Minutes
Coventry Town Council Meeting
May 20, 2019
Town Hall Annex

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.
   **Present:** Mike Sobol, Jonathan Hand, Joan Lewis, Lisa Conant, Matthew O’Brien, Julie Blanchard
   **Also present:** John Elsesser, Town Manager, Amanda Backhaus, Finance Director
   **Absent:** Carolyn Arabolos

2. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. **Audience of Citizens:**

   Richard Williams, 508 Wrights Mill Road, thanked the Town Council for their service and dedication and the time spent governing the town. He also thanked Joan Lewis for adding the proposed resolution opposing tolls to the agenda. He is against tolls and feels they will affect his family in a number of different ways. His wife and daughter commute for work and college every day. He owns a small business in town and has two vehicles. He drives quite a few miles on the highway. He said that no one really knows how these tolls are going to affect his family or business but we think it will cost about $3200 a year just for his family. That is less disposable income for his family, and most of the people in this town unless they work for the school system or the town are going to pay tolls as well. He also believes that people won’t take the highways, they will take our rural roads to avoid the tolls so we will have more traffic. He gets angry when he thinks about it. He looks forward to hearing what town leaders are going to be doing about this regressive tax. The Governor ran on a platform that the toll was just going to be for tractor trailers but now everyone is going to get taxed. That alone should make everyone angry. He hopes that our Town Council will oppose this scheme to take more money from the taxpayers of this town.

   Sean Regan, Hemlock Point Drive, was present to talk about the crosswalk (at Rt. 31 and Ripley Hill Road) and some of the dangers associated with it. He said it is quite dangerous for kids, and his daughter started crossing it when she was 10. We always have her cross with older kids but it is still dangerous. The location of the crosswalk is at the crest of the hill which conceals it until the last minute. Another issue is the confluence of seven different threats. There is the potential for six cars to be at the intersection as well as a seventh car passing on the right. It’s just a matter of time before someone gets hit. He hopes consideration will be given to other options - if you face the fire house on the right hand side there is a police officer who sits there most mornings. We could have someone in the intersection and it wouldn’t cost more.

   Matthew O’Brien Jr., 3400 Main Street, thanked the Council for putting the proposed resolution opposing tolls on the agenda. He was present to speak for the people being left behind by the damaging tolls proposal and urged the Council to vote for the no-tolls resolution being proposed tonight. He would like teachers, blue collar workers, farmers who bring goods to market and families with medical expenses to be able to keep that money in their pockets. He said for people who don’t know how the toll plan will work, you will have a credit card connected to an EZ Pass. If you have problems, you are either not driving to work or will pay a fine. It means that people who can’t make ends meet are paying 20% interest on credit cards and that’s not right. It doesn’t work for poor people in cities or the people in Coventry. The tolls will touch all people who can least afford it. There will be more traffic on local roads as people try to avoid the tolls, creating unprecedented environmental impacts and direct maintenance costs to Coventry taxpayers. He
believes this is not a Republican or Democratic issue, but an issue of strict fairness and is not how Connecticut should be. We should be standing with the poor and this is a terrible way to pay for infrastructure. He said we can cut costs and make the gas tax work. There are plenty of places to cut spending. Tolls will add costs to every product sold in our state. Out-of-control spending is what is causing people and businesses to leave Connecticut, and others to never move here at all. The bottom line is that the State doesn’t need any additional revenue. State government must adapt to current tax revenue. We need leaders who know how to prioritize and are willing to put the needs of the citizens ahead of their own interests. (Mr. O’Brien’s full remarks are attached to these minutes.)

