Minutes
Coventry Town Council Meeting
June 3, 2019
Town Hall Annex

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

2. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. Audience of Citizens:
   Joan Lewis read a resolution commending Coventry resident Harvey Barrette on 40 years of volunteer service.

   Lisa Thomas, 255 Geraldine Drive, appreciates the leadership of Joan Lewis, Chairwoman and Carolyn Arabolos, Finance Chairwoman in guiding us through two years of fiscally responsible budgeting. She urged the Council, when considering setting the mil rate on tonight’s agenda, to reduce the originally-proposed mil rate for reasons described in the Town Manager’s memo. She also thanked the Council for committing ongoing funds beginning with this budget to fight the invasive aquatic plants on Coventry Lake. Ms. Thomas’ full remarks are attached to these minutes.

4. Acceptance of Minutes:
   Motion #18/19-300: Mike Sobol moved to accept the minutes of the Town Council meeting on May 20, 2019. Jonathan Hand seconded the motion. The following corrections were requested:
   - Page 4, last paragraph, last line: add “through court action” to the end of the first sentence.
   The motion to approve the minutes carried with Carolyn Arabolos abstaining and all other members in favor.

5. Consent Agenda:
   Motion #18/19-301: Julie Blanchard moved to accept the consent agenda, seconded by Lisa Conant. Matthew O’Brien requested to remove item 6.D.1. The motion to accept the Consent Agenda as amended carried on unanimous vote.

6. Reports:
   A. Council Chairwoman – Joan Lewis: Joan said that yesterday she had the privilege of attending an Eagle Scout ceremony where 4 Coventry young men, Alden Jennings, Kenny Boland, Zachary Hattan, and Brett Aberle, attained Eagle Scout rank. The projects they chose were great, including the construction of a new storage shed at the Brick School House, benches for Laidlaw Soccer field, an outdoor reading courtyard at Booth & Dimock Library, and reconstruction of an outdoor classroom at the middle school.

   Joan also gave an update on the School Readiness Committee, which met in May. The grant application is in and should be approved in July. It brings in about $135,000 and we expect it will be approved. We received preliminary notice that we will receive funding for the three Smart Start classes. This brings hundreds of thousands of dollars in for the preschool. Mary Beth Moyer has already met with 35 families who will be using this assistance, families that might not
otherwise be able to attend.

Joan said she asked John Elsesser to put in information with regard to the proposed tolls. It is still a moving item, but information came in from the Governor’s office and CT DOT about projects the tolls will pay for, as well as article by Dan Haar about the cost of borrowing vs. tolls. Her real concern would be that if money is borrowed for our roads we wouldn’t receive some of the money we receive today such as code reimbursement, LOCIP and STEAP. Our roads and bridges have to be improved. It’s not as simple as saying “let’s just borrow.” There are many things that may be lost. Joan also shared some emails we received from people opposed to the no-tolls resolution. Joan also asked the Town Manager to calculate costs - at the time the no-tolls resolution was proposed we didn’t have accurate figures. John Elsesser said he had to do certain assumptions based on the route traveled. Traveling I-384 during peak would be an increase of approximately $122.50 per year, and $20 less off-peak. One of the plans discussed a 5 cents per gallon reduction in the gas tax. Based on a car traveling at 19 miles per hour it would be about $25 per year in savings. There are other proposals for a low-income person’s discount - we don’t have those figures yet. If you get on I-84 in Vernon you would be doubling that, and getting on I-84 in Tolland would be tripling that.

Joan asked how many Council members plan to attend the high school awards ceremony on Wednesday at 7 PM in Veterans Auditorium. If you are coming to present an award, you should be there by 6:45 PM. Lisa and Jonathan said yes. Mike and Matthew said maybe. Julie Blanchard said no. Joan said we have six awards to present.

B. Council members:
Lisa Conant said that the Coventry Farmers Market is open for summer the season. Lisa and John attended to open the market for the season. She was also honored to march in the Memorial Day parade with John, Joan, Jonathan and Matt. Matthew said that Main Street looked wonderful.

