MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL
JUNE 1, 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 (arrived at 7:48 p.m.)
Jonathan Hand - remote
Matthew O’Brien, Jr. – remote
Matthew O’Brien, Sr. - Vice Chair - remote
Lisa Thomas
Richard Williams – Secretary - remote

Members absent:

Also present:
John Elsesser – Town Manager
Amanda Backhaus – Finance Director

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

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

This section will not be about budget comments. Budget comments were due by May 29th. Blanchard has the mix of letters sent to both email addresses. Thomas is not sure citizens understood that comments sent to the budget email, while being sent to all Members simultaneously, would not be shared under the audience of citizens portion. Hand is in support of going through the entire pile of letters. O’Brien, Sr. stated budget letters brought in after the deadline should not be read aloud at the meeting. Only those letters sent to the audience@coventry.org should be shared. Comments to the email address for the budget will be attached to the Minutes; all Members have received these comments.

Comments from these citizens were read at the meeting. Each statement is attached to this document.

Tom & Jan Weston, 158 Beebe Farms Road – Wrote to thank the Council taking citizens’ comments to heart regarding the budget. They agree that tweaking the collection rate makes sense. Folks should be comfortable with adoption without a vote.
Matt Twerdy – Is in support of the BOE budget with no more cuts. Families are attracted to Coventry based on the education system.

Chris Morgan – Wrote about two points. First, the budget being presented by the Council does not go far enough in reducing costs for taxpayers. Second, in regards to the process of adopting the budget this year. The Council should adhere to the town charter and allow the people to vote.

O’Brien objected to the reading of this letter as it pertains to the budget. Hand feels reading this letter has set a precedent that all letters received should be read. Blanchard stated this letter was sent to the email address set up for audience comments, not the budget email address.

Jason Blakesley, 27 Berry Avenue – Wrote that he was disgusted by seeing a white police officer kneeling on a black man’s neck with other officers silently standing by. This is similar to the Council remaining silent to Hick’s inappropriate comments to a girl. Thomas seemed annoyed when his and his wife’s letters were read at the previous meeting. If you can breathe you can speak up.

A citizen entered the Annex. Elsesser commented he could not be in the building. The citizen demanded the Council give the people transparency. Elsesser stated he was calling the police. The citizen continued this is not right. He left the building. Hand stated the other letters should be read in fairness.

Jennifer Burdette, 154 Bear Swamp Road, Andover – The tragic death of a person by a police officer has people demanding accountability for police actions. Officer Michael Hicks made racist statements and is a known liar and predator. The internal investigation is ongoing. Her daughter matters. Fire Hicks.

Hand stated there was one more statement sent at 5:08 p.m. to audience of citizens email before the 7:00 p.m. deadline. Elsesser stated the email was sent to an incorrect email address and Hand can discuss that letter during Council Member reports if he wishes.

4. Acceptance Of Minutes:
   • May 4, 2020
   Motion: I move to accept the minutes of the May 4, 2020 meeting.

   By: Thomas Seconded: O’Brien, Jr.

With the following corrections:
• Page 9, 7.A.1, seventh sentence – change “Town Manager and Finance Director” to “Town Government”.
• Page 10, second paragraph, last sentence – remove “to be postponed”; add “to be paid for this year by the BOE.”.
• Page 10, sixth paragraph, last sentence – add “preliminary” before “goal”.

Page 2 of 12
The Council asked the Clerk to review the tape of this meeting for the Voting of 8.C. as some felt O’Brien, Jr. abstained. In review of the tape Blanchard asked for those in favor and those opposed; abstentions were not asked for. There was not a roll call vote and an abstention was not heard on the tape.

All Members were in favor of tabling the acceptance of these minutes until the tape is checked.

- **May 15, 2020**
  **Motion:** I move to accept the minutes of the May 15, 2020 meeting.

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

With the following corrections:
- Page 2, first paragraph, last sentence – replace “the” with “next year’s” before “budget”.
- Page 2, third paragraph, second sentence – correct to read “It is moving from CNREF $25k for contingency”.
- Page 2, last paragraph, third sentence – replace “it” with “one”.
- Page 2, last paragraph, sixth sentence – add after “necessary” and this action would ensure the police department would get one cruiser right away.”.
- Page 3 and throughout – correct “Kahn” to “Khan”.
- Page 3, third paragraph, fifteenth sentence – add an “s” to “operation”.
- Page 4, first paragraph – correct “$510,000” to “$5,510”.
- Page 4, second paragraph – change the first sentence to read “O’Brien, Sr. said the use of fund balance is about $200,000 which would leave us around 13%.”.
- Page 4, third paragraph – change “6.9” o “2.6”.
- Page 4, third paragraph – change the beginning of the eighth sentence to read “The use of fund balance ...”.
- Page 4, fourth paragraph, seventh sentence – change “the 1.5% fund” to “fund balance”.
- Page 4, fourth paragraph – remove the last four sentences.
- Page 5, third paragraph – change the first sentence to read “Backhaus reported assuming the Town cuts are accepted as presented, the capital, the debt, and BOE cuts as proposed and using $220,000 of fund balance we still need to cut $139,000; if $250,000 is used of fund balance we still need to cut $109,000.

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

- **May 18, 2020**
  **Motion:** I move the Council table the acceptance of these meeting minutes.

  **By:** O’Brien, Sr.  
  **Seconded:** Conant
Discussion: Hand mentioned there are one and one-half pages of people and addresses listed that wrote in to voice their thoughts.

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

Discussion: Hand asked that item 9.A. be removed from the Consent Agenda.

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 has been following the census numbers. We are doing well though not as well as Tolland. The Farmer’s Market is opening next Sunday. The Fire Department’s Chief Meyer has now appointed other officers. Blanchard thanked those who volunteered for or were appointed to the positions; she appreciates this.