Dorothy Grady, 42 Cornwall Drive, said she hopes we can fix Rt. 31 to keep our people safe when they cross the roads. Regarding the proposed resolution opposing tolls, she said that Matt and Richard are right - whether we have tolls or not is not a political issue. It’s about public safety. Our roads and bridges are in bad shape and need to be fixed. To do that costs money. When she goes to visit family in other states she pays a toll and that is used to help fix their roads. It has been said that 40% of the tolls are anticipated to be paid by out-of-state people. She believes that because she pays them herself. It is a choice of how to pay for it - we could bond for it, but then we will wind up paying 100% of the costs plus interest. We have to do something about it. She thinks the State legislature will be considering all of these plans. She doesn’t think that towns should be putting in road blocks to prevent fixing these things that need to be fixed.

4. Acceptance of Minutes:
Motion #18/19-287: Lisa Conant moved to accept the minutes of the Town Council meeting on May 6, 2019, seconded by Jonathan Hand. The following corrections were requested:
   a. Page one, last paragraph, 8th line: add the word “a” before representative.
   b. Page three, first paragraph, 2nd line: add the word “the” before plan.
   c. Page six, item d., last line: change “further that” to “further than.”
   d. Page eight, Item 5, next to last line: change the sentence to read, “…received all of the money that had been proposed to be cut in the Governor’s budget and more…”
   e. Page nine, first line: change “outlined correctly” to “being done correctly.”

The motion to accept the minutes as corrected carried on unanimous vote.

5. Consent Agenda:
Motion #18/19-288: Lisa Conant moved to accept the Consent Agenda, seconded by Jonathan Hand. Julie Blanchard noted that the Finance Committee minutes haven’t been on any agendas since April and she would like to ask questions. She requested to remove item 6.C.1. The motion to accept the Consent Agenda as amended carried on unanimous vote.

8. New Business:
A. 18/19-70: Consideration/Possible Action: Request for Traffic Calming/Pedestrian Safety Measures at Intersection of Rt. 31 and Ripley Hill Road:
Motion #18/19-289: Jonathan Hand made a motion to move up item 8.A. as the next item of business. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and carried on unanimous vote.

Joan Lewis noted that we have a report from Chief Palmer. John Elsser said we also provided some information that was shared with a couple of the citizens who contacted us about this issue. Rt. 31 is a State roadway so it would have to go to the State Traffic Commission for analysis. We don’t have the authority to make any changes. The only thing we can do is enforcement. He provided statistics from the police cruiser at the fire station. They have been at the intersection near the end of their shift when they are not called to respond to other issues. When the Town put in the sidewalk that is there now a year or two ago, we had to get permits from CT DOT. They
made us move a crosswalk that was at the middle school and put it at that intersection. Historically we have asked for additional signage near school zones, but at the time CT DOT was concerned about all the other yellow warning signs there. They are opposed to mid-block crosswalks and felt that side of the street was the best location based on the sight line coming the other way. The Council can ask them to take another look. The cost for any changes would likely be borne by local taxpayers. CRCOG was given some funds by CT DOT to do some traffic safety incident studies, and we were allowed to pick two areas 4 months ago and that was one of the two we picked. The other was Daly Road. If you want more information we could have Chief Palmer or (Town Engineer) Todd Penney come to a meeting.

Matthew O’Brien said he is guessing we could do either a warning light or some additional signage. Joan Lewis said that the Chief has recommended we ask for a study and establish special speed zones during certain hours. The statistics from Chief Palmer indicated there has definitely been an enforcement effort there, resulting in numerous citations and verbal warnings. John Elsesser said that when Facebook says nothing is happening that is not true. When people know the police are there they change their patterns. Matthew said that the schools can possibly have a role such as a crossing guard, and there are things that we can do without the State that we can do right now.

Julie Blanchard asked if we know whether anybody spoke to the Board of Education. Tammy Regan (in audience) said she spoke with the Superintendent and he said he would look into the cost. He thought it would be approximately $5,000. Julie said that the cost doesn’t matter based on what we’re trying to solve. Matthew said because kids are short an adult standing there with a sign would be more visible than a child. John said that for the community’s information, it is illegal to pass on the right. He knows we’ve probably all done it, but it is illegal. There are some things we can be doing with the school on an annual basis.

