing items from this year’s budget was indicated as an okay way to find savings in next year’s budget.

Thomas stated the BOE tried to find the savings goal without slicing into its ability to educate. We all know the education being received now is nowhere near that when in a classroom. BOE is being mindful of what it is facing when teachers and students are back in school. There will be academic learning gaps, social and emotional issues from being in homes that are not safe to be in, or those that are afraid of what it means to be back in school. O'Brien, Sr. seems to be sending conflicting signals to the BOE. $83k for the Wannack is proposed to be postponed.

O'Brien, Sr. stated if capital purchases are delayed that creates a larger hole for next year. O’Brien, Sr.’s point is the Town is working to find every possible dollar savings to allow the BOE to only come up with $350,000. There have been no attempts to sacrifice positions.

Conant clarified that O’Brien, Sr. is suggesting the BOE look for savings to come out of operations. O’Brien, Sr. replied yes, that is what we have to look at. O’Brien, Sr. is not blaming the BOE for the first stab. We need as a Council to compare what the Town is doing in finding savings to what the BOE is suggesting. Williams still sees money being shifted from one year to the next. Why can’t we look at savings from this year going back to the general fund? Savings that we have in this year’s budget should revert back to the Town. Whatever employees are involved they are stewards of the taxpayer’s money. Savings found should not be spent. The shifting of money from one year to the next does not make sense to Williams. The Tuition funds has money in it. Those funds should all be swept into the general fund. If we save it, it goes back to the taxpayers.

Hand asked if there was a letter outlining what the BOE gave back to us? Elsesser received the letter and forwarded that to the Council. This is the official communication from the BOE to meet the goal set. It says the BOE would commit 100% of COVID-19 savings and not all of that is yet defined. Blanchard added what was offered from the BOE is what can be saved today. There are no dollars yet for savings from transportation. The letter made it clear it is not the final amount. Williams stated any savings should come back to the taxpayers. O’Brien, Jr. read the letter from Petrone to Elsesser.

O’Brien, Sr. stated the Council needs to come up with the proposed budget at the next meeting. If the proposed cuts in the capital budget by Elsesser and Backhaus, some of which are in the extreme, are accepted by the Council that brings us to the $350,000 - $375,000 goal given to the BOE.

Backhaus gave an overview of the updated budget working document. There have been some revenue changes. The third tab are the proposed changes in the Town’s capital budget. Knowing the current economic conditions Backhaus did a collection rate analysis assuming the current measurement of uncollectibles will be higher next year. Therefore, cuts of $103,000 - $419,000 to the budget will be needed on top of
the $1.1 mill. based on a Council decision of what collection rate to work with. During previous economic depressions the collection rates were 97% and 98.2%. The rate (98%) Elsesser and Backhaus feel is the most realistic means we have to absorb an additional $250,000 in cuts. Elsesser feels this is where COVID-19 savings play in. The State’s revenues are going to be more unbalanced next year, maybe even this year. With the degree of uncertainty the capital budget acts as a hedge fund. If you reduce the capital budget, you won’t have the same flexibility in the future. Once the BOE operating budget has been set the Council does not have the right to change it. That means all of the cuts have to come out of the Town’s budget unless the BOE volunteers it. Conant stated shredding things to the bone would be detrimental. Elsesser replied we have to be conservative but also look beyond more than one year. There should be short-term and long-term horizons with a plan for a midway adjustment. The best plan would be to meld all of that together. Using the collection rate of 98% shows a reasonable approach that we are not oblivious to economic conditions. The unemployment rate is up 8.8% and that does not include the self-employed nor accounts for indication that the true data is lagging behind the reported figures.

Backhaus also provided information about the historical trend of what the Council approves for the BOE and what is transferred to the 1.5% fund. This year is trickier than most. O’Brien, Sr. stated this does not speak to the surpluses the BOE has for each of the reported-on years; they have average surpluses of $450,000 - $475,000. There was $52,000 in encumbrances last year. Hand stated column K does have year-end surpluses. Those are moved from one line to another to cover what was not in the budget while always making sure there is some to revert to the fund. It does not show the transfers happening at year-end.