6.B. Council Members:
Thomas reported now that we are moving into the opening phase she wants to remind everyone there is a requirement to wear a mask including while dining outdoors at a restaurant. She has seen a few people not adhering to the rule. This rule is for not only you, it is for the people around you. We are trying to open the economy. 2-1-1 can be used to report non-adherence if you see someone without a mask in a store. However, that is for reporting the store not enforcing the rule. Wear your mask. Be respectful of small businesses trying to get on their feet.

Thomas then asked about a previous request to get a status update from the registrars on what is being done as we are getting closer to the primaries. Elsesser stated this will be an agenda item on June 15, 2020. Marge Roach is not comfortable doing Zoom and will not attend. The others have not responded. Thomas replied that is not right. Elsesser will leave this to the political leadership to get representatives for the constituents to respond. Blanchard will issue an invitation.
O’Brien, Sr. thanked everyone for working hard on the budget. The BOE and Petrone responded quickly when additional information was requested. Everyone was very helpful and responsive and he appreciates the effort. Elsesser, Backhaus, and others have been working on this for a number of hours and days. The Council has worked hard to get to this point.

Hand summarized the number of letters received this evening from the budget email address. Basically, there were six in support of the BOE and the Library budgets with no cuts and two against. Hand read part of a letter in support of the actions of the BOE from Emma Eaton, 41 Sean Circle.

O’Brien, Jr. read a letter from Robert Chipkin, 454 Cassidy Hill Road, asking to have the BOE budget reduced a further 5%. Williams stated this is no place for these letters to be read. This portion of the meeting has nothing to do with the letters.

Conant reported the Farmer’s Market is opening on June 7th. This will be done with online orders, the vendors informed of the orders, the buyer drives to the field, and the vendors will place the orders in the vehicles. Conant feels Erica and the team can make the market fun and interesting.

Conant further reported Laura Rand has been cheering up people around town by preparing hearts on wood slivers. Conant thanked her and the efforts of her family.

Conant spoke to Thomas’ point about keeping masks on. There is more exposure indoors and if the air is poorly circulated there is a problem.

Thomas asked about the online ordering for the Farmer’s Market. Backhaus is working on getting the order site up and running. It will be at Coventry Farmer’s Market at Hale Homestead. Elsesser added the process will be posted on the Market’s Facebook page.

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

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

6.E. COVRAA – John A. Elsesser:
6.E.1. 19/20-76: Consideration/Possible Action: Set COVRAA Rate For FY 2020/2021
The rate has to be established for July 1. Backhaus sent out background information about this matter. It is suggested if the rate is increased by $15 it will not likely have to be changed next year; if a $10 increase is set it is likely to have to be raised next year. At an increase of $15 the operation is still subsidized. The number of households is 4,813.

O’Brien, Sr. added the cost of waste disposal is driving this increase.

**Motion:** I move the Council increase the COVRAA Rate by $15 annually.

By:  O’Brien, Sr.  Seconded: Williams
Discussion: Are there any recyclables that are desirable or have worth? Elsesser replied that cardboard has a market. Break down boxes but don’t tie them up. Don’t put bottles and cans in a bag. The markets vary dramatically. For environmental purposes, and it is the law, they should be recycled. If a resident has too many boxes around the house bring them to the DPW garage or the Transfer Station to dispose of them.

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

6.F. Town Manager – John A. Elsesser
6.F.1. Projects Update
- CROG foundation report indicated 165 homes have been tested in town.
- Fire department officers have been appointed.
- Favorable bids have been received for the asbestos work in the cafeteria.
- The Folly Lane bridge is out to bid. Eight companies picked up the bid package.
- The Superintendent is eliminating the restrictions of use of the school facility grounds. This decision was in conjunction with orders loosening up and people wanting to be able to walk in a safe environment. Organized sports continue to have restrictions.
- The Economic Development Commission (EDC) is working with placing seven interns with local businesses. The experience of the interns run the gamut from websites, ecommerce sites, and business plans. The value of this work is $5k - $8k per business. The students and the EDC are excited.

The motion about sick leave carryover due to COVID-19 was specifically for the police union. Blanchard asked Elsesser to prepare an item for the June 15th meeting for carryover of vacation for the other unions.

Conant asked for the status of personnel rules and work on the appendices. Elsesser replied that item is on a list that we cannot get to. He has spent 30 – 40 hours on the Back-To-Work plan sent in draft form today. Everything that is not critical to reopening has to be set aside. You can’t imagine how much time this virus is taking up. Comments are expected from employees about the drafted plan.

O’Brien, Sr. asked, to that end, how can we be of assistance? Can we help with Zoom meetings set-ups or with technical assistance? Elsesser replied the IT department was at Town Hall today; the YouTube channel should be running correctly. There are a couple of Zoom accounts and the use of the accounts has to be organized. There are four upgraded Zoom accounts. O’Brien, Sr. would like a more formal process, other than volunteering time, to assist the Town Manager. What kind of service would help? Elsesser replied a door monitor may be needed as Town Hall reopens. This could be a good summer job for a youth as there is a major summer jobs shortage. Elsesser continued the State of CT gave up on opening inland beaches for the season. It may be helpful to have someone help with daytime Zoom meetings. Elsesser loses thirty minutes just to get a meeting going.
6.F.2. COVID-19 Update
Elsesser reported we are trying to get employees back into Town Hall beginning today versus having them work from home. Town Hall should be ready for public entry with restrictions by the end of the week. The plexiglass for the Tax Office is being installed tomorrow. There is a drop box at the back door for dog licenses and taxes. We are making significant progress. The formal recovery process will be in place by the end of the week.

7. Unfinished Business:
7.A. 19/20-51: FY20/2021 Budget
- Consideration/possible action: possible adjustments and development of final budget
O’Brien, Sr. would like to make a budget motion for discussion; he also has a sister proposal.