Mike Sobol asked how one gets a flashing light like the one by Robertson School. John replied that they cost a lot of money. You would be stunned at the speed at which people travel. When it gets over 80 mph Todd Penney was getting an email from the software connected to the sign. We can’t do anything about it but try to talk to people. We weren’t able to afford the continuing cost for the data fee on that sign but there are other options like a solar product. Those are the types of things the State could look at. There are some other alternatives for signage. In Connecticut you don’t have to stop for somebody waiting at a crosswalk. In other states if they are at the edge you are supposed to stop. In Connecticut they have to be in it. Mike said he likes the idea of a push button light. John said there is an older one near a school in Willington. He thinks limiting it to during school times is critical. We could also put some reminders on the signage, like a reminder to stop. Mike thinks all those options should be looked at. Joan asked if we can do those things without the State. John replied no; we need their permission. We could make specific signage requests. He also thinks we may have an advance warning sign missing on one side. It might have been hit by a plow. The Local Traffic Commission can do that. Matthew said if it’s a priority we can talk to the Board of Education about splitting the cost. Joan said we can talk about it at the next Finance meeting. Lisa Conant asked if we know a ballpark cost on a flashing sign. John replied $25,000, plus getting electricity to it can be expensive. We might want to look at a solar one. Jonathan asked if it would be easy to add the vertical striping on some of the signs. John replied we may have some of those that are coming down but we would need permission to install them. **Motion #18/19-290: Jonathan Hand moved to authorize a request to the State to look at doing additional traffic calming/pedestrian safety measures at the intersection of Rt. 31 and Ripley Hill Road. The motion was seconded by Mike Sobol and carried on unanimous vote.**
6. **Reports;**

   **A. Council Chairwoman – Joan Lewis:** Joan reminded everyone about the Memorial Day parade on Monday, as well as the Lions Club breakfast at First Church. She also shared a plaque that the Town Council received at the soccer event for our contribution to Laidlaw Park. The Council made two appropriations in the amounts of $30,000 and $8,000. Several businesses also contributed. The park improvements were really a community effort and the fields look wonderful.

   Joan also reported on a meeting that we held with Town staff and representatives from CHR, the organization that runs the group home on Dunn Road. It was a good meeting and all of the staff at the home seem to be very dedicated. Children are placed in the home by the State Department of Children and Families after extensive evaluation. CHR staff stressed the intensive nature of the vetting process. They try to place people who will fit in with the community. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t. The Dunn Road home is authorized to have up to six kids ages 13-18. Right now they have three. There is a required staff ratio. It is not a locked facility because it is trying to emulate a home environment. Most of the kids go to school, some of them work and they are encouraged to participate in school activities. All staff are required to have degrees plus 65 hours of training in child therapeutic care. The kids come from a variety of backgrounds and many have been abused. The Coventry Police Department works cooperatively with the staff and their involvement is very much appreciated by CHR. When a child is identified to need a higher level of care or supervision than the home can provide they seek alternative placement. It can take several weeks to find an alternative. The child that stole the vehicle has been transferred. The last of five original clients that moved in during the current supervisor’s time has graduated from high school. John Elsesser said that Chief Palmer does maintain a working relationship with the staff at the home and suggests solutions. There are not a lot of good locations to send kids – the system is somewhat broken. When selecting a new client, they try not to have more than one no-nexus student to be conscious about school tuition cost. Concerns have been raised about ambulance costs. We are reimbursed either by Husky or Medicaid so we get some funds back. You can see the sense of pride when the staff talks about things like graduation, and they really seem to appreciate the Police Department’s effort to establish a relationship.

   **B. Council Members:**

   Mike Sobol said he had an opportunity to go to the art show at the high school. The school did a great job putting it together. It was really neat to see the pieces of work that the kids did and go on a hunt to find your child’s art.

   Jonathan Hand said that the Laidlaw Park soccer celebration was great. The facility is so nice now. There was a nice assemblage of current and former people involved with the program. They are a big part of the community and a lot goes into it. They reach a lot of kids and it is impressive.