Elsesser stated if Council members have follow up questions for the Town or the BOE those should be presented soon as responses will be needed before the Finance Committee meeting. Conant is unclear as to the specifics of the cuts that are proposed on the Town side. Backhaus requested Members review the updated budget working document and email questions to herself and Elsesser. Answers will be sent to all Council members. O’Brien, Sr. suggested it may be prudent to schedule a special Town Council meeting to go through the details before the final decision is made. It has been stated the BOE will have more information on or after its meeting on May 15, 2020. O’Brien, Sr. asked if the BOE can do any better than what has been presented? Thomas mentioned the BOE has identified $68k in COVID-19 savings so far and has committed to returning any other savings found to the Town general fund. Thomas reminded O’Brien, Sr. that he stated as Chairman of the Finance Committee his desire to have the BOE cut $350,000 - $375,000 out of the budget and they have come up with $368,000 in cuts. Is he saying they haven’t done what we asked them to do? How many times do we go back to them when they have already gotten guidance? O’Brien, Sr. stated that was a preliminary goal with the idea that this has moving part. The Council has not yet decided on what the Town has proposed. The number from uncollectibles we heard tonight adds another $265,000 to the goal. The BOE must have more COVID-19 savings. This discussion is about putting forward ideas before making the final decision. O’Brien, Sr. has said as Finance chairman and clearly within his responsibility what the goal needs to be for the BOE and now the goalposts are being moved. We have two weeks to make a decision. O’Brien, Sr. clarified that was a goal to work in the right direction. It was a goal and it might
change as we explore the needs of the budget. He has made that very clear every step of the way. Thomas feels that is not the case. O'Brien, Sr. stated we do set their budget and we do set the operating budget. Thomas replied we do not have control on how the BOE spends the money they have. Hand feels this is kicking the can down the road. The BOE has suggested savings in technology knowing times are tough and the current equipment is working right now, so the expense was pushed forward a year. It can't be taken off the list; it still needs to happen. That is a valid way to do this. Budget for it and try to make it happen next year. O'Brien, Sr. commented that more than just this year's numbers have to be thought about.

Blanchard stated we will find out on Friday where the BOE ends up and have concrete information to make decisions.

Conant mentioned the breakdown of the mil rate changes is in the updated budget working document. This is toward getting all of the information we can possibly get. Conant wants to have a discussion on the specifics of the Town's proposed cuts. Elsesser explained these include pay freezes, holding off in hiring, freezing vacancies, and savings from worker's comp. The BOE is not proposing any of those. Elsesser knows of at least five retirements coming up from the BOE side. The Town budget did not propose 3% pay raises. Because you have union agreements does not mean you can't see if the unions have any willingness for give-backs during these tough times. The BOE budget has 2-3 new positions proposed. There is a director of security and a behavioral therapist. Substitutes are contracted services and they have stopped paying substitute teachers.