Motion: I move that the Town Council make the following appropriations for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021:

General Government $10,249,009
Board of Education $27,846,548
Capital Expenditures $ 664,000
Debt Service $ 2,828,468
For a Total of: $41,588,025


Discussion: O’Brien, Sr. would like to put forward a sister proposal because it could affect different ideas. Thomas would like to suggest restoring $50k to the BOE budget in light of the COVID-19 savings found. The BOE is returning those savings of $740,000. This is two times what was initially requested from the BOE. Hand expressed support of Thomas’ proposal. This has been a change since the last vote and it is fair. It sets us up for being closer to success in the fall. O’Brien, Sr. stated he took that into consideration. That brings O’Brien, Sr. to his sister proposal -

I propose that the Town Council create a fund and fund it with $99,500 from the Council’s 1 ½%, during the current fiscal year, that would provide funding to the Board of Education to meet extraordinary and unbudgeted expenses, incurred during the 2020/2021 school year, that cannot be met by the funding in the Board’s approved budget, due to changes in the way Coventry schools operate and the changing requirements placed on the District by the State, in response to the coronavirus outbreak, that are needed to provide our students with a quality education and keep them safe. Access to these funds would require Council agreement.

This will also preserve the Council’s entire 1 ½% for next fiscal year to better help the Council meet any issues that may come up during the next year.

This suggestion is separate from the budget motion. This fund would answer the questions being asked by the community about the safely running of the schools under the new
normal. Elsesser stated the Council is authorized to take up to $100,000 from the 1.5%. The funds would come from this fiscal year and becomes a designated fund balance.

Thomas stated it is interesting that one of the letters relating to the budget from citizen Howard Haberan on Cassidy Hill Road had a similar comment. Thomas asked why the money would not go into the BOE’s 1% fund? Why create so many steps for the BOE to do the job they have to do? The BOE should be able to take care of what they need to do. In a reply it was stated the 1% BOE fund is for capital use. This would be something different. Transportation or staff costs could not come out of this fund. Thomas felt restoring $50k to the BOE would make them whole to where they need to be. Hand asked if this is legal to do with BOE operation money. O’Brien, Sr. replied in the affirmative. Backhaus added the Council is authorized to create a fund for any purpose. It would be included as a general fund and show as a committed balance. Conant received clarification from O’Brien, Sr. that the use requested by the BOE would have to be approved by the Council. Does it have to be a unanimous vote? There could be an awful lot of emergencies that will arise and the BOE will have to wait until the approval process? O’Brien, Sr. reported one suggestion voiced at a BOE meeting was to have K-5 attend in double sessions and everyone else does distance learning. Or open the schools but not have sports. Nothing is set in stone. Until concrete proposals are put forward on how to service the children, no one knows what the expenses will be. Williams added we have no idea on what is going to happen in educating our children. If expenses exceed the amount of money available to the BOE we will have to come up with the money. This would be taking money from this current fiscal year and moving it to the next not even knowing what expenses we will have. This amount is more than giving $50k back to the BOE. Williams stated this is a unique way of doing this and doing it in this current year. It is a great idea. It is a way to help out and move it forward. It is outside-the-box thinking.

O’Brien, Sr. commented this may be no more than a down payment. We have no concept or clue of what it will take to make certain the children are safe. Hand is encouraged by Williams’ support for this, although perplexing.

O’Brien, Jr. asked where the $50k would be allocated if returned to the BOE? O’Brien, Sr. replied the BOE couldn’t say where they would eliminate that amount. Hand asked does the BOE looking for the restoration of the $50k per a letter preclude the Council from starting the fund? That will give them money to get started now and a way to get them some more money.

Hand suggested an amended motion to restore the $50k and set up the fund. O’Brien, Sr. asked if Hand means this to go to the Finance Committee? That means Hand is in favor of being committed to doing this? This fund can’t be set up tonight and can’t be part of a motion now.

Hand replied he is making an amended motion to increase the BOE allocation by the $50k taken away at the last meeting. Thomas seconded.

O’Brien, Sr. is opposed to the amended motion.

Blanchard is in favor of O’Brien, Sr.’s motion. The BOE has worked with the Council. By talking about this fund it indicates we are here for the BOE. She thinks of this as one budget.
Conant is in support of Hand’s amendment.

Conant asked Elsesser if the proposal being heard now has been run by legal counsel? It seems to her it does not seem possible for the Council to set up fund for operating money. Elsesser replied this is similar to money being set aside for the wall projects for the school. This is a budget issue, not a legal one. Backhaus was an auditor and is a CPA. Backhaus stated she has no concerns with a fund being specifically set up for a specific purpose. Thomas understands this is a fund to be set up for Covid expenses related to education in our schools. The Council makes the decision as to the use of the fund. O’Brien is in favor of this proposal going to the Finance Committee to set up the designations, what the uses are, how requests will be treated, what the timeframes will be, etc. Thomas would like to know there is a firm commitment for the fund from each Member.

O’Brien Sr. reminded the Members there is an amendment on the floor. Hand reiterated the amended motion as per the letter from the Superintendent asking for restoration of the $50,000 in light of the increase of Covid savings being given back to the Council. Thomas seconded. O’Brien, Sr. confirmed that would bring the appropriation to the BOE to $27,916,548.

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

The motion for amendment fails.

Thomas would like to know which Council Members are in favor of this new fund. Blanchard stated the creation of the fund is showing support from the Town to the BOE. O’Brien, Sr. added there will be other funds available also, such as, the Care Act, asking to increase the 1% fund by another $100,000, and the tuition account monies that are undesignated. All of those funds are available for emergency and unusual circumstances. If more money is needed, O’Brien, Sr. would expect the BOE to come back to the Council.