   **C. Finance Committee – Mike Sobol for Carolyn Arabolos:**

   Mike Sobol provided highlights of the Finance Committee meeting on May 13, 2019. End-of-year transfer requests are on tonight’s agenda.

   Julie Blanchard had a question on the April 8, 2019 Finance Committee minutes. At the top of page 2 when talking about COVRRA, it says, “At some point we will have to reimburse COVRRA $60,000 if we don’t build a new transfer station.” John Elsesser said that statement is somewhat convoluted. The dumpsters to clean out the Stewart property for a zoning violation were paid for by COVRRA and will be reimbursed. It is a “due-to” to COVRRA.
Mike Sobol noted that the Finance minutes recognized that the Board of Education’s projected surplus went down. The Board had significant savings in the salary and benefits line items in the amounts of $65,000 and $90,000 respectively, and transferred these funds to the supplies line item. Matthew O’Brien said covering such items as a walk-in freezer and bathroom fixtures sounds like a good use of surplus funds.

D. COVRAA – John Elsesser:
John Elsesser said he thinks you have all been aware of the failure of the recycling market. We received a visit from Willimantic Waste with some rate increase language that we are having our attorney review. They are asking to go from a $10 credit/ton to paying $30/ton. $30/ton is what most towns are paying. They are willing to freeze our solid waste collection rate which was slated to go up 2.5% and the penalty for contaminated recycling would be eliminated. This is an increase in cost of approximately $24,000. We want to verify the numbers with Amanda and will distribute them when they are accurate. We will talk further in executive session. The recycling world is changing and they want a one-year evaluation of this fee. Matthew O’Brien asked if we will be renegotiating the contract next year. John replied yes, for recycling. We are locked in for solid waste disposal for several more years. Matthew said it is good for people to know that the cost to dispose of solid waste is higher so it is good to continue recycling. John said there are still some markets for cleaner recycling. Matthew asked whether new methods are being considered. John said when we did sorting at the curb that was most efficient because the sorting process was already done. Joan Lewis asked if we are going to get the tipper barrel labels to help residents know which items are acceptable for recycling. John said yes, we wanted to wait for warmer weather to apply them.

E. Town Manager – John Elsesser:
1. Projects update:
• On June 25th there will be a public hearing on the replacement of the bridge over Hop River Trail over the Willimantic River. The meeting will take place at Yeomans Hall in Columbia at 7 PM. This bridge crosses from Kings Road to the other side of the trail in Columbia.
• We got eight responses to the RFP for the Swamp Road intersection project. We are screening to get to 4-5 firms. Base pricing ranged from $17,000 to $147,000. We will have a selection in 2-3 weeks.
• We have been notified that the CT Building Congress has selected our Main Street project for a 2019 Small Project award. It got first place and there will be an award for BSC Design Group. This is an honor.
• The Coventry Farmers’ Market is opening on June 2nd.
• We received three responses to our RFP for economic development consultants under a collaboration of 4 towns. Mansfield cut funds from their budget for this next year but might have some funds in this year’s budget. Interviews are pending.
• Mike Sobol asked how many of the compost bins we have left. John replied 4-5, with another order coming in. There will be another Growing Green Day at the Farmers’ Market. The bins are on sale right now if people want to buy them – contact the Public Works Department.
• Matthew O’Brien asked about the oil tank removals project. The bids are double the engineer’s estimate. John replied that the engineer blew it. In going out to bond they came up with a price of $195,000 just for the schools. The lowest bid was $337,000. While we were opening the bids, CT DEEP was here inspecting the tanks. They are talking about fines because the removal is overdue. The Town Hall tank is empty but the
others need to be emptied. We found a contractor who will remove the oil for $1/gallon. We are taking the bottom two bids and doing value engineering to see what we can do to reduce costs. We will do an above-ground tank at the library. We are looking at individual contracts. The School project is prevailing wage but Town Hall is not. It took the State DAS almost a year to approve us to go out to bid so that is one of the reasons why the timing is off. John is coordinating removal of the oil. He has given a proposal to the school but hasn’t heard back yet.