Williams came back to the same question of why do we always have to spend more money? Why can't we say we are not going to fund that? Let the department figure out how to decide to make the cuts. This is the dollar amount that we are going to fund. Elsesser stated it has to do with policy. If we let the departments figure it out they could say we are not removing trees or we are not going to respond to a snowstorm. There are union contracts to be complied with. Part-timers would be the first to go. The part-timer at the Senior Center was formally laid off last week. Are we going to have a lake patrol? That is a policy decision. Williams feels most of the cuts should come from the BOE. That is where most of the money is. We somehow or other avoid that year after year. This is the year we cut back some of the expenses. Williams viewed the payroll records today and that is impressive. The positions may provide a function but maybe we don't need all of those people. Thomas asked if he is suggesting we tell the BOE what to cut and how to do their job. You can't have it both ways, such as suggesting it is fine to slash and burn those who are serving our kids. Hand added in addition to looking out for the taxpayers we need to be looking out for the investment of the town in our kids and our seniors and all of the residents of town. We have to provide the services they have come to except. Don't pull the rug out from under people. Williams stated he saw that UConn Health has 5,000 employees with 4 technical people to support that number. It is baffling the amount of labor we have for the amount of students. O'Brien, Sr. understands the need for all of the services. However, how is the BOE paying a 3% increase vs. a 2% increase which is being put into the budget. On the Town side pay increases are suggested at 2%-2.25%. These times are unprecedented. The real issue is we have to consider what the stomach is going to be for such raises. In the private sectors furloughs, layoffs, no raises, no bonuses, pay cuts, doing more work for the same pay is happening. Those
are the impacts that people are living with in today’s world. The school system seems to be sacrosanct to what other people are going through. O’Brien, Sr. said we found out there is another $265,000 to reach the goal. Hand stated we can look at what the other COVID-19 savings are. Conant added time will tell and we are facing a ticking clock. Additional savings will have to be found from the Town and from the BOE we just don’t know. We have to work around that. She is not sure we need to make a problem worse where there is a lot of unemployment. There could be a lot of different solutions and we need to think outside of the box. Thomas thought the raise percentages and salary increases on the BOE side are negotiated and contractual so they cannot be changed. Elsesser replied those are salary increase placeholders; they are not for the teachers, but for union contracts that are open, for such positions as administrators, secretaries, paraprofessionals, nurses, janitors – any non-union employees. Elsesser has an obligation to represent his employees as best he can with a fair and equitable arrangement. Those without a contract will be getting zero increases. Conant has seen such a situation with one group being furloughed and one group was not; it was not good. We want to be sure all things are on the table and each side is about similar things.

A special meeting was suggested for Friday, May 15, 2020, starting at 6:00 p.m. Laura Stone will contact Members for scheduling and availability.

2. Development of postcard survey
Elsesser indicated drive-through voting that Vernon held has been deemed not permissible per an updated Executive Order.

A postcard survey would be another means of communication, in addition to Facebook, the website, eblast, and Everbridge calls. This would communicate to the residents about the website presentation of the budget and a means to comment on the subject. A draft was costed and mocked up. The postage is expensive but can be covered by not holding a referendum. If the Council wants to do this, it needs to go to printing tomorrow to give people time to return the postcard. Elsesser stated $9,600 is a lot of money; there may be enough other communication techniques being used. Conant is afraid people will misconstrue this as being an opinion survey. We could do the same thing better with a yes/no poll on the website. With a survey link we could not track if people vote more than once and then we would have to research if the respondents are registered voters. Thomas stated while the conversation has been about saving money we should be considering the importance of informing voters. The postcard survey would go to each registered voter at each address. Voters would then have to go find and look at the budget and then give an opinion. We’ve already had a public meeting on the budget for input. This method, Thomas feels, will result in angry constituents. It would add to the muck of what is going on. O’Brien, Sr. said this is a really unusual year with a process that has not been done before. This is a way to reach out to each person who can vote telling them why we are not having a referendum. Thomas feels the postcard will cause confusion and anger with respondents thinking what they are doing will have an impact on the budget. O’Brien, Sr. indicated the Council can change the budget before it is voted on. Voters can have a say before the final decision. Thomas suggested mailing the letter informing residents to go to Coventryct.org to view the presentation of the budget Elsesser will be filming. People can then send feedback and we save on the return postage for the postcard. Williams question about the number of email addresses the Town has for
eblasts was responded to as being 1,500. Backhaus added we don’t know of those people are registered voters. Williams commented that process will be confusing. O’Brien, Jr. added some may not receive the mailing and we would not have time to get another one to those people. Can we communicate the information a different way without a mailing? What about the boards around town where we could leave information? Conant sees this process as being confusing and making people mad if they think they are voting on the budget when that is not the case. This is a survey taking the temperature. This can be put online. O’Brien, Jr. suggested people respond to the presentation at budgetcomments@coventryct.org. Elsesser stated that address was set up so all Council members receive the comments.

Sending only the letter is okay with O’Brien, Sr., Thomas, O’Brien, Jr. and Blanchard. One letter per household would cost ~$2k. Some changes will be made to the letter and be sent to the printer. The 35 – 40 minutes presentation from Elsesser and the BOE will be up on the web page Thursday evening.