Thomas stated she would support the fund in light of the defeat of returning the $50,000. O’Brien, Jr. in support of the fund; it is a good step to plan ahead. O’Brien, Sr. added this preserves fund balance for next year. Hand is supportive of the BOE and does not understand why the Council does not return the $50,000 and establish the fund for $49,000. O’Brien, Jr. replied that would not accomplish the stated purpose. Hand asked O’Brien, Jr. if he thinks this money won’t go toward Covid related expenses? O’Brien, Sr. stated if money was returned to the BOE it could be spent on salaries; this fund will be used for virus related expenses. O’Brien, Jr. reiterated this action would ensure the monies be used for Covid related expenses. Hand stated his support of the fund. Hand also supports the BOE knowing what they have to do; he has faith in them. Williams is in favor of setting up the fund; this is accountable. This is a designated fund for designated purposes. More than likely it is going to take more than this. Williams stated it is a prudent thing to do and supports it 100%.

Thomas heard that each Member has stated their support of the fund of $99,500. The fine points of the fund will be discussed at the Finance Committee. It is suggested to be funded
with as much as possible. Thomas while appreciating what appears to be the spirit behind supporting the fund, she does not appreciate the micromanaging of the BOE.

The voting on the budget motion:
For: Blanchard, Williams, Hand, O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Thomas, Conant
Against: None
Abstain: None

Thomas and Conant stated their support of the budget appropriation motion is based on the creation of the new fund being funded as discussed.

- **Set mil rate**
  Blanchard stated the proposed mil rate is 31.17 mils.

**Motion:** I move the Council sets the mil rate at 31.17 mils.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Hand

Discussion: O’Brien, Sr. stated this requires an allocation of $310,000 from the fund budget and with a modified collection rate of 98%.

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

O’Brien, Sr. is disappointed that the State of CT did not have faith in towns to come up with a plan to hold the referendum while keeping citizens safe. If there were a feasible way to hold a budget referendum, we would have done so. The Governor cut off all avenues. O’Brien, Sr. understands that people are disappointed with the process; we are disappointed, too. Blanchard agrees.

Thomas is not intending to beat up the Governor in making his decisions. Some towns don’t hold referendums for the budget. We tried to use every possible avenue of communications about the budget to the voters and residents. We are doing the best we can around the Council table. There are some constitutional issues of how the vote was held in the town of Vernon.

O’Brien, Jr. commented he is very uncomfortable with the Council having to make unilateral decisions with voters having no say in setting the budget amount. The Council looked at many legal possibilities to get around the Executive Orders. The process this year goes against everything about the people having a voice. Every taxpayer should have the right to vote. As for the statement made earlier about it being our duty to ignore unconstitutional orders as violating the constitution or the charter, he does not know if that would hold up in the courts.

Hand supports the citizens’ right to vote. This is the process we have this year. Hand finds it perplexing that some of those at the table having a problem with it. Three years ago the Council passed a budget and set the mil rate. The mil rate was set without a citizens’ vote.

- **LINK to submitted citizen comments**
Elsesser stated there are more people participating than ever for the audience of citizens portion. Anyone who wants to view the comments can use the link.

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)

7.C. 19/20-68: Consideration/Possible Action: Appointment Of Long-Term Recovery Coordinator (Not Ready For Action)
Elsesser stated the State is still having discussions of having this at the town level versus a regional level. Eric Trott is the point person for Coventry.

7.D. 19/20-69: Consideration/Possible Action: Amendment To Charge, Veterans Memorial Commission And Call To Public Hearing (Not Ready For Action)
Elsesser stated it would be nice to get this committee going again as it does not have a quorum now. When ready the public hearing would be held before a Council meeting.

7.E. 19/20-73: Consideration/Possible Action: Appropriation From CNREF For Engineering Services, South Street LOTCIP Project
Elsesser reported two proposals have been received that are very different in the scope of pricing. There is a complication that this is a scenic, historic road for the length from the roundabout to the Homestead.

Motion: I move the Council authorize up to $90,000 from CNREF for engineering services for the South Street LOTCIP project.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Conant

Discussion: Thomas asked why Elsesser feels $90k is enough? Elsesser replied the pricing was disparate at $69k and $107k. Some of the aspects of work will be removed and some of the survey work has already been done. Elsesser believes the services will be below $90k, although the PZC may want more work done because it is a scenic road. Elsesser and Todd Penney, Town Engineer, feels $85k will be enough.

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

8. New Business:
8.A. 19/20-75: Consideration/Possible Action: Review Of Neighborhood Assistance Act
- Proposal And Call To Public Hearing
Elsesser stated CLCC is interested in this program. More details will be forthcoming to construct a greenhouse as part of the master plan on Route 44. The public hearing has to be held before the end of June. It would be held thirty minutes before the next Council meeting. As for the ability to have 10 people gathered together, that seems to be for social
interactions. A definitive answer has not been given about public meetings. Even if we can open the Annex to the public we will still want to have the meeting on Zoom.

**Motion:** I move the Council hold a Public Hearing on the 2020 Connecticut Neighborhood Assistance Act program proposal by Creative Living Community of Connecticut, Inc. by the required state standards to be scheduled for 7:00 p.m. on June 15, 2020.

By: Hand
Seconded: Jr.

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

9. **Miscellaneous/Correspondence:**

9.A. *Blanchard Response To CT Library Association*
Hand read the original letter from Lisa of the Library Association and Blanchard’s response. He was taken aback by Blanchard’s response. From the May 15th Minutes discussion Williams had plenty to say about making substantial cuts. The tone of the response letter is disingenuous with general imprecisions. It does not square up with the meeting discussion. We as a Council did not agree.

O’Brien, Sr. stated no proposal was made for a library budget reduction. Hand stated it may not have reached the level of a proposal, but that was the nature of the discussion. Williams stands by every word he said. There was no discussion of a 20% cut or even an amount.

10. **Adjournment:**

**Motion:** I move that the Council adjourn at 10:32 p.m.

By: 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.
Coventry Town Council
Coventry Town Hall
1712 Main St
Coventry, CT 06238

May 19, 2020

To the Members of the Coventry Town Council:

The Connecticut Library Association urges the Town Council of Coventry to reconsider its plan to cut the Town’s annual contribution to the Booth & Dimock Library by 20 percent for the 2020-21 fiscal year. Currently the Town’s contribution is 1.05% of total municipal revenues, but 97% of the Library’s annual operating budget. The proposed budget amendment would be devastating to the operations of the Library.

