Minutes
Town Council Steering Committee Meeting
May 28, 2019
Town Hall Conference Room B

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:57 PM.
   **Present:** Jonathan Hand, Julie Blanchard, Matthew O’Brien, Joan Lewis
   **Also present:** John Elsesser, Town Manager; Amanda Backhaus, Finance Director; Bud Meyers, Fire Marshal

2. **Acceptance of Minutes:**
   Matthew O’Brien moved to accept the Steering Committee minutes from the meetings on April 22, 2019 and May 6, 2019. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard and carried on unanimous vote.

6. **Consideration/Possible Action: Modifications To Ordinances: Inspection/Permit, Open Burning:**
   Jonathan Hand made a motion to move up item 6, consideration of modifications to open burning ordinances, as the next item of business. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard and carried on unanimous vote.

   Fire Marshal Bud Meyers was present to discuss his proposed amendments to the ordinances. Regarding open burning, Bud said he is bringing that forth because we have a permit process for people who want to burn brush, etc. but we don’t really have specifics except they can’t have anything larger than a 5’ x 5’ fire. There have been some nuisances like people building a fire right on their property line. Unless there is a high fire danger we can’t really enforce asking them to put it out. Chief Palmer wanted us to take out the language regarding the first offense. He felt a verbal warning could be given. Bud agrees if someone is egregious we shouldn’t be giving a warning; we should just be able to issue a ticket at the officer’s discretion. Bud noted that this document was drafted by him just to start a dialogue. There may be some things that the Council would want to adjust.

   The other item is fees for inspection and plan review. Bud and Noel Waite go out and do inspections, and the $30 fee has been set since 1994. It is nice to keep costs low but the fees are regulated by the ordinance and to change it requires an ordinance change. We would like the Council to be able to change the fee schedule rather than changing the ordinance. John Elsesser said that our attorneys have always felt an ordinance is the way to do fees. They are more comfortable when it is done by law vs. collections. Bud said he feels it would behoove us to change some other items in the ordinance, too. John said we can change the ordinance and fees at same time. Bud said that right now a 3-4 family apartment is not all that difficult with a flat set fee. But a 12-unit group home or a large apartment or restaurant is not something we can do quickly. If we’re working into larger places it is an issue. Jonathan Hand asked how Orchard Hills is done. Bud replied we don’t do them - they are individual units so it is not required. However, it might not be a bad idea.

   Jonathan Hand asked how Coventry compares with other towns. John Elsesser noted that we were the first town in the State that did this. We did it under Home Rule and now about 50 towns do it. The State imposed an unfunded mandate that fire marshals do this. Fees have not been adjusted since then. Matthew O’Brien asked whether some other towns have escalated their prices. John said yes. Jonathan asked how Bud arrived at the suggested fee schedules. Bud said he looked at other towns. Matthew asked if he can share this information. Bud said yes. Matthew said that
copies of ordinances from other towns would be helpful too.

Matthew O’Brien asked what the definition of a cooking fire is. Bud replied an open fire. The language in the ordinance is out of the State open burning definitions. We would like to have supportive language in the ordinance so that enforcement can be done. Matthew said he would like to compare it to the existing ordinance. John Elsesser said once the language is satisfactory to us we would turn it over to the attorney.

Jonathan Hand said he wouldn’t want to curtail the ability to burn too severely. We are a rural town, but we don’t want to be reckless either. Bud said that nuisance smoke can be difficult to enforce. If a neighbor has a health issue such as asthma that can be a problem. John Elsesser said that public health code trumps reasonable enjoyment. Generally, as a public health code they don’t want fires at all because they pollute. The Town can’t burn brush unless there has been a natural disaster. Town residents also believe in environmental issues - there is a balance. Matthew O’Brien said he thinks people should be able to have a small fire. Jonathan said he wants to be careful that we don’t get more nuisance calls by establishing an ordinance. Matthew said he is willing to continue working on it.

Matthew O’Brien moved to table consideration of amendments to the open burning ordinance for more information. The motion was seconded by Jonathan Hand and carried on unanimous vote.

3. **Reports:**
   A. Committee Chair – Jonathan Hand: Jonathan said it was great to march in the Memorial Day parade. We had great weather.

   B. Committee members. No reports.

   C. Possible Recommendations/Vacancy List/Board & Commission List:
   Jonathan Hand said he appreciates that the party affiliation of the previous position holder have been included on the reports. It is very helpful in maintaining balance.