- Matthew O’Brien asked about the status of the Miller Richardson football field. Are the leagues no longer playing? John said for now they are not. We still think we need to do the methane venting. We wouldn’t want it to become dangerous.

- Matthew O’Brien asked if we are getting regular reports on the micro grid project. John said yes. We asked the team to start with conference calls. No contract has arrived from CT DEEP yet. The deadline doesn’t start until the contract arrives. The presentation at the Board of Education was done. The Housing Authority presentation is not done yet as some members are ill. A complicating issue is that the Board of Education authorized submission of a solar carport grant application and they can’t do it in combination with the micro grid. The solar grant application has been submitted by the Board of Education before and was denied. That deadline to commit would be August 9th.

7. Unfinished Business:
A. 18/19-68: Consideration/Possible Action: Proposed Pension Plan Amendments: Not ready for action. Will remain on agenda for consideration when further information is received.

8. New Business:
B. 18/19-71: Consideration/Appointment: Town Council Representative, Board of Education/Education Association of Coventry Contract Renegotiation Process: Joan Lewis announced that she is appointing Carolyn Arabolos to serve as the Council’s representative to the contract negotiation process with the Board of Education, with Lisa Conant as an alternate.

C. 18/19-72: Consideration/Possible Action: Authorization to Execute Agreement With Eversource Energy Small Business Energy Advantage Program for Energy Efficient Lighting Retrofit Incentive/Loan Program for Town Firehouses: John Elsesser said this program is similar to what we did at Town Hall and the Police Station. The cost and net savings are shown in the materials that were provided with the agenda. We are slightly underwater at approximately $50 a month but we get all new lighting. The firehouse has some lighting issues. There will be savings going forward after several years. Motion #18/19-291: Jonathan Hand moved to authorize the execution of an agreement with the Eversource Energy Small Business Energy Advantage Program for an energy efficient lighting retrofit incentive/loan program for Town firehouses as presented. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant. Matthew O’Brien asked where the upfront costs will come from. John Elsesser replied that we don’t pay anything. We select a vendor and they get paid by Eversource. We get billed on a monthly electric bill. World Energy did an evaluation of the high school and middle school and we are also expecting an evaluation of Robertson School and Coventry Grammar School. Those savings are a lot more dramatic. They are coming to the school building committee to make a presentation on Thursday. There will be another choice to be made. If the committee wants to proceed we will come to the Council for authorization. We are pushing this a bit because we have heard the program is ending in a year or two. They have money right now, but it is first-come, first-served. Motion #18/19-291 carried on unanimous vote.

D. 18/19-73: Consideration/Possible Action: Adoption of No-Tolls Resolution: Joan Lewis noted that Julie Blanchard submitted this item and requested it be put on tonight’s agenda. The
request was a little short of the required time of 5 days but she put it on the agenda as a courtesy. She pointed out that requests for items to be added to the agenda are supposed to be made at least 5 full days in advance, which would have been close of business on Wednesday. We received the request on Thursday.

**Motion #18/19-292:** Julie Blanchard moved that the Coventry Town Council adopt the no-tolls resolution as presented. The motion was seconded by Mike Sobol. Matthew O’Brien read the proposed resolution aloud (**attached to minutes**).

Julie Blanchard said the email response we’ve gotten has been 100% in favor of passing this resolution. Joan Lewis noted we only got two or three emails on the matter, and she is not sure the people live in town - no addresses were provided.

Matthew O’Brien said he has been attending a number of the no-toll events and people are upset. This is an additional tax and the State is proposing dozens and dozens of new taxes. It is unfair to poor people and it will have an inflationary impact. He is more cognizant now as to the inefficiency of State government and how they do road management. There is lots of money available. The proposed rebate in gas taxes will have minimal impact. The infrastructure bill also might have an impact. He thinks it is a burden on our taxpayers above and beyond. Julie Blanchard said there are other towns that have already done this.