The staff of the Library began providing virtual services to the community immediately after the state shutdown began March 16. Since closing, staff has continued to register patrons and issued online cards to access the Library’s eBooks and databases available remotely 24/7. It has offered 126 unique, original content posts with over 23,000 engagements. This content has included online story times for young children, science and art programs for elementary and middle school students, and book clubs for adults. The Library has provided homebound delivery services and will begin curbside pickup services on May 26. Library staff has answered online reference questions and assisted people with using online resources. Furthermore, the Library has continued to provide support and resources for job seekers, a service which will continue to be invaluable as the economy reopens. As the state implements phased re-opening of community services, Library administration has also been developing plans for the future. The proposed budget cut would eliminate nearly all the hours of the Library’s part-time employees which would have an immediate effect of reducing services and programming, and more importantly, reducing the Library’s hours once it can re-open.

In this difficult time, the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library provides critical services to the Coventry community. It has ably and flexibly served residents, providing a high level of literacy and employment support in addition to providing community-building for all ages. The Connecticut Library Association urges members of Coventry’s Town Council to reconsider the proposed cut to the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library’s operating grant for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. This cut would be catastrophic to the Library’s ability to provide residents with crucial services, which will be especially vital as the community emerges from the effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

Sincerely,

Lisa Karim
President, Connecticut Library Association

citlibraryassociation.org
Laura Stone

Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Re: comment on the Proposed Budget

From: Tom & Jan Weston <tomjanweston@aol.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 20, 2020 9:21 PM
To: Coventry Audience <Audience@coventryct.org>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: comment on the Proposed Budget

To our Town Council -

Having sent the email letter below to the Council for the May 18 meeting, we now feel compelled to write again and thank the Council for taking town residents' comments to heart and coming up with a budget that we feel does an excellent job of threading the needle - responsible expenditure levels funded by a compassionate mill rate.
We also agree that tweaking the collection percentage down a smidge makes very good sense, and may hopefully help to create a surplus that can go back into the Fund Balance.
We know that many townspeople are concerned about not being able to vote on this Budget. However, we feel that this Budget is crafted so well that folks should feel comfortable with its adoption without a vote.

Thank you all again for your hard work and a job well done.

Tom & Jan Weston
158 Beebe Farms Rd.

-----Original Message-----
From: Tom & Jan Weston <tomjanweston@aol.com>
To: audience@coventryct.org <audience@coventryct.org>
Sent: Mon, May 18, 2020 5:03 pm
Subject: comment for audience of citizens tonight

To our Town Council -

We urge the Council to insure that the Proposed Property Tax Revenue Total for FY 20-21 is no higher than that for FY 19-20.
Given the increased Grand List due to revaluation, we urge the Council to lower the mil rate by the same percent to achieve this level amount of total revenue.

With so many Coventry families struggling with their finances currently and into the future due to COVID-19, now is the time to insure no increase in the average family’s tax bill.
Our neighbor’s appraisal went up over 25% due to revaluation. Without a mil rate reduction, she will pay close to $1000 more this year.
Our appraisal also went up and we will owe over $1000 more unless the mil rate is lowered.

Please don't put families into a position of choosing between food on their table and paying these huge increases.

Thank you.

Tom & Jan Weston
158 Beebe Farms Rd.
860-208-2863
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Funding for the Board of Education

From: Howard Haberern <hhman99@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 25, 2020 6:04 AM
To: TH - Budgetcomments <Budgetcomments@CoventryCT.org>
Cc: Howard Haberern <hhman99@hotmail.com>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Funding for the Board of Education

Howard Haberern
80 Cassidy Hill Rd.
Coventry.Ct.06238

While nobody, including myself, likes a budget increase it is inappropriate to not plan better for the up coming challenges that our School Board will face and almost certainly incur.
Due to the Covid 19 virus there will be increases in transportation, staffing costs, due to smaller class sizes, the need for segregation areas, busing, and etc.
I propose that the council puts the over $300,000.0 budget cut that they made into an escrow account to pay for these almost guaranteed increases.
I don’t want to hear that the school system failed because of the bad planning and or implementation by the school board. I feel that there is politics going on by certain members who are looking to brag about how they kept the budget down during the next campaign time while they ignore reality. Our children are or should be the most important concern for our town and country and NO, I do not have any in the Coventry school system.
The Town Council members are suppose to be our leaders, let them address how these additional expenses are going to be covered. It would be tragic to destroy or degrade the hard work and progress made by our school boards over the past years.
Our great school system has also raised property values since more younger families are now OK with moving to Coventry, this was not always the case in Coventry.

Howard Haberern
Good morning members of the Coventry town council.

After reviewing the town manager’s proposed budget, the BOE proposed budget and the town council’s proposed budget I wanted to share the following with you as a taxpayer and a parent in Coventry. I understand the town council’s desire to reduce the mill rate to offset the cost of increased property valuations. I also feel that taking a majority of the money needed from the BOE budget to make the mill rate decrease possible is not justified at this time. Our schools and students are under tremendous stress, as are many others in our community due to the far reaching impacts of the Vivid pandemic. Now is not the time to strip the most important institution in our town of necessary funding to educate and ensure the well-being of our children. I refer to our schools being the most important institution because they employ the most people in our community by far and provide numerous essential services for our community, our children and our families. Reductions such as those proposed often look good on paper or in our pocket books, but rob our children and the families in our community of needed resources.

Thank you for your hard work and continued dedication to our town,

Brandon Elliott
164 Root Road
Coventry CT
Begin forwarded message:

From: Matt Twerdy <mjtwerdy@gmail.com>
Date: May 28, 2020 at 7:25:26 PM EDT
To: TH - Budgetcomments <budgetcomments@coventryct.org>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] FY2020-21 Town Council Proposed Budget

I'm sending this email supporting the Booth and Dimock Library budget with no further cuts in the existing Coventry Town Budget proposal.