4. **Reappointments:**
   A. Eastern Highlands Health District: Matthew O’Brien moved to recommend the reappointment of John Elsesser to the Eastern Highlands Health District, term to expire 6/7/2022. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard and carried on unanimous vote.

5. **Appointments:**
   A. Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee: Jonathan Hand moved to recommend the appointment of Laura Mirante to the Ad-hoc Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee to fill a vacancy, term to expire 5/31/2021. The motion was seconded by Matthew O’Brien and carried on unanimous vote.

   B. Planning & Zoning Commission Alternate: The committee agreed to table consideration of the appointment of Arianna Mouradjian as an alternate to the Planning and Zoning Commission, as it is customary for the committee to have a conversation with candidates for major land use boards and commissions. Jonathan Hand will invite her to attend the next Steering Committee meeting.

   C. Veterans Memorial Commission: Jonathan Hand moved to recommend the appointment of Peter Kelly to the Veterans Memorial Commission to fill a vacancy, term to expire 1/1/2020. The
motion was seconded by Matthew O’Brien and carried on unanimous vote.

6. Consideration/Possible Action: Establishment of a Senior Housing Study Committee and Development of Charge:
A draft developed by John Elsesser was submitted for consideration. Matthew O’Brien moved to table this item to the next meeting so that the committee would have sufficient time to read it. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard and carried on unanimous vote.

7. Consideration/Possible Action: Amendment to Cemetery Ordinance: Amanda Backhaus, staff liaison to the Cemetery Commission, was present to discuss this item. The current ordinance was done in 1977. The Cemetery Commission has determined that a lot of this language is outdated and is no longer relevant to the way the Town operates. Proposed changes include position titles, separation of responsibilities, and definition of Town employees. There are not many lots to sell and services fees for burials and cremations are below market rates. Matthew O’Brien asked if we can put in a provision to provide the Town Council with regular information such as sales, etc. Amanda said she provides this information to the Commission already and can easily share it with the Council. Matthew asked if the budget includes revenues received. Amanda replied that revenues go into fund 202 until they are used for capital projects every couple of years. The actual budget is in the general fund and the Council approves that every year. Amanda can clarify language to specify general fund vs. special funds. Matthew said he would like that language clarified. John Elsesser noted that capital improvement funds go in the Capital Improvement Plan under Other Funds. John said that over time the Town has taken on more and more responsibilities to oversee the cemeteries. At one point, records were kept in a private home and we had difficulty retrieving them. Matthew asked if it is the intent that the Commission cannot spend funds without the approval of the Public Works Director. Amanda replied that it says either by the Commission or the Public Works Director. Matthew said we might want to clarify. Amanda said we want the Public Works Director to be able to move forward with maintenance-related items, or the Sexton might need office supplies etc.

Matthew asked if there are any preferences given to Coventry residents in purchasing a plot. Amanda replied no. John said historically this has not been an issue or concern. Amanda said the Commission also felt some of the rules and regulations were outdated, such as dogs in the cemeteries. They want some ability to update it without an ordinance amendment every time. Matthew said he thinks it might be good to have some level of notification – such as a public hearing. John said that there should be a public process, including some sort of time limit for feedback. Jonathan and Matthew agreed. Amanda will make some changes per the Committee’s feedback. John said if enough of it is ready, the next step would be to get it reviewed by the Town Attorney. The committee agreed to proceed.

8. Consideration/Possible Action: Amended Investment Policy: Amanda Backhaus said that the Pension Advisory Committee met recently, and these recommendations stemmed from that discussion. Currently pension investments are split 60-40% between stock and a fixed income product at a lower rate. Pension Advisory Committee members questioned whether a managed bond fund might have a better yield. This led to a review and recommended revision of the entire policy that allows for more flexibility in asset allocation, and also identifies asset parameters. Matthew asked how they limit their loss potential, other than monitoring and making changes. Amanda replied that is the extent of what they do. They are a conservative group. Comparisons show that Coventry is well funded. Jonathan Hand moved to refer the amended investment policy to the Town Council for approval, and to authorize the Town Manager to execute. The motion was seconded by Matthew O’Brien and carried on unanimous vote.
9. Consideration/Possible Action: Proposed Revisions to Personnel Policies and Procedures:
   Tabled for further review.

10. Adjournment:
    The meeting was adjourned at 9:24 PM on a motion by Matthew O’Brien, seconded by Julie
    Blanchard and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone
Council Clerk