Joan Lewis said there is a lack of information. We haven’t seen a completed plan. We are not sure of the amount of money that is required to fix our roads. Some of the bridges are in dangerous condition. She doesn’t like the fact that we would depend on bonded indebtedness. She has difficulty approving this not knowing where the figures came from. Lisa Conant agreed, and said she would like to table it for later consideration until we can have more facts and data to verify the accuracy of the information. She thinks it is important for people in Coventry to know we are acting in their best interest. **Motion #18/19-293:** Lisa Conant moved to table consideration of the no-toll resolution until more information is received. Jonathan Hand seconded the motion, which did not carry on a 3-3 vote, with Joan Lewis, Lisa Conant and Jonathan Hand in favor; and Julie Blanchard, Matthew O’Brien and Mike Sobol opposed.

Matthew O’Brien agreed that the State has been stingy with information. He thinks it has been done on purpose. We are not going to know all these things before the State Legislature passes the bill. He thinks tolls are the wrong way to go for our citizens.

Jonathan Hand said this issue is very important. It is a bipartisan issue that will affect all of us. There is no clearly defined plan. We don’t have enough information so he doesn’t think we should preclude our future actions by voting on a resolution now. Joan Lewis said she heard on the news tonight that the issue may go into special session. Matthew said he heard they are prioritizing transportation so other things might not get done. Jonathan asked if Matthew had any details about what might not get done. Matthew replied maybe playgrounds, he doesn’t know. Joan emphasized that we don’t have any accurate information. She wants to see what is actually proposed.

**Motion #18/19-292 to adopt the resolution did not carry on a 3-3 vote, with Joan Lewis, Lisa Conant and Jonathan Hand opposed; and Julie Blanchard, Matthew O’Brien and Mike Sobol in favor.**

**E. 18/19-74:** Consideration/Possible Action: Establishment of Committee to Study Housing Options for Senior Citizens in Coventry and Development of Charge:
Motion #18/19-294: Matthew O’Brien moved to forward this matter to the Steering Committee for consideration. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard. Lisa Conant asked if there have been any kind of surveys or studies done by town staff regarding housing for seniors. John Elsesser replied that we looked at housing issues about three years ago, not just for seniors but for inclusionary housing. The Town Council approached the Housing Authority and asked them to look at additional options and they said no. Motion #18/19-294 carried on unanimous vote.

F. 18/19-75: Consideration/Possible Action: Authorization of FY 2018-19 Budget Transfers: Motion #18/19-295: Lisa Conant moved to authorize the FY 2018-19 budget transfers as presented. The motion was seconded by Jonathan Hand. Matthew O’Brien said he is reluctant to take any funds from tree removal. John Elsesser replied we are putting funds into trees, not taking from. We just got hit with the need to remove a tree that will cost $4,000. We are taking savings from workers comp and pension and adding to trees and police technology. Motion #18/19-295 carried on unanimous vote.

10. Executive Session:

Motion #18/19-296: Matthew O’Brien moved that the Town Council enter into Executive Session at 9:17 PM 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: Town Council members present, the Town Manager and the Finance Director. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard and carried on unanimous vote.

Motion #18/19-297: Matthew O’Brien moved that the Town Council enter into Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1-200(6)(D)-discussion of the selection of a site or the lease, sale or purchase of real estate by a political subdivision of the state when publicity regarding such a site, lease, sale, purchase or construction would cause a likelihood of an increased price until such time as all of the property has been acquired or all proceedings or transactions concerning same have been terminated or abandoned with the following people in attendance: Town Council members present, the Town Manager and the Finance Director. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard and carried on unanimous vote.

Executive Session commenced at 9:10 PM.

Motion #18/19-298: Matthew O’Brien moved to leave Executive Session at 10:00 PM. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard and carried on unanimous vote.

