1. **Call To Order, Roll Call:**
The meeting was called to order by Blanchard at 6:31 p.m.

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

Members absent:
Matthew O’Brien, Sr. - Vice Chair

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

2. **New Business:**
2.A. 19/20-77: Consideration/Possible Action: Town Council Statement On The Death Of George Floyd
Blanchard prepared a statement trying to make it clear this was being written by the Council Chair. Blanchard’s statement denounced violence by the police support of our police department. Elsesser shared this statement with Chief Palmer who provided comments back. Based on Blanchard’s statement other Members provided ideas for a Council statement.

Thomas likes what Conant drafted and shared. Our statement should be about supporting our police department and all in our community. Conant feels the comments made by the Chief have to be taken under advisement, although they probably lend them more to a task force rather than brief concise statement. Conant wants the Council’s statement to speak to the issues the community is talking about. Chief Palmer has already incorporated Eight Cant’ Wait; our police department is getting a lot of criticisms right now. Some could be deflected by showing the good things they do have in place. Hand added the statement Conant put forward is a nice draft; it covered much ground that needs to be covered coming from the entire Council. O’Brien, Jr. stated Conant’s draft is basically Blanchard’s statement while adding in support for the community.

Blanchard does not want to give the public the impression she needs to coach our police department. Blanchard has faith and believe the department is well-trained. They don’t practice choking.
Thomas advocates for a statement that expresses support for our community, especially for people of color in our community. The Council’s statement should not list police department policy. We can set up a task force or community conversations where police policy can be discussed and provide education in the community. Thomas continued that the Council needs to stand by all people living in our community. Hand agrees that is what is needed. Conant’s draft statement had a lot of that included. Conant was throwing out concept steps and ways to move forward and ways to support the community. The third paragraph speaks to the community. Blanchard is not sure what the paragraph is referencing with prejudice and racism in the community. Conant has seen swastikas on signs and on the playground at CGS. Others have seen disturbing Facebook posts. It is here, it is everywhere and it is important for the Council to address it. O’Brien, Jr. asked if we can be specific about those examples? Thomas replied those could be included. Blanchard agreed the third paragraph is a good starting point.

Blanchard continued the second paragraph speaks to senseless deaths at the hands of the police; that is not happening in Coventry. Conant replied it is not but we don’t want it to happen. You never know what may happen. Rogue officers can appear at any time even with a good chief running the department. Elsesser added the second paragraph references only the black community. That can be expanded on (people of color, community of color) because that is what is being talked about now. Blanchard would skip mentioning any group, or race, or color, or anything. We are one. Blanchard mentioned Thomas expressed the idea of mentioning how kids are dealing with this. Thomas responded her mindset was that she is spending the majority of her time with mostly black families and they are incredibly traumatized right now. Bottom line, our statement should be focused on the welfare, health, and needs of our community; we don’t specifically have to reference children. Our BOE is being urged by former and current students to do some self-examination. Sometimes we don’t recognize some of the things we do are racist, that are systemically ingrained. The BOE needs to address that.

Thomas agrees with Conant’s reference to ‘most of the nation is appalled. We can say systemic and cultural racism in our country’ and in the third paragraph talk about ‘there is still much work to be done and uncomfortable conversations to be had to prevent this sort of violence or dismantle this type of racism in Coventry’. Also suggested was ‘moving together as a united community that does not tolerate acts of racism either overt or covert’. The Council would be making the commitment to lead that effort. Maybe we can be in partnership with clergy and other leaders in the community to hold those conversations. Invite local NAACP. Thomas and Chris Pattee are members of NAACP.

Elsesser has noted the following from Conant’s statement and the discussion:
Like most nations the Coventry Town Council is appalled by the brutal murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police on Memorial Day. We are equally appalled, unequivocally reject and condemn the systemic and structural racism in our country. Floyd’s death was yet another example of century long history of pain and acts of violence inflicted on people of color in the name of prejudice, bigotry and hate. We support the _____ protestors who are speaking out of George Floyd’s death and the senseless acts of racism. Sadly we have observed cases of racism and prejudice in our community such as racist graffiti, harmful Facebook posts, and micro-aggressions. There is still much work to be done and uncomfortable conversations to be had to counteract bigotry and this sort of racism from ever happening in Coventry. George Floyd’s death is a call
upon us to take action. In addition to supporting peaceful protests we support community conversation on how we can work together to have a better and more inclusive community.

Thomas wants to see the words ‘overt and covert’ included. Thomas thinks a lot of people don’t understand that racism happens in a lot of ways. It is not just slurs but in other acts also.

Hand stated he likes the direction this is taking. The Council is moving in the correct direction speaking to the people in our community and trying to reach them. Let them know we see you, we hear you, and we recognize you as members of our community. And we will be here to support you. We are the elected leaders of the Town. O’Brien, Jr. can see that point of view not having been said yet.

The redrafted statement will go to all Council Members to review and provide comments back to Blanchard. She will revise the statement and resend it. This is a working document. The intent would be to have the Council adopt the statement at the next Council meeting.

2.A.1. Resources From Coventry Public Schools

3. Adjournment:

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.