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. 19/20-68: Consideration/Possible Action: Appointment Of Long-Term Recovery Coordinator
Elsesser is experiencing some consternation about this matter. The recommendation is that this be done on a regional basis. The PowerPoint presentation suggests this will be a lot of work. The COGs are starting to talk about this. It may become unmanageable. Elsesser recommends we table this until we have more guidance. This is going to be overkill.

O’Brien, Sr. asked if there is going to be an appropriation for this to which Elsesser replied that is unknown. Elsesser stated this is pulling the emergency action plans off the shelf that are generally for the commonly known natural disasters. Elsesser is not sure the plan will work this this type of event. Elsesser is not aware of any federal grants other than FEMA. This would be for business recovery.

Motion: I move the Council table this item.

By: Hand Seconded: O’Brien, Sr.

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

8.B. 19/20-69: Consideration/Possible Action: Amendment To Charge, Veterans Memorial Commission
Elsesser indicated this has been forwarded from Steering. The next step is to forward it to the Town Attorney to draft a resolution on the ordinance and then have a public hearing called.
O’Brien, Jr. indicated Steering made minor changes to the charge.

O’Brien, Sr. feels this is a good idea and he is glad it is moving forward. This will help to better coordinate veteran events throughout the year.

There was consensus from the Council members is to forward the amendment of the charge to the Town Attorney.

**8.C. 19/20-70: Consideration/Possible Action: Appropriation For Architectural Services, Per Revised Scope Directive To Library Renovation & Improvement Committee, For Booth & Dimock Memorial Library Project**

Elsesser indicated the $12,000 request includes estimating services.

O’Brien, Sr. reported he viewed the meeting and was shocked and disappointed about the lack of representation of the Council’s position to the Committee and the hostility towards to the Council. O’Brien, Sr. did not hear Elsesser represent the motion, the intent, or the goals of the Council decision to the Committee. The meeting was off base and did not address the Council directives in a helpful way. Members of the Committee made derogatory statements and suggested they outlive the Council because they would be soon gone.

O’Brien, Jr. reported he heard a lot of those same things with a level of hostility toward the Council. It seems the Committee has in mind what they want to do and will pursue that. At the end there was talk about disbanding the Committee and starting over. He would like to know how the discrepancy arose of what went on at the Council table and what was discussed at the Committee table. There seems to be a disconnect of what we are asking for.

Hand also observed the meeting. He is surprised both O’Brien’s are shocked and surprised about the hostility. The Committee was given a charge and they responded to that. In the meantime, the Council has changed. Are there better ways for them to act? They’ve donated their time and effort for years of work toward a goal. The carpet was yanked out from under them. This is a bipartisan committee. People have donated their expertise and services to come up with a solution to a problem. They’ve volunteered a number of hours working on this problem with the expectation there would be buy in that the solution is going to happen. It is natural that some have a negative connotation given the scale and scope of their actions. Deb Walsh tried to bring the meeting back to find a solution within what they have been give. Hand did vote to reduce the price of the project because of the difficult circumstances we are in. Hand wants to make it clear that the goalposts won’t be moved again. That is what needs to be done and they are doing it. You can’t force people to be happy about it.

Williams watched the meeting. He thinks every meeting that takes place in town government needs to be taped. He is not a supporter of this project up to $1.7 mill. He ran on this; he feels it is too much. And it isn’t $1.7 mill. It is plus some money tucked away for $100k in elevator repair money. The Committee was told the project is to come in at $1.7 mill. the Council will vote on it and take it to referendum. But he was surprised by what he learned. Something that starts off at one price and we agree to it and then there is another price.
Hand stated the elevator money is already over there so it’s not in addition to the $1.7 mill. It is already sitting there and the Committee decided to wait to move and install a new elevator rather than repair the existing elevator. It is already bonded. O’Brien, Sr. said that money can be used to offset the Town’s matching funds to the grant. Hand insisted those funds are already sitting there. Williams restated he listened to the meeting. We gave them the amount of $1.7 mill, not $1.8 mill. It is not $1.7 mill. We find pockets of money and other people decide on how it is spent. Backhaus reported that money has been bonded for the elevator. O’Brien, Sr. restated the money can be used to offset the $850,000 match.