Carolyn Arabolos said there was an article in the Hartford Courant announcing that Coventry resident Cynthia Dee was named school district teacher of the year. She had turned down the teacher of year nomination in the past but was told this year she can’t. The article is attached to these minutes.

Jonathan Hand also said it was an honor to march in the parade. It is a great tribute to our fallen heroes and a real showcase of the town. He is proud to be from here and was proud to be there.

Joan Lewis noted that the CHS baseball team is going into semi-finals.

C. Steering Committee: Jonathan Hand:

Reappointments:
Motion #18/19-302: Jonathan Hand moved to reappoint John Elsesser to the Eastern Highlands Health District, term to expire 6/7/2022. The motion was seconded by Matthew O’Brien and carried on unanimous vote.

Appointments:
Motion #18/19-303: Jonathan Hand moved to appoint Laura Mirante to the Ad-hoc Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee, term to expire 5/31/2021. The motion was seconded by Matthew O’Brien and carried on unanimous vote.

Motion #18/19-304: Jonathan Hand moved to appoint Peter Kelly to the Veterans Memorial
Commission, term to expire 1/1/2020. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard and carried on unanimous vote.

D. 1: Finance Committee Minutes:
Matthew O’Brien removed this item from the consent agenda to ask several questions. The Finance Director said we received the final ECS payment and it was more because they did a true-up. He asked how much it is. Amanda Backhaus replied about $8,000.

The minutes also said that regular monthly bills for COVRA have gone up $30,000 due to the Stewart clean up. John Elssesser replied it is not monthly. Amanda said the monthly bill is going up but it will be about $30,000 annually. The Stewart clean-up was about $45,000. Matthew said he is curious what we’re projecting for annual recycling costs. Amanda replied that this year we were charged $95/ton for dirty recycling fines which wipes out the $30/ton credit. Costs next year will depend on what the Council does on Willimantic Waste’s request for relief. Matthew asked the amount of our annual tonnage. Amanda replied it is around 1,000 tons.

On page 3 item 2 of the minutes there is a discussion about special education volatility. Matthew said that the Board of Education minutes said the student left the district April 1. He said this is upsetting and should have been brought to the Council’s attention immediately. He wants to know when the Board learned this child was leaving Coventry and if it was known prior to budget deliberations. Joan said she understands what Matthew is saying, but we all know what a special education budget is and another child could move in tomorrow. Matthew said his point is we should have been notified during our budget deliberations and he is disappointed we were not.

E. COVRA – John Elssesser:
1. Mattress recycling: Mattress recycling will be changing. There has been a program in operation where the State imposed a $9 fee when you buy a mattress. In exchange they provide a disposal box and mattresses can be brought there. Mattresses have to be recycled per state law. Willimantic Waste informed us that the mattresses collected curbside are too damaged to be recycled and they are being included in our tonnage at $67/ton. So we are not in compliance with State law and we’re paying when we don’t need to be paying. So our recommendation is we immediately change our current practice, and get a container at the transfer station. We will start in August. People can bring their mattresses to the transfer station at no charge. They can either pay for disposal when the new mattress is delivered, or ask a neighbor if they can’t get to the transfer station on their own. We want people to have a little advance notice but we think we have an obligation both financially and legally to make this change. Matthew O’Brien asked how many mattresses are recycled. Amanda Backhaus replied about 70 a month. John noted that curbside pick-up of mattresses is also unsightly. This change is a bit of a rush but we would like to announce it in the tax bill that goes out this month. Council consensus was to make this change. Matthew suggested including an item about it in the fall newsletter. Carolyn asked how many mattresses the unit holds and how often it is emptied. John replied it will be emptied as needed. We want to make it clear we only have one employee down there so he can’t help unload.