Matt Twerdy
On May 28, 2020, at 7:18 PM, Matt Twerdy <mjtwerdy@gmail.com> wrote:

I'm sending this email supporting the Board of Education budget with no further cuts in the existing Coventry budget proposal. Coventry currently attracts families to Town based on our education system. It would be a step in the wrong direction and a disappointment to the families in Coventry to see the school system suffer due to further cuts.

I'm also still waiting to hear an apology from the Town Council leadership to the citizens of Coventry regarding the Republican councilmen for chastising GOP school board member William Oros.

Matt Twerdy
Gentlemen:

I've reviewed the proposed Coventry budget for fiscal year 2020-21 and have general comments. The proposed budget does not recognize that the town of Coventry (as well as the State of Connecticut) is considerably poorer than it was last year, and will continue to be so in the year to come. Individuals have lost jobs and income, businesses are shuttered, perhaps forever, and Coventry residents are rightly fearful about the future. It's inappropriate that the proposed spending budget(s) do not recognize this reality, and they should be further reduced to reflect this. We can't continue to spend monies that we won't collect, especially if we rely on promised funds from the state government. Those funds will undoubtedly be reduced this year, and we should be prepared for that eventuality by reducing expenses. The Board of Education's budget continues to increase, despite at least a decade of declining enrollments in our schools. Of course, you'll receive the typical "we can't reduce education spending - it will decimate our children's future!" remarks. These can be safely ignored as they come from those who would support the school's spending, regardless of the level proposed. They're the same statements year-by-year, and are perpetual "background noise". Better that the Coventry Board of Education recognize that they're the taxpayer's representatives, and not the cheerleaders of the school system itself. I would suggest that we consider going back to the drawing board and reduce the proposed school system budget by a further 5%, and have the Board, together with the Superintendent, prioritize the proposed spending to accomplish this.

Robert Chipkin
454 Cassidy Hill Road
To The Town Council,

My name is John Fleming and I reside at 107 Stonecroft Lane.

While reviewing your budget, I was pleased to see the proposed mill reduced from 32.20 to 31.17, but with that said I want to express my concern over the Revaluation process, that seemed inconsistent. I appealed the assessment, and after review it was changed. If I had not done some extensive reviews of other properties in my neighborhood my taxes with this new rate would of increased substantially. The inconstancies need to be addressed for next time.

I know the Town is following the guidelines from the Governor, but there has been so many other establishments open (Grocery Stores, Home Depot, Lowes, Costco, liquor stores) etc...that have numerous patrons inside, along with long lines of people waiting outside to enter. They are getting along, we could have also. There should have been more consideration for our residents to cast their vote. I am saddened by this turn of events.

As I write this on Memorial Day, I would hope the Town in the future will not forgo our rights to be a part of the processes established by the Men and Women who have fought dearly for the freedoms in which we all enjoy.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my comments with you all,

Regards,
John Fleming

Sent from my iPhone
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Board of Education Budget Proposal

From: Denise Twerdy <denni515@charter.net>
Sent: Friday, May 29, 2020 12:44 AM
To: TH - Budgetcomments <budgetcomments@coventryct.org>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Board of Education Budget Proposal

I am writing today to express my support of the Board of Education's budget proposal. I appreciate and thank everyone who is involved in all the hard work and hours that have gone into both the Town and Board of Education budget proposals, especially given the incredible circumstances this year.

I am very proud of the Town of Coventry, and especially the Coventry school district. My daughter currently attends Coventry High School, and I have seen how much our programs have developed over the years. I know she will have opportunities in her future only made possible because of the quality of her education in our town.

I support the Board of Education budget as proposed, without further reduction.

Respectfully,
Laura Twerdy
730 Pucker Street
TO: Coventry Town Council members

FROM: Claire C. & John L. Twerdy, 605 Pucker Street, Coventry

We respectfully request that you take our comments below into consideration when making your final decision on the proposed budget at your meeting on Monday, June 1st.

1. We fully support passing the current proposed budget with no further cuts.

2. We fully support restoring $50,000 to the Board of Education budget, in light of Dr. David Petrone’s letter dated May 22, 2020 addressed to John Elsesser. Dr. Petrone’s letter is an attachment to your June 1st Agenda under Item #7.A.

3. If this $50,000 is restored to the Board of Education, we do not support cutting the equivalent amount from any other part of the budget. We do understand this action will negatively impact your goal of a no tax increase. The tradeoff is for good reason.

Re our affirmative position on the budget, we wish to stress two points in particular:

First -- Re Coventry’s phenomenal & superior educational system. Our school system requires continued adequate financial support, more so during the current pandemic crisis. Without question, it is evident that our community supports and values our schools. The children in our community are our future. They need us now.

Second -- Re the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library. The library sits right up there at the top alongside our educational system. The volume of letters submitted to Audience of Citizens at your May 18th Council meeting stand as evidence of the value of the varied services provided by our town’s library and the community’s overwhelming support for these services. The town must continue its financial responsibility to the library without cutting the contribution provided in the proposed budget.

We fully understand the extreme and unusual difficulties facing our town, our state and our country at this point in time. We understand the need for fiscal responsibility, during both good times and bad. Sometimes, however, a goal has to be tweaked.

As longtime residents, our Coventry roots on Pucker Street run strong and deep. Our home is the Twerdy farm purchased by John’s parents 100 years ago. Like his parents, we raised our family here, we’ve watched Coventry grow into a well respected and valued community, we’ve both served and currently serve our town in various capacities, we care very much for the continued
well being of Coventry and its residents—long time residents like us and newcomers who have chosen Coventry for its values. These are all reasons why we support and ask that you adopt the current proposed budget, with the one increase to the Board of Education as we described above, to maintain the values of the Coventry we know and love.
Laura Stone

Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Booth and Dimock Library

From: Denise Twerdy <denni515@charter.net>
Sent: Friday, May 29, 2020 5:38 PM
To: TH - Budgetcomments <budgetcomments@coventryct.org>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Booth and Dimock Library

I am sending an additional note of support for the Booth and Dimock Library portion of the 20-21 budget proposal.