O’Brien, Sr. added it is unclear from listening to the meeting if the Committee is committed to working on the project goal they were given by the Council.

**Motion:** I move the Council authorize up to $12,000 for design concepts for the Booth & Dimock Library project within the budgetary limits the Council has given.

By: Williams  
Seconded: Hand

Discussion: It was stated the budgetary limit is $1.7 mil including matching funds of $850,000. O’Brien, Sr. did acknowledge the need for addressing maintenance, water intrusion, code work, and a number of other items at the previous meeting. The Council’s stance was not well represented at the Committee meeting. Williams agreed.

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

Backhaus stated an Executive Session is needed prior to this discussion. It was suggested to reschedule the Executive Session to a future meeting. Members agreed.

**Motion:** I move the Council table item 8.D. until after the Executive Session is held on the matter.

By: Thomas  
Seconded: Hand

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

9. **Miscellaneous/Correspondence:**  
9.A. *Board Of Education: 4/30/2020 Agenda*
10. **Executive Session:**
Union negotiations

11. **Adjournment:**
**Motion:** I move that the Council adjourn at 11:29 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.
I would like to voice my concern about talks of cutting the board of ed budget. I do not support that idea, as I understand the importance of education for my 2 children. I moved to Coventry because of the high quality education being offered, and I know it is a factor for others who are moving to our town as well. Damaging our amazing school offerings could be detrimental to the popularity of our town to potential property buyers. Please do not cut off our nose to spite our face.

Thank you for your time.
Catherine Alfano
Please pass the BOE budget without any further cuts/staff reductions. I am a parent of a child with special needs and the support she receives from teachers, paraprofessionals, etc. is vital to her success and continued growth.

Thank you,

Lisa

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone
Hello everybody. My name is Jason Blakesley and I still live at 27 Berry Avenue in Coventry, CT.

First, I want to thank Amanda Backhaus for promptly responding to my questions in regards to Sgt. Hicks' financial compensation since he was placed on administrative leave last October. I would appreciate if the council members responded as quickly as she did or even bothered to respond at all.

From October 1, 2019-April 25, 2020, the taxpayers have paid Michael Hicks $55,691.60 in gross pay. This is wasted money, which is especially difficult for taxpayers to swallow during a time when so many are struggling just to survive.

It is unfortunate that we pick and choose when to stand by and speak up for victims of sexual harassment or assault. All victims should be believed and their claim investigated to the fullest, regardless if the accused is the president of the United States, former vice president, or a local police detective.

On another note, after witnessing a spiritual gathering several weeks ago at Veterans' Memorial Green, Nathan Hale, already practicing social distancing, decided to wear a mask to protect himself and to help educate the public about the pandemic.

Thank you.

Jason Blakesley
27 Berry Avenue
Coventry, CT 06238
Good evening, my name is Emma Eaton, I live at 41 Sean Circle.

I’m writing tonight to express my support for the budget proposed for Coventry’s Board of Education. As has been the case for the last several years the BOE’s proposed budget is as lean as it can be without sacrificing the high quality of education being provided to our children.

In this tumultuous time I think it’s especially important to safeguard the quality of our educational system, as even with the valuable content being created and creatively delivered to our students, distance learning is very different from actually being in school. Our educators have done an admirable job of pivoting into this new version of their careers and we owe it to them to support their efforts next fall with funding that allows them to do their jobs to the fullest.

Whenever we do physically return to the schools it’s clear that teachers will have lost ground that must be made up because despite the truly amazing work they’re doing now, distance education isn’t the same. Under no circumstance can we afford to hinder the crucial work they’ll be doing as they are pushing themselves and their students to achieve even greater levels of academic rigor. Deep cuts to an already very lean budget would be detrimental to the community as a whole and to the entire generation of Coventry residents receiving their formative education in our buildings.

