1. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Matt O’Brien Jr. at 7:01 pm.
   In attendance were: Matt O’Brien Jr., Julie Blanchard, Lisa Conant (via zoom), and John Hand (Zoom)
   Also in attendance: Amanda Backhaus, Finance Director and Police Chief Mark Palmer

2. **Acceptance of minutes:** Lisa made a motion to accept the minutes of February 24, 2020. The motion was seconded by Jon. The following corrections were requested:
   - Page 2 – First paragraph – 6th line down – should be “commented” rather than “comment”
   - Page 2 – second paragraph – 1st line – “O’Brien Jr. said it” should be “O’Brien Jr. said it is”

Motion to accept the minutes as corrected carried unanimously.

3. **Reports:**
   A. **Committee Chair:** None noted
   B. **Committee Members:** None noted
   C. **Possible recommendations/Vacancy List/Board & Commission List:** Matt noted we have been doing well and have a few to address this evening. Julie thought we had approved the reappointment of Albert Bradley to the HUD Housing Rehab – back in December 2019. Amanda will follow up with Lori and prior minutes to confirm.

Matt moved to move up agenda item 10. Motion seconded by Jon and passed unanimously.

10. **Discussion/Possible Action: Dialogue with Police Department Regarding Various Racial Concerns:**
    Matt noted that he invited Chief Palmer in today for an open discussion about recent events and how they have affected the community and the Department. He noted there has been several policies passed and additional proposed legislation affecting Police and he felt it was important to open up the dialogue between the community and the Department.

Julie noted Chief Palmer was chosen to be the Town’s Chief through panel selection based on experience and she noted that he continues to do well for our community and he continues to direct our police department in a professional direction, especially with the CALEA accreditation. She notes that Chief was asked to come tonight so they can understand how recent events have affected everyone as of recently and how can the Council assist the police department going forward.

Chief Palmer noted that back in June he submitted a memo to the Town Manager outlining various policy changes that were being proposed at the State and Federal level and how these policies would impact Coventry. He noted the “8 Can’t Wait Campaign” which outlines eight changes that are being evaluated for immediate implementation. He has gone through each one and outlined how our department complies with each of these and notes that they have been meeting them for several years. Part of the process of being accredited involves being up to date on best practices and policies. He notes we just received our report from CALEA, and while he can make no guarantees he believes the department will be re-accredited in July.
Chief Palmer then went on to discuss military police equipment. He noted the recent list that was published in the news was not a comprehensive list. The Town received a Humvee in 2013 as a result of significant snow storms in 2012. At that time, the department had only Crown Vics, which prohibited the officers from answering calls in the snow. Military markings were removed from the Humvee and it was marked as a patrol car and the gun turret was immediately removed. This vehicle is also used for public relations events such as Touch a Truck and others. Chief noted the vehicle is used less now since we have changed our fleet to be SUVs but it is still used occasionally. The Town also received M16 rifles. He notes there are a number of critical issues in which the handgun does not have the functionality the rifle has – especially in terms of long range distance. One rifle was ordered for each officer. Money was spent to make the rifles more like civilian type and all guns were permanently converted to semi-automatic only. Chief noted he is hoping to replace the rifles with proceeds from selling the previous boat – at which time the rifles we currently have are required to go back to the federal government.

Chief noted the department has been lucky to receive a lot of other equipment as well: eye goggles for fire arms training, almost 250 chem lights, capability set (portable PA system) which has been used by several Town agencies, 3 sets of binoculars, brand new laser jet printer, speaker bars for computer monitors and various medical supplies. The CT Chiefs Association on a 90-day moratorium on getting more military equipment but he does not expect that to last long. He notes that what is available is much more than just vehicles and weapons. The equipment is all available for free and overall helps save the Town money.

Chief has brought with him an article out of the Post from June 15 titled “CT Police Departments have lacked diversity for years”. Chief agrees that this is a true statement and that minorities and women are in high demand. Chief is proud to say we have had hired 2 female officers and 2 Hispanic officers in recent years. He has wanted to hire an African American officer. He noted in the last batch of applications there were only three who applied and they will be considered based on qualifications.