This valuable resource provides many programs that my family utilizes, especially for the youth in our town. My daughter has become active in its Teen Advisory Board. The Library supports her love of reading, but it also gives her a safe and social atmosphere where she can study, and can develop her independence and leadership skills.

Thank you again for your consideration,
Laura Twerdy

-------- Forwarded Message --------
Subject: Board of Education Budget Proposal
    Date: Fri, 29 May 2020 00:44:17 -0400
    From: Denise Twerdy <denni515@charter.net>
    To: budgetcomments@coventryct.org

I am writing today to express my support of the Board of Education's budget proposal. I appreciate and thank everyone who is involved in all the hard work and hours that have gone into both the Town and Board of Education budget proposals, especially given the incredible circumstances this year.

I am very proud of the Town of Coventry, and especially the Coventry school district. My daughter currently attends Coventry High School, and I have seen how much our programs have developed over the years. I know she will have opportunities in her future only made possible because of the quality of her education in our town.

I support the Board of Education budget as proposed, without further reduction.

Respectfully,
Laura Twerdy
730 Pucker Street
-----Original Message-----
From: dcinct@aol.com <dcinct@aol.com>
Sent: Saturday, May 30, 2020 8:25 AM
To: TH - Budgetcomments <budgetcomments@coventryct.org>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Town budget

To the counsel. I don’t think the town should be considering any type of budget that increases the residents property tax. What you should be doing while you’ve been sitting around the last month is getting a handle on how your going to reduce the budget make the proper cuts via layoffs, contracts should be put on hold and renegotiated. Nobody at this time should think they are deserving and should understand the plight of the residence who have incurred increased costs over the years. And now with uncertain futures and job losses the counsel should do its due diligence to cinch up its belt and reduce spending. When your economy is robust then most have no problem with little increases but at these trying times it would not be prudent to come at the tax payer.

On another note wasting tax payer money, who thought it was smart to put down chip seal in October no time to have pressed in before winter and watch the plows push all up on the side yard. Hence Heather lane. If there looking for work give them rakes and send up to heather lane and remove the stones. Heather lane is a band aid road that needs repair not quick fixes and done at the wrong time of year wasting tax payer money.

Since I have the opportunity to write this won’t be the last. You may have your wants or wish list but now is not the time you need to pass a bare bones budget or reduced budget and understand the times were in. To say that your counsel has the right to vote on how my money is being spent I disagree. If other towns have implemented drive up voting then why can’t we? This is my money and I should have every opportunity to vote and not leave it up to counsel to decide. I’m not happy with anyone idea that they think they have the right to put forth budgets without tax payer voting. This is unconstitutional. It is my right. I am the property owning job holding tax paying citizen and you have no right to make the decisions for me. All for now Dc Larson Bread and milk st.

Sent from my iPad
As the council presses forward with the budget I am writing again to express 2 major points.

The first is that the budget the council is presenting has not gone anywhere near far enough in reducing the amount of cost that will be passed on the the taxpayer. The country faces a massive economic hurdle. It is now more important than ever in our lifetimes to give people the control to make their own decisions with their money. No council, panel, board or beauracrat knows what the individual/families in our community face, and how and where their money goes needs to be their choice.

The method by which we collect taxes at town level is about as regressive as it comes. This means the impact will unquestionably be shouldered harder by those that even in the best of time can least afford it, not to mention how that impact will be felt during these uncertain times.

The taxpayers are already having to make hard choices, there is no excuse that the town should further that burden. If the people have to tighten the belt, the town does too, and significantly so. Allow voulentary human action to support things where those that can want to, but do not use the force of government to extort them.

The second issue is the process. The people of Coventry, regardless of whether or not they share my views on the contents of the budget are to be respected in their constitutionally protected right to their voice in its enacting. The town council absolutely must adhere to the state constitution and town charter and allow the people a vote.

There is no grounds that the governor can supercede these protected rights by unilateral executive privilege. Home rule is protected in the state of CT, and the crown, whether Lamont likes to admit it or not does not have authority to strip this from us.

As restrictions on operating ease across the state and we learn more and more about the virus that has lead us down this path it defies all logic and reason to think we cannot carry this out safely. Arguments to the contrary are nothing more than being willfully obtuse or worse divisive in an attempt to restrict and control the people.

The council has claimed many times for years, Democrat lead or republican, to stand for transparency, passing this without a vote is spit in the eye of all that believed you.

Other towns have stood up and said that these unconstitutional orders will not be followed, and taken the steps to protect the peoples rights Coventrys town council needs to find the courage to do the same.

Every member of this council swore an oath to the citizens to work for us, and to protect our rights. The charter and the constitution afford us this voice. If any members of the council do not wish to uphold their oath disrespectful to the people you represent, and an abomination to the founding principles of our state, our country, and the trust that needs to exist for government to operate.

If the council is still bent on moving forward with this you owe to the people an explanation. Every member of this council needs to go on record as to how this is in line with their oath and the constitutional issue it creates. No hiding, if you wish to strip the rights of the people, if you think that you have the power to do so you owe the citizens a clear explanation of how you rationalize that decision.

In my last email I asked the council to make a motion, have adequate discussion, and vote on record about the validity of their ability to move forward on this. I repeat this call again.

Government exists to protect the rights of, and serve the people. It is not the other way around, the town has obligations to its citizens. Respect that duty.
Good evening,

I am writing tonight to thank the Board of Education for their commitment to contributing as much as possible back to the town to support Town Council’s effort to achieve a 0% tax increase budget.