Many other local districts, including Bolton, are requesting very minimal cuts from their Boards of Education, recognizing that now is not the appropriate time to look at major cuts or funding deficits. I would urge Coventry to continue to lead its school system up into the highest performing districts in Connecticut by trusting the Board of Education has diligently worked for months to craft their budget and have also now proposed cost savings for next year to do their part in maintaining tight purse strings as we face the unknown in the months to come.
Dear Town Council Members:

My name is Robyn Gallagher, and I live at 984 Main St. First and foremost, thank you for your attention to this letter and for your leadership during an incredibly difficult time. I believe we can all agree that there are heroes in our community – our first responders, our doctors, nurses, EMTs. For me, this issue has also highlighted some of our other town heroes – the teachers and school officials that have managed to keep education flowing to our children. I have now spent over a month intimately involved in the education of my son – and I can assure you, anyone doing this on a day-to-day basis deserves a large raise.

All kidding aside, I am writing about ensuring financial support for our schools. Our students have, and are continuing to, thrive under the leadership of Dr. Petrone and our Board of Education. The BOE runs a tight ship and the return on investment, in terms of our students’ performance relative to the funding the schools receive, is nothing short of amazing. Coventry already pays significantly less than many surrounding towns on a per pupil basis and despite that is competitive with towns like Bolton and Mansfield. However, as amazing as the schools are – they aren’t (always) miracle workers. At some point the discrepancy between spending will be reflected in academic performance and achievement. Cutting funding can result in larger class sizes (in particular at the elementary level), loss of important opportunities designed to challenge our students to thrive in a modern workplace, and loss of athletic opportunities that promote teamwork. Our kids are our future and they deserve better.

But there is also a financial incentive. . . we are entering a recession. The best way to shield residents against large future mil rate increases is by increasing, or at least maintaining, the grand list. The way to do that is through the schools. Young families (like my own) pay taxes, utilize additional services, and support businesses on Main Street. The way to draw these young families is the schools. Our mil rate is already competitive with surrounding towns, a modest increase in the mil rate will not be determinative. You don’t draw families because your mil rate is 32 and your neighbor’s is 33 (although by way of reference, Bolton is 39 and Tolland is 36). You draw families with excellent schools. That is how I ended up in Coventry instead of Tolland or Mansfield. Now, that doesn’t mean writing a blank check to the BOE. There is a need for some balance. I believe the BOE has achieved that balance historically (as evidenced by the fact that we pay much less on a per pupil basis with outstanding results). I believe the BOE has achieved that balance this year as well, and I would ask that the Town Council not insist on any further reductions.

Thank you for your attention.

Robyn

Robyn E. Gallagher
Wiggin and Dana LLP
20 Church Street,
Hartford, Connecticut 06103
Direct: 860.297.3704 | rgallagher@wiggin.com
www.wiggin.com
It is time for the council to put an end to the ongoing library committee project. The committee was biased on its inception, and is not in any way objective when it comes to the use and concerns of the community that has voted similar projects down twice already. (I say similar for sake of technical correctness because this in any real sense is just round 3 of the same project, regardless of the name change charade that is the new committee. They can try to spin it all they want, its still just another shot at the expansion.)

Protections of the people are taking a back seat to the wants of the committees members to continue their project at the largest scale they can aquire. In their recent meeting this became very clear and exceedingly evident by both the comments of the committee members, and there back burner attitude to the councils request to price out water intrusion repair costs in a separate scenario. Given that their focus is clearly all about creating a 1.7 million dollar project (plus the extra 100k they cavalierly seek to keep out of the conversation) it is fairly clear that the focus is not on anything other than spending to the maximum degree allowed. They even go as far as the discussion that multiple rounds of this project could be used in the future to cover things they feel they cannot cram in now at the 1.7 million dollar price point. This is a clear atempt to undermine the process, and to keep the people from understanding the true cost of what they are trying to do. The video of the committee meeting (the first time most of us have had a chance to see this committee in action due to the amazingly inaccessible time frame of its meetings for regular working folks) shows their intent with great clarity; they have no intention of a stop to the extortion attempts with this proposal. This is only the beginning.