2. Consideration/possible action: Set FY 2019-20 COVRA Rate: John Elssesser said that the Council can discuss this under executive session too, if they want to talk there and make a motion afterwards. Matthew O’Brien noted the projected end of year balance. John said we think we can risk a one-year hold at the current rate and see how it works out. We thought we were going to lose money and we didn’t. It’s working. Motion #18/19-305: Matthew O’Brien moved to hold the FY 2019-20 COVRA rate at the current rate. Julie Blanchard seconded the motion. Carolyn Arabolos asked if there is a possibility it could be reduced. John replied he is not comfortable with that. Jonathan Hand noted that the structure of fees will change a lot with the
increase in recycling fees, but maybe we won’t get hit with so many fines. **Motion #18/19-305 carried on unanimous vote.**

**F. Town Manager – John Elsesser:**

1. **Projects Update.**
   - John Elsesser provided additional details on Town projects. He noted that the House passed the aquatic invasive fee which will bring some money in to cover Hydrilla treatment. Now it goes to the Senate where the outcome is not certain. Joan Lewis said she thinks we should ask as a Council that Sen. Champagne support this. Matthew O’Brien said he did that today. John Elsesser will also communicate this. Matthew said he thinks it is vitally important. John noted that Rep. Ackert supported it.
   - Police radio installations are making good progress but the new system is not live yet. The State has gotten backed up with lots of other things.
   - Matthew O’Brien asked for a status on oil tank replacements and whether there is any information about potential fines. John said no, typically if CT DEEP decides if there is a violation they will fine you. Sometimes you can appeal. We spent time working with Bill Trudelle, Bob Carroll and Amanda Backhaus doing value engineering – using smaller tanks, which is not a huge change. We were also able to get some reductions in the number of protective bollards, and downsized the size of the fuel line at Robertson. We negotiated for the Town Hall and Library tank removals – those will be done for $20,000. We went back to the two lowest bidders and asked that contracts be made up. The tanks at the elementary schools can be done over the summer, but the high school and middle school will have to be done in fall. We want to get moving. We have made some progress but it is slightly disappointing. Had we gone out to redesign and re-bid we would have had to go back to the State and with the risk of fines we probably wouldn’t save. Joan thanked everyone for their efforts to try and resolve this.
   - Microgrid update: A draft of the contract with technical specs has been reviewed. The contract from CT DEEP is expected any day. We are holding weekly conference calls with all of the players. The vendor met with the Housing Authority and was authorized to apply for a mid-size Z-Rec for solar that would go on the Housing Authority property. That would help with the rates. We did a walkthrough of each of heating system to do final design specs. We will be installing some sub-meters at the high school. We’re starting to feel a lot more comfortable that it’s a real thing. We doubt we will have the contract in time to discuss it at the Finance/Fiscal joint meeting on Thursday. Matthew O’Brien said he read the Board minutes and was encouraged to hear they said it would be cheaper. They also said it would come back to the full boards and he would want that.
   - Lisa Conant asked for an update on the turf issues at Miller Richardson field. John replied that there are no football leagues anymore, and since we are low on manpower with the Public Works Director out on leave, we are going to wait until he gets back to work on this project. There is some methane gas so the engineer is recommending plastic piping to let it vent. It is a simple landscaping project. Joan asked if then there would be more testing. John replied that the landfill is tested four times a year. Matthew O’Brien asked how extensive the piping is. John replied that we have a plan we can share. Mike Sobol asked if the field could be used for softball. John said yes. Mike asked how extensive the work would be. John replied it would be fairly easy - skimming the grass off and adding a backpack, probably top-dressing and over-seeding. We don’t have water up there but we are looking at the well at the baseball field for yields. We are ready to start irrigation for the major league field. Mike asked if the softball field study committee is looking at that area. Joan Lewis said they are, but they are concerned about kids’ health as a result of the
methane. John said there are a lot of sports fields on closed landfills. CT DEEP gave us a permit for this.

- Jones Crossing Bridge is closing for replacement on June 17th. Equipment mobilization begins next week.
- Corin Construction has been hired to do the rubberized chip seal on Daly Road at the end of this month when it gets a little warmer.
- Engineers will be interviewed this week for the Swamp Road project.