10. Adjournment:

Motion #18/19-299: Matthew O’Brien moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:01 PM. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone
Town Council Clerk

Note: These minutes are not official until acted upon by the Town Council at its next regular meeting. Those meeting minutes will reflect approval or changes to these minutes.
I’m here tonight for the people who are being left behind by this damaging toll program. I’m here to urge the council to vote for the no tolls resolution that will hopefully be considered tonight. I’m here for the public-school teacher who commutes by highway to school every day—pays for gas, pays all her student loans, pays her kids expenses, doesn’t have enough money to make due everyday— I’m here for her to keep that money in her pocket. I’m here for my blue-collar friends who commute to Manchester and Hartford—who don’t make a ton of money but they work hard. And they have to make sure that every dollar fits, and every single time they go to work they’re going to have to pay a toll— it doesn’t work, it won’t work for them.

I’m here for the Coventry farmers who bring goods and produce to market every day and who will be taxed through tolls— and who may pass through those expenses on to consumers, making food more expensive for everyone. I’m here for the families with medical conditions who drive into Rockville General Hospital for MRI’s, and Glastonbury for prenatal care and Children’s Medical Center in Hartford, and Meriden for Dialysis. And I’m here for the people who don’t know how this toll plan will work. Here’s how it’s going to happen:

You’re going to have a credit card, that credit card is going to be on an EZ Pass, and guess what—what happens if you have a problem this month— and your bills are due and your credit card is maxed out— you’re either not driving to work or you’re paying a $50 fine.

Just like New Jersey, just like Maryland—30% of the BILLION dollars that they allege will be coming in for toll revenues will come from fines—taxes and fees on top of that EZ pass. That’s 30% more in punishment dollars coming out of the pockets of people who already can’t afford it. This is not right. That means that people who can’t make ends meet in any given month is paying 20% interest on their credit card or they’re getting a fine. And nobody that lives below their means in this state has the ability to take the risk— and our government acts like a payday lender. It’s not right, it can’t happen.

This tolling plan does not work for the poor people in our cities any more than it works for our small towns like Coventry who are struggling to get by. These tolls will go through all of our major cities, they will touch all the people who can least afford it. These tolls will affect Connecticut businesses— Coventry businesses. More traffic diverted on to our local roads, people choosing to rip through Coventry and to 384 to avoid tolls on I-84. Unprecedented environmental impacts, unprecedented direct maintenance costs to Coventry taxpayers. Connecticut is not the sum of the dollars collected but the sum of the people of Connecticut. This is not a Republican or a Democratic issue, by any means. This is an issue of strict fairness. This is not how Connecticut is, this is not how Connecticut should be, we should all be standing with the poor, with all the people who recognize that this is a terrible way to pay for infrastructure, and hurts terribly the people who don’t have enough money to make this work, to make ends meet.
We CAN cut costs and make the gas tax work. There are plenty of places to cut spending. Consider the $500+ million we are spending to bail out the city of Hartford, $45 million per year on the XL Center, or brass statues in New Haven.

Connecticut spends $99,417 per mile of road in administrative costs, the highest in the country- and 9 times the national average of $10,864. Administrative costs per mile increased almost 20% between 2016 and 2018. In total, Connecticut spends $497,000 per mile of road- the 44th most expensive in the nation. Average cost per mile nationally is $178,000.

Connecticut drivers pay 43.8 cents per gallon in gas taxes (7th highest in the country) when petroleum gross receipts taxes are taken into account.

Texas and Florida- both huge states in comparison to Connecticut, have the most tolls in the country- with 25, and 21 tolls respectively- and Connecticut’s toll plan would make us the “most tolled State in the country” by double.

The amount of money that has gone into the special transportation fund has been enough to give us the most state-of-the-art roads and bridges in the entire world, but sadly has not been spent on those things. It’s been siphoned off to the general fund to expand government in all the wrong places. The states surrounding us do not change anywhere near the same gas tax that Connecticut charges. And there are no plans to reduce our gas tax if tolls are installed. Massachusetts in fact takes in less money in tolls than Connecticut takes in gas taxes that Massachusetts doesn’t even have.