The idea that they will once again ask the taxpayers to pay for more research money, at a time when 20% of the state is jobless, at a time when the state deficits look towards 3 billion in 2 years, at a time when the governor is again talking taxes, and tolls and a general more expensive life in CT is sick. We are realistically facing what may be the worst financial situation in our lifetimes. The effects of this will likely literally kill more people than the virus that caused it through loss, suicide, and other factors. The brunt of dealing with this crisis will be handled not by government, but at the kitchen table by regular tax paying citizens who will have to make real hard choices. Yet we watch a committee, even with the direction of the town manager, thoroughly uninterested in looking at any reduction and willing to strap that tax payer to that burden for 40 years. let's recognize that again, 40 years.

At a time like this government should do everything in their power to keep as much money in the peoples hands as possible. Its theirs, and they need it now more than ever. If the people choose voulentarily to donate to a cause like the library project thats up to them, but now more than ever as people struggle to make ends meet that choice needs to be theirs, and that needs to be protected by government. The abusive theft through taxation is not for these harsh and uncertain times.

There is no component of this to require the corporation whose interests are being propped up to fundraise or put any of their skin in the game either, and even the lauded idea that they will be handing over the building after this to the people who foot the bill for it is currently not decisively on the table.

It is evident that this committee no longer serves the interests of the Town, the town council, or the citizens, but instead is acting in the interest of the corporation. This is not a committee, this is an echo chamber. An echo chamber for a position that has been overwhelmingly turned down by the town. Twice.

End this nonsense and allow voulentary human action to be how this project is handled. If there is enough demand and want for this then they should have no problem raising the money, and the amount of funding
raised will be a direct reflection on the communities actual interest in the project. In short, if people want it they will pay for it on their own.

Good ideas don't require force.

Chris Morgan
62 North ayers Rd
Coventry, CT 06238

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Amanda Backhaus

From:          c2pattee@aol.com
Sent:          Saturday, May 2, 2020 1:54 PM
To:            Julie Blanchard; Jon Hand; Lisa Conant; Lisa Thomas; Matthew OBrien; Matthew O'brien Jr.; Richard Williams Jr.; audience@coventry.org; Coventry Audience
Cc:            blueberryhill01@charter.net; C2pattee@aol.com; coventry.authority@att.net; bahoffman@earthlink.net; Mark Landolina; pkat7@earthlink.net; sailcat18@yahoo.com; judgecct@aol.com; vvinkels@gmail.com; John Elsesser; Catherine Alfano; Brenda Bennett; Margaret Khan
Subject:       [EXTERNAL] Human services expenditures, Internet access, Covid-19 cases, Audience of Citizens, 5-4-20

Submitted by
Christine Pattee, 98 Brookline Rd., Coventry CT 06238
Home 860-742-6511          c2pattee@aol.com

[Note, is it possible for me to read this statement myself? I have been successfully zoomed in to PZC and SHASC meetings.]

Town Council Audience of Citizens, 5-4-20 on:

1. Human services expenditures
2. Internet access for school children and seniors
3. Covid-19 cases in Coventry

1. Human Services and Senior Center expenditures

Please, please don't take away from the Senior Center one of the very tiny resources that we worked so hard to get. (4/20/20 TC minutes, pg. 9 "if staff cuts are needed, part-timers would go first, such as lake patrol or Senior Center part time staff.") Five years and three Senior Center Coordinators ago, the 3% Human Services slice of the town's expenditure pie chart was barely visible and Senior Services didn't appear at all. Now recall that four years ago, the Republican-majority Town Council approved the Senior Advocacy Task Force's requests for soundproofing, part time staff help and an upgrade in the coordinator's pay level (job title and responsibility upgrade to Director were not possible for union contract reasons). We even managed to get you to increase the Assistant's hours from 14 to 19, the maximum level before benefits kick in.

From the time the Senior Center was built, about a decade-and-a-half ago, it was starved for resources and space. In a pennywise and pound-foolish move, the men in charge chose not to install a professional kitchen, which resulted in limited lunch opportunities for seniors. This only got worse after a
health inspector said the kitchen we had wasn’t adequate to assist TVCC in provision of their lunches. In the past year, the SC’s twice monthly school lunches were expensive, nutritious and boring, causing attendance to plummet precipitously. Traveling around with movable lunches and Mansfield Senior Chorus concerts showed that much smaller towns like Ashford and Bolton have senior lunches four days a week in comfortably spacious facilities. Frankly, Coventry’s attention to services for its nearly one-in-five senior residents is pathetic.