2. NCS Community Livability Survey: John Elsesser said that a summary of Coventry’s results has been released and there is a lot of information there. We think we may want to look at it in depth at the next consortium meeting. You can see why we stayed with the same company – you can see how things change over time. In the comparison to other communities we think we look pretty good, except we do not have enough mass transit. Under economic development, there is a lot of support for commercial development that might be surprising given what we hear from vocal groups. We haven’t typically held consortium meetings in the summer, but we think it is important to share this information and have discussions. We got a high response rate, and kept the opt-in responses separate to preserve validity. There were no real statistical differences between the two groups. Carolyn Arabolos said she was surprised that a large number of respondents feel we should encourage commercial development. We hear about preserving the Town’s rural character but there is a lot of support for development. John said that’s why it’s good to get a broad reach. One key element is that people like living here. Carolyn said it’s also important to people that roads be improved maintained.

7. Unfinished Business:
A. Consideration/Possible Action: Proposed Pension Plan Amendments. Not ready for action.

8. New Business:
18/19-76: Consideration/Possible Action: Establishment Of Mil Rate For FY 2019/20: John Elsesser said that additional information was emailed out, and in the folder tonight is a flyer from COST on what is in the budget implementer. We don’t know if it passed or not. The bottom line is we already guessed that teacher retirements won’t be in and that has been confirmed. We also knew about ECS prior to the Town Meeting. We are close to being able to go with a zero mil increase. We are somewhere between $9,000-$20,000 short, which would mean a two decimal rate which we have never done. Rounding leaves us at the current mil rate. Motion #18/19-306: Carolyn Arabolos moved that the Town Council adopt a zero mil rate increase for Fiscal Year 2019/2020. Lisa Conant seconded the motion.

Matthew O’Brien read a statement expressing his opinion on the mil rate process (full remarks attached to minutes). He feels there should have been no tax increase or a .1 decrease last year, and that we should be lowering the FY 2019/20 mil rate by .1. Joan Lewis replied that we have discussed this fully in the past. Some may not agree but we believe our actions on the mil rate last year were appropriate and effective. Carolyn Arabolos said as we went into deliberations to set the mil rate last year, a .4 increase had been recommended based on the information we had available at the time of the Town Meeting. The Finance Committee brought the increase down to .2, for reasons which included Hydrilla treatment, and overages in snow removal overtime and road salt. Dollars would have come out of fund balance and we had concerns about our credit rating and a potential interest rate increase for borrowing. The mil rate was approved on a 5-2 bipartisan vote. This year the proposed budget was approved unanimously and we were hoping we would not have to do an additional increase, which is where we are. Joan Lewis said we also wanted to make sure we preserved our bond rating. We did not know about the extent of the Hydrilla treatment cost until after the budget passed. The lake is one of the most valuable
resources we have. We have the Hydrilla treatment expense in the budget now and we won’t have
to increase the budget for that. The taxpayers did approve the budget with a projected mil
increase of .4.

Further discussion ensued about the mil rate setting process from the previous two years. Joan
Lewis noted that the previous Council set a .8 mil increase without going to Town Meeting.
Matthew O’Brien pointed out that there were many factors at that time, including mid-year State
budget cuts, and that the Council felt it was prudent to take those steps. He noted that the
taxpayers vote on spending when voting on the Town budget and that it has nothing to do with
the mil rate. Joan said there are many decisions that must be made and there are disagreements.
The current Council majority is comfortable that we are making a responsible decision in setting
the mil rate. Motion #18/19-306 carried on unanimous vote. John Elsesser thanked the Council
for taking action tonight – it gives staff an opportunity to get the tax bills out on time, so it is very
helpful.

B. 18/19-77: Consideration/Possible Action: Amended Investment Policy: John Elsesser said
that this matter was discussed and recommended by the Steering Committee. Amanda Backhaus
said our advisor has proposed some changes to the policy to allow a little more flexibility. It
opens up the possibility of looking at additional options. There are no significant changes.
Motion #18/19-307: Jonathan Hand moved to authorize the Town Manager to execute the
amended investment policy as presented. The motion was seconded by Matthew O’Brien
and carried on unanimous vote.