In addition to the “8 Can’t Wait” campaign, there is also “Campaign Zero” regarding ending police violence in America. There are 10 goals on this campaign. One item is community oversight. Some departments have or are looking for civilian review boards. Chief feels we have that through the oversight of the Town Manager and the Town Council, especially during serious complaints. Matt noted there has been talk of a subcommittee on social media so Steering should take a look into that. Another item in the campaign is stop and frisk, which Chief noted our department does not do. Another item is establishing standards on reporting use of deadly force. Chief feels our policy on use of deadly force is strong and possibly one of the best in the State. Deadly force is used absolutely last. Our policy also includes that the officer has to give verbal warning to alert the recipient. To Chief’s knowledge – we have never had a police officer from our department shoot and kill someone. Matt asked if a verbal warning is given for non-deadly force. Chief confirmed a warning is always given – he outlined the example of use of tasers. The department already reports to the open justice database to report use of force and related deaths. Another item in the campaign is high speed police chases. Coventry’s pursuit policy is very strict. We do not follow for traffic violations or stolen vehicles – pursuits are only done with a serious crime or when a person is in danger. The campaign also includes language to hold officers accountable for use of force. Chief notes that any time there is more than simple handcuffing – struggle, taser, pepper spray, baton – a report is required to be completed by the officer and is then reviewed by supervisor. We then review the body camera video and take statements of any witnesses. This report then goes to Chief for final review. Matt asked Chief to elaborate about cameras. Chief noted that body cameras have been used since 2015. Each officer has one. Any time an officer has interaction with a citizen, the camera is required to be turned on. Videos are stored in house which
saves us money. The videos are backed up in an offsite location with a duplicate server in case one fails. Supervisors review three random body camera videos each month for each officer to ensure the cameras are being used properly and the officers are acting appropriately. The in-car camera is activated when the lights and sirens are put on. Also there is a manual activation switch. There are two cameras – one in front of the car pointing forward and one facing the back seat where a prisoner would be held. Video is mandatory for any time a prisoner is transported. This is activated automatically by sound.

Lisa thanked the Chief for being informative and thorough. She inquired about policies in regards to discrimination. Chief noted we have a very strict policy called “bias based profiling” which covers discrimination by any means: Race, gender, religion or any group. This is a strict policy on no discrimination and profiling. Each year, we keep track of traffic stops and this is annually reviewed by Chief. He reviews race and gender totals for each officer and performs a statistical analysis. This data is also transferred to the IMP group out of CCSU, which is contracted by OPM to annually review the traffic statistics of every police department in the entire State. They identify agencies where statistically they have identified profiling. Coventry has never had issues. IMP group then takes a deeper dive to see if there are reasons for the potential profiling – population ethnicity breakouts of surrounding areas etc.

Chief noted that the senate democrats published their agenda for the upcoming session today. This list included ban chokeholds, prosecutor reform, and decertifying police officers for misconduct. CT Post academy already has a process to decertify officers, including for felony charges or other crimes such as purgery or lying. Also, they decertify officers who resign as a result of an ongoing investigation or disciplinary action. The State’s list also included banning no knock warrants and the duty to intervene. This means officers are required to intervene to stop excessive force – regardless of rank. The State’s list also included requiring the use of body cameras, which as mentioned Coventry already does. Chief does not know what the whole bill will look like but those are a few of the major items.

The State’s list also included increased training. Chief noted that our department already does a significant amount of training. Chief noted that officers spend about 15-20% of their time on training. Some we do in house, with several of the officers presenting. Matt asked if Chief sets the training standards for the department. Chief said he does but in addition, there are State standards which include 60 hours every 3 years plus 8 hours of fire arm training. Chief noted Coventry far exceeds those standards. We also have a document management system that allows easy distribution of updated policies and procedures to the department. Officers are required to take tests for policies of serious nature, such as use of force.

Jon thanked Chief for the explanation on current policies as well as providing us with information on those things coming across his desk. Jon asked if there was any racial sensitivity training or de-escalation training. Chief noted that the officers get them both in academy training and once every three years as part of the POST requirements. There is also upcoming training on the LBGTQ community addressing nomenclature, sensitivity and how to search people who are a different sex or transgender and how to handle that in an appropriate manner.

Chief noted a number of policies are available on the website – use of force, non-documented immigrants, and a handful of others available. There is a way the Town can publish all public policies using its document management system – it is called public facing policies - but it would cost about $2,500. Policies change quite frequently and often change based on new standards or identifying weaknesses. It would be a significant amount of work to maintain all policies on the website without
the document management system. Chief noted that perhaps in the future we can make this available. A few are private due to operational sensitivity but the majority are available to the public.

Jon noted the military rifles that Chief spoke about in the beginning of the meeting have been modified. He was wondering if Chief could speak to the ammunition used and its appropriateness. Chief noted we use 223 caliber – it is a civilian used for law enforcement. He relies on the recommendation of the firearms instructors for this decision as they are most qualified. As mentioned, Chief noted we have had to use these weapons for several incidents and also train with those weapons for active shooter trainings. Chief noted if we had to respond to a school or large business active shooter we would be able to use those. A supervisor would determine who is to have the rifle and who is to be available for other items (handcuffs, shot guns, etc).

Chief noted the IMP actually has a website called Ctrp3, the CT Racial Profiling Project. All info they receive is available by community and anyone can review the statistical analysis if they want. Chief noted it is a very interesting report.