I’m glad to hear that our new Human Services Director has started work. For many years, human services has meant direct client services, which of course is a good and necessary thing, but I submit that we need firm and clear direction for the whole Human Services sector.

2. Internet access for school children and seniors

On page 12 of the minutes, there was much discussion of conduits to increase speed of digital transmissions to and from the Department of Public Works, an expenditure that I support. My question has to do with accessibility of broadband access for both school children and seniors. I believe that all (or most?) of Coventry’s school kids have some kind of a laptop or other device to do online schooling, but do they have low or no-cost access to the internet itself? In Hartford, 600 kids still have not gotten their laptops, but through an agreement with Comcast, internet service is available free. On the other hand, seniors are a digitally less literate population and may not have their own internet service, especially if they are low income. Previously, they could always go to the library and log on to those computers for family connections, job applications or anything else they needed, but now that the library is closed, how are Coventry families who are unable to afford internet service going to get online? Sheltering in place means isolation for seniors who often live alone and so internet service once available within the walls of community gathering places needs to be made widely available outside those walls.

3. Covid-19 update (minutes pg. 7)

Can anyone explain why there has been an alarming increase in Covid-19 cases here in Coventry? On May 1st, the Willimantic Chronicle reported 25 cases in our town, second only to Windham which is much larger with an urban center.
Good evening Town Council members,

I spoke with Sergeant Ted Opdenbrauw April 29, Wednesday via conference call with my daughter, the victim of Officer Hicks. Sergeant Opdenbrauw informed us he was handed the Hicks internal investigation on April 20th. I point out, Sgt. Opdenbrauw was handed the case April 20 per his statement, and we were notified April 29. NINE days later.

He also informed us the internal investigation was active during the days of 1/22 to 1/26, then halted. Neither my daughter nor myself were ever informed previous of the investigation being active at that time, or who was investigating, which is still unknown to us.

I would like to reference a recent similar case of an officer being inappropriate with underage youth using social media and text messages in Cartersville, a small town in GA. Chief McCann of Cartersville began his investigation on March 2 of this year, and completed it on March 5. Cartersville LT Prescott chose to resign in lieu of termination at that time. THREE days, to clarify.

As of the day I write this letter, April 30th, Coventry police have had access to clear, written, recorded, secured by police warrant, evidence regarding Officer Hicks disgusting behavior toward my then minor daughter for TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY DAYS.

I would like to point out some extreme differences in the handling of the two cases.

Chief McCann interviewed his officer the following day, and placed him on leave. Chief Palmer waited a week to inform Officer Hicks of the charges.

Chief McCann took away his officers gun and badge almost immediately. Chief Palmer allowed Hicks to retain his weapons until an unknown date many months later, and apparently only due to a department wide turn in of weapons, in which active officers received new guns.

Chief McCann investigated in THREE days. Coventry Police after SEVEN MONTHS as of the date I write this letter (April 30th), has not completed the internal investigation.

Chief McCann of Georgia stated to me via email. "I referred this case to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) to conduct a criminal investigation." Why didn’t Chief Palmer do the same immediately?

What message does it send to the youth in town in Coventry?

I remind the Town Council; Special Agent Ryan Mahar of the Department of Homeland Security has accepted the criminal investigation against Officer Michael Hicks, and is working in tandem with Major Crimes of eastern CT. The federal government is investigating Officer Hicks, to make that clear.

I ask the Town Council, what are we waiting for? The evidence is factual, and clear. There is no he said, she said.

Terminate Officer Michael Hicks immediately.

It’s been 7 months too long already.
It should never have come to this Coventry, Officer Hicks should have been immediately investigated and terminated. States Attorney Mathew Gedansky, Major Crimes of Eastern CT, and federal authorities should have been notified IMMEDIATELY of the complaint against Officer Hicks by Coventry Police, so they could make their own determination if the case warranted criminal investigation.

Instead here we are, over 7 months later.

Jennifer Burdette
154 Bear Swamp Road
Andover, CT