C. Purchase and Sales Agreement, 16 Swamp Road: John Elsesser said we could discuss this
in executive session, although the price is based on an appraisal. Mike Sobol noted than an edit is
needed under section 3 and section 9. Matthew O’Brien said that a comma is missing under 13C
between purchaser and seller’s rights. John said because we have not done this before we want
the Town Engineer to meet with the CT DOT right-of-way people to make sure they are happy
and will give us the money. Typically, real estate acquisition has to go to a Town Meeting but if it
is funded by state or federal government then a Town Meeting is not required. Matthew asked
what guarantee we have of reimbursement. John replied we have a commitment to fund letter but
we want specific agreement on this portion. Matthew asked where the funds will come from. John
replied fund balance. Sometimes we get the money up front. Matthew asked if an A-2 survey is
required. John said no, but we will have one because it is part of engineering. We would like to
move for the benefit of the family who is ready to relocate but can’t until this house is sold.
Motion #18/19-308: Lisa Conant moved to authorize the purchase and sale agreement for
the property at 16 Swamp Road as amended. The motion was seconded by Carolyn
Arabolos and carried on unanimous vote.

10. Executive session:
Motion #18/19-309: Matthew O’Brien moved that the Town Council enter into Executive
Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1-200(6)(E)-discussion of any matter
which would result in the disclosure of public records or the information therein contained
described in sub-section (b) of Section 1-210 with the following people in attendance: Town
Council members present, the Town Manager and the Finance Director. The motion was
seconded by Jonathan Hand and carried on unanimous vote.

Motion #18/19-310: 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 8:50 PM.

Motion #18/19-311: 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 #18/19-312: 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.
My name is Lisa Thomas. I live at 255 Geraldine Drive.

I note that on your agenda tonight is new business item 8.A. to set the mil rate for fiscal year 2019-2020. I very much appreciate the leadership of Joan Lewis, Council Chairwoman and Carolyn Arabolos, Finance Committee Chairwoman in guiding us through two years of fiscally responsible budgeting. This is what you promised us when you asked for our vote and you have delivered. I notice that the Town Manager suggests in his memo that the Council can consider setting a 0 mil increase for the next fiscal year. I know that the minority members of the Council recently opposed a proactive resolution to reduce the mil rate if that became an option, but I encourage you to strongly consider reducing the originally proposed mil rate for the reasons described in the Town Manager’s memo. The current budget and the one for next fiscal year have been a refreshing change of direction from 3 years ago when that Town council leadership refused to follow the normal budget process outlined in our town charter and imposed an unnecessary .8 mil rate.

On a side note, though a very important issue for our town, thank you for committing ongoing funds beginning with this budget to fight the invasive aquatic plants in Coventry Lake. I served on Town Council when the CLEAN Team presented their findings concerning the devastating impact to our town revenues and recreational opportunities should the lake become overrun by hydrilla, curly leaf pond weed and other invasives.

My apologies if I have to leave before you consider the budget question. Please accept my appreciation in advance.

Thank you for your time this evening.
June 3, 2019 Town Council meeting
Agenda item 8.A. 18/19-76 . Consideration/Possible Action: Establishment of Mil Rate for FY 2019/2020 (E)

I want to thank our Finance Director, Amanda Backhaus for providing the supporting documents that show that there is no need for a tax increase to balance our budget again this year.

I think it is important to point out that last year we had a similar situation. The final state budget restored all of our school and road grants that the governor proposed cutting and even increased them – completely eliminating the need to raise taxes at all last year. And the Council knew that because we had them wait to make their mil rate decision until the state budget was passed.

Last year the Council majority passed a mil rate increase to 32.2 mils even though only 31.89 mils would have balanced our budget. Then they came up with reasons how they could justify taking the almost $300,000 dollars more from Coventry taxpayers. Reasons that were never included in our budget. The opportunity presented itself and the majority took advantage of it. And that was wrong.

It has been said repeatedly that the Council raised the mil rate to pay for the Aquatic Invasive Species - Hydrilla Lake treatment but this is just not true.

In June of 2018, the Town Council appropriated $95,000 from the general fund to set them aside for the lake treatments. The Council majority said they were raising the mil rate to replace those funds and make that money available in our taxes every year going forward. The funds were not needed at that point and $54,800 of them remain unspent today. On top of that, our state legislators have proposed a bill, that is currently under consideration in Hartford, that would provide substantial funding to offset Coventry’s costs for future treatments. And finally, leaving the mil rate at 32 mils in 2019, a no tax increase, would have generated over $100,000 more than was needed to balance the budget, which could have been used towards lake treatments, if it was needed. We should have had no tax increase or a .1 mil tax decrease last year too.