The current plan for tolls would install a gantry every 6 miles on every major highway. Other states that have tolls have them only on one or two major highways- like Massachusetts for instance has them only on the Mass Pike.

The federal government gives us a sizable amount of money for NOT having tolls. That money has been misspent for decades. Most recently, the New Britain Hartford busway project was funded in part by this allotment intended for the whole state of Connecticut. This money is jeopardized by installing tolls.

Once tolls are installed, we will only get a fraction of every dollar back since a significant amount of money will be lost in management, maintenance, and collection of tolls. And with Connecticut being ranked 50th in the nation for administrative costs per mile, and 46th in overall cost effectiveness, I have little faith that we will see a positive outcome with this proposal.

Tolls will add costs to every product sold in our state. This will affect the poorest among us, and those on fixed incomes who are already having difficulty paying the highest electricity costs in the nation, and some of the highest property taxes anywhere.

The toll money will not go where it belongs. The people in charge would prefer to spend the money in ways that will politically benefit them. Governor Malloy inherited a $4
billion budget deficit and proceeded to raise taxes by $4 billion. At the end of his first term, we were still in deficit for $4 billion because he spent an additional $4 billion by expanding government programs.

This out-of-control spending is what is causing people to leave, businesses to leave, and others to never move here at all.

If we keep doing things to chase away lifelong residents like my sister who is now a public-school teacher in New Hampshire, and businesses like GE and Aetna, our economy will only shrink further and the tax burden will continue to rise for all of us who remain here, further damaging our chances to rebound.

The bottom line is that the state does not need any additional revenue, not for roads and bridges, or for anything else. The state government must adapt to current tax revenues and no more. Every state around us is managing with far less taxes per citizen.

What we need are leaders who know how to prioritize, and are willing to put the needs of the citizens ahead of their own interests right now, and fight for those among us unable to speak for themselves. You all can be those leaders. Please stand up for Coventry's most vulnerable, and please consider carefully this resolution against this damaging toll plan that legislators will likely bring to the floor this week.

Respectfully Submitted,

Matthew O'Brien Jr. (3400 Main St)
Chairman
Coventry Republican Town Committee
RESOLUTION

A RESOLUTION FROM THE COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL IN OPPOSITION TO THE INSTALLATION OF TOLLS ON LOCAL AND STATE ROADS

WHEREAS, the Council further believes the increased traffic on our secondary roads would affect the quality of life of Coventry residents in numerous ways including but not limited to:

1. A dramatic increase of heavy-duty commercial vehicles and tractor trailer truck presence encroaching on our scenic New England community, negatively impacting the Town’s character and atmosphere;
2. A dramatic increase in traffic by heavy-duty commercial vehicles and tractor trailers subjecting streets to increased damage, maintenance and repair costs resulting in an increased tax burden;
3. Crowding of secondary roads, an increase in traffic accidents, and disruption of the pedestrian enjoyment and residential property values on and adjacent to the main roads affected;
4. Traffic congestion from increased vehicles and accidents delaying response time for local emergency personnel, causing significant safety concerns and compromising the standard of safety care and increasing the cost of public safety to the taxpayers of the Town of Coventry;
5. Further discouraging retail establishments and shopping, putting our valued local businesses at a competitive disadvantage and increasing costs and decreasing convenience to residents.
6. The subject of our residents to a new estimated tax of $900-$1,100 per year for commuters traveling from Coventry to Hartford for work (per person); the regressive nature of the proposal failing to take into account the income level of working people.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Coventry Town Council does hereby declare its opposition to the implementation of tolls on state highways leading to the aforementioned negative effects to the Town of Coventry; and

BE IT FURTHERED RESOLVED, that the Coventry Town Council does hereby submit this resolution to the Governor of the State of Connecticut and the Connecticut State Legislature this 20th day of May, 2019.