To date the BOE has achieved nearly $800K in contributions toward this goal through budget cuts, cost reductions, and their decision to give back 100% of the COVID closure related savings that have been realized and negotiated for.

Given that the COVID related savings number has increased substantially since the last report was made to the Town Council (going from a projected $158,000 in savings to $291,000, an increase of $133,000), I would ask that the Council vote to repeal the additional $50,00 cut in the BOE’s operating budget for next year, as the COVID savings have risen over $133,000, far outmatching the Council’s request.

The 2020-2021 school year is an unimaginably complex puzzle that the Board of Education will have to solve in a remarkably short period of time. The costs associated with being able to safely open Coventry’s schools to educate our students will be significant, no matter what that plan looks like. The Town Council’s 0% tax increase budget goal can still be met without the additional $50,000 cut, and the BOE will need those funds to support our staff and students.

Thank you for your time and your care for all of Coventry’s children in this matter.

Emma Eaton
41 Sean Circle
Amanda Backhaus

From: Jason Blakesley <jasonblakesley@live.com>
Sent: Monday, June 1, 2020 5:41 PM
To: Coventry Audience
Subject: [EXTERNAL] audience of citizens

Hi. I'm Jason Blakesley and I live at 27 Berry Avenue.

I was completely disgusted after watching a white police officer kneel on the neck of a black man for nearly 10 minutes, ultimately causing his death. Just as troubling, 3 officers sat by silent.

This type of behavior is eerily similar to our town council members remaining silent after learning about Mike Hicks' inappropriate comments to an innocent 15-year-old girl.

Just as concerning was that Councilwoman Thomas appeared annoyed last meeting that two letters from my wife and me were not related to the budget.

Apparently, speaking up for women that are victims seems to annoy a particular council member. If speaking up for victims bothers you, good, I'll speak up every day.

I've had people thank me for speaking up. Remember, as long as you can still breathe, you can still speak up.

It's been 8 months and cost the taxpayers $70,000 to investigate Mike Hicks.

Jason Blakesley
Dear Town Council Members,

The tragic death of George Floyd at the hands of a murderous police officer, and the following demonstrations have showed us American citizens demand accountability for police actions.

We have all watched videos of horrific scenes of violence and situations escalating way out of control. Despite our various strong opinions and emotions about these situations, we have all been witness to the anger across the United States. The citizens are calling for police abuse to stop.

The Citizens of the United States are calling for swift investigations and disciplines of those who don’t deserve to wear the badge. Citizens are asking towns and Police Chiefs to stand tall and brave against the police unions and their protections of abusive officers.

Predators, rapists, and sadistic individuals exist among us in every faction of society. The ones who find a way to slip into positions of law enforcement officers need to be weeded out and the fear must stop.

I remind the town Council of Officer Michael Hicks racist statements in the New York Times.

“I definitely notice that now more people I pull over, if they’re black, they right away turn on the lights and put their hands on the wheel,” Sergeant Hicks says. “I like that. It makes me feel safe.”

Why was Officer Hicks allowed to make those statements without discipline as he represented the Coventry Police Department?

EVERYONE should feel safe driving through Coventry, not just white men. Hick’s statement clearly demonstrates his bias.

Town Council, did you know Officer Hicks is a known liar to the Coventry Police? He was spoken to at length about his failure to tell the truth. He felt at liberty to lie about removing a weapon without permission from the armory and lie about carrying live ammunition without permission, amongst other lies he was caught in. He lied about what people told him, and what permissions he had.

Chief Beau Thurnauer, warned him explicitly, "I expect honesty and integrity in every action and activity performed as a representative of the Coventry Police Department. This includes contacts with the public as well as situations that may take you away from the Town. Any indication that you have strayed from this
policy in any way will result in discipline and or dismissal. Please keep this in mind as you proceed in your career. These ethical values should be pervasive not only in your on duty activities but when you are away from policing.

Officer Hicks did not listen to Chief Thurnauer’s advice apparently.

Officer Hicks is a liar and a predator! He chased around my 15 year old daughter while he was ON DUTY and intimidated her with his authority and groomed her to have sex with him. Pressured her to meet him when he was on duty in the dark at the Coventry Town Line when she was 15 years old. He pressured her for inappropriate photos constantly. My daughter was only FIFTEEN and she had to live with her constant fears that a POLICE OFFICER was stalking her and sexually harassing her. She had to live with the constant fear of what would happen to her or her family if she did not comply. She had to live with the constant fear of how to refuse to do these things without anything bad happening to her or anyone she loved. She was FIFTEEN years old minding her own business in her own home when Officer Michael Hicks began his pursuit. Just as shocking is that his own father Kenny Hicks, well known across Coventry and a long term fire department member, told Amber she is a dream girl that any guy would do anything to be with and she should remember that in a positive light, and he was acting out a fantasy at the time.

Well Coventry having a police officer who while ON DUTY acts out a fantasy of chasing around underage girls for sexual relations and photos and trying to meet them is frightening.

Chief Palmer today informed me the internal investigation is still ongoing.

I won’t let this be swept under the Police Department rug! I will continue to cooperate with the state police, CALEA, any attorney Coventry sends my way, the federal special agent working on this case and the media.

MY DAUGHTER MATTERS! What Officer Hicks did to her, and tried to do to her, matters! If my daughter is brave enough to come forward, and we are both brave enough to expose ourselves to the world and the dangers that go with it, be brave enough Coventry to do the right thing.

FREE COVENTRY YOUTH FROM A KNOWN PREDATOR!!

FIRE OFFICER HICKS!

Jennifer Burdette
154 Bear Swamp Road
Andover, CT
Good evening,

I am writing tonight to thank the Board of Education for their commitment to contributing as much as possible back to the town to support Town Council’s effort to achieve a 0% tax increase budget.

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Thank you for your time and your care for all of Coventry’s children in this matter.

Emma Eaton
41 Sean Circle