I am glad that the Council majority is not following the same path as they did last year when they raised taxes by $300,000 more than we needed to balance our budget.

Additionally, it is very upsetting that the Board of Education did not make the Town Council aware that a special education student had left the district at a savings of $100,000 in the 2020 budget before the Council voted to send next year’s budget to referendum.

Rightfully, the Council should be lowering our mil rate by at least .1 mil tonight.

Unfortunately, once funds are appropriated to the Board of Education, in the budget referendum, the Board has complete discretion over spending them.

Given that a no tax increase budget appears to be the best we can do at this time.

Matthew O’Brien
Coventry Town Council
Calculations showing 2019 revenue generated from a 31.89 mil rate, a 32 mil rate and a 32.2 mil rate

Amount of taxes needed to balance the 2019 budget was $30,407,398.*

The value of one mil was $953,453

1) The mil rate needed to balance the 2019 appropriated budget was:
$30,407,398 / $953,453 = 31.89 mils

2) Keeping the mil rate steady at 32 mils (no tax increase) in 2019 would have generated:
32 mils x $953,453 = $30,510,496

3) A mil rate of 32 mils would generate how much more than was needed to balance the 2019 budget?
$30,510,496 - $30,407,398 = $103,098

4) A mil rate of 32.2 mils will generate how much in 2019?
32.2 mils x $953,453 = $30,701,186

5) How much more that the $30,407,398 that was needed to balance the budget will the 32.2 mils rate generate?
$30,701,186 - $30,407,398 = $294,001

*From the Town Manager’s budget presentation and this figure is included in the town’s monthly financial statements every month during the 2018-2019 fiscal year.
East Hartford top teacher finally can’t refuse honor

BY JESSE LEAVENWORTH

EAST HARTFORD — Cynthia Dee held balloons and hugged former students who made a surprise visit to her classroom Friday after school officials named her district teacher of the year.

"You guys! You’ve grown up!" the East Hartford High School health sciences teacher said as the young men and women took turns embracing her.

Dee had turned down school teacher of the year nominations several times before, district human resources Director Christopher Wethje said. But she is retiring this year, and high school Principal Matthew Ryan over-rode her refusal.

"Mrs. Dee takes the daily tasks of a teacher to another level. ... She is here every day for every one of her students," Ryan said.

"It is very clear to me," School Superintendent Nathan Quesnel said, "that Cynthia Dee is a teacher who walks into her classroom every day with her focus in exactly the right place: What do the students need to learn, and how can I help them learn it?"

Dee, who taught for 19 years at Manchester High School, launched the health occupations program at East Hartford High. Students who complete the two-year program take a certified nursing assistant test. School officials said Dee’s students have had a 100 percent success rate in passing the test.

Dee said she sees the program as a starting point, and the former students who visited her proved the truth of that. They are working now as nurses and medical assistants at rehabilitation facilities, the state Department of Children and Families and other businesses and nonprofit organizations.

"I’m so proud of all of you," Dee said as former and current students and school and district staff members enjoyed cake.

Class of 2013 graduate Steve Adu, who works as a nurse in Westfield, Mass., praised Dee for helping him "find a passion that I didn’t know I had," Adu said.

Her teaching certification from St. Joseph’s College. She worked as a nurse and then taught health and science courses at Manchester High before coming to East Hartford High in 2008.

School officials also named Karen Strand as the district’s paraprofessional of the year on Friday. Strand works with small groups of students, assisting with reading intervention, at O’Connell Elementary School, a district release said.

"She loves helping children learn how to read and believes in the power of relationships with children to encourage students to see their own potential," the release said.

Dee shares a laugh with former student Dion Reid, Class of 2013, who now works at Hartford Hospital.

East Hartford High School health sciences teacher Cynthia Dee, center, gets a hug from former student Vivian Saint-Hilaire as another former student, Priscilla Cotto, distributes cake. Dee was named the district’s teacher of the year Friday afternoon.