Lisa had a few thoughts in terms of the citizen review board idea. She is not sure the Council is the appropriate vehicle for that in terms of already serving as that. While we have responsibility for the big picture, I think we have seen demonstrated in recent months our effectiveness in being a voice of the community can be delayed. A separate structure with more autonomy might want to be considered. Lisa noted her second thought was related to looping in the community and allowing them to have a community voice. Perhaps this can be facilities by reaching out to NAACP or other groups if available. Another possible solution would be Citizens Police Academy is great to bridge gap between the police and the community. This might help show why officers do what they do and why the community reacts the way they do. Chief noted Citizens Police Academy has been one of the goals for several years, but it is very labor intensive for his staff. Chief holes that when they reach full employment levels again they will try to get that started. He noted that 3-4 years ago after the Ferguson incident he reached out to the Windham NAACP branch and discussed hiring and policies. Chief reached out to the President a few weeks back just to check in and they talked about perhaps their chapter doing a community conversation here in Coventry. Chief thinks it is up to the Town Manager but he would be open to participate. Matt asked what that looks exactly looks like. Chief said it is an open forum with department leaders and anyone in the community who wanted to participate. He has done one before and about 15 people attended. Lisa noted there are often grants available to host a community conversation which are often led/facilitated by outside agencies. Matt asked what community outreach we do. Chief noted we go to various events at the schools. It is difficult to assign community outreach to one officer as they need to be available respond to events. They do law enforcement week at the kids camp. Julie noted she sees officers at Christmas in the Village and they are always friendly and easy to talk to. Julie noted she appreciates the Police Department Facebook posts and the reaction from the community to the posts that are made.

The Committee thanked Chief for coming and spending time going over all of this information with them.

4. Resignations:
   A. Fire Transition Study Committee: Jon moved to accept the resignation of Ray Eldridge from the Fire Transition Study Committee with regret. Lisa seconded and the motion passed unanimously.
   B. Municipal Historian: Jon moved to accept the resignation of Carol North from her position as Municipal Historian with regret. Seconded by Lisa and passed unanimously.
C. **Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee:** Jon Hand moved to accept resignation of Laura Mirante with regret from the Protected Spaces Stewardship Committee. Seconded by Lisa and passed unanimously.

5. **Reappointments:**
   A. **Building Code Board of Appeals:** Motion made by Jon to recommend the re-appointment of Joshua Gemmell to the Building Code Board of Appeals, new term to expire June 1, 2025. Motion seconded by Lisa and passed unanimously.

   B. **Eastern Highlands Health District:** Motion made by Jon to recommend the re-appointment of M. Deborah Walsh to the Eastern Highlands Health District, new term to expire June 7, 2023. Motion seconded by Lisa and passed unanimously.

Matt noted an additional reappointment was received during the day from Scott Gallo. Lisa moved to add the reappointment of Scott Gallo to the Adhoc Coventry Lake Monitoring & Lake Advisory Committee to the agenda. Seconded by Jon and passed unanimously.

C. **Adhoc Monitoring & Lake Advisory:** Motion made by Jon to recommend re-appointment of Scott Gallo to the Lake Advisory Committee, new term to expire 8/1/2023. Motion seconded by Lisa and passed unanimously.

6. **Appointments:**
   A. **Fire Department Transition Study Committee:** Motion made by Jon to recommend appointment of Bud Meyers to the Fire Department Transition Study Committee, for the life of the Committee. Motion seconded by Lisa

   B. **Municipal Historian:** Motion made by Jon to recommend appointment of John Holmy to the position of Municipal Historian to fill a vacancy with a term to expire June 19, 2024. Motion seconded by Lisa and passed unanimously.

7. **Consideration/Possible Action: Policy for Council Interaction with Town Staff:** Julie noted it can stay tabled. Lisa made a motion to table. Seconded by Jon and passed unanimously.

8. **Discussion: Modifications to the Public Gathering Ordinance 70-88:** Amanda noted changes in red are proposed changes by the Town Manager. They have not been reviewed by the Town Attorney – but subject to review by Steering tonight, the next step would be to have the Town Attorney review. Matt noted the changes include: accelerated time process for 14 days if an applicant accepts a pre-planned location, changing of applicant review to be by Police Department rather than Town Manager, Applicant age from 21 to 18, and proposed wording to waive the fee with Town Council approval.

Lisa thinks if a fee is going to be waived it should be done at the Local Emergency Management Coordinating meeting rather than wait to come before Council for a vote. She has concerns with possible political party alliance or personal dislikes for certain groups, which would not be a fair process. Jon agrees and also notes the structural delay that might occur based on when the Council meets. He feels it is important to treat everyone the same and have a clear process outlined. Jon noted that in his time on LECC, it is clear the groups applying spend a large amount of time, effort, and money put into planning events and the $50 fee is not an exorbitant
cost. Lisa agrees the $50 fee seems reasonable but if there ever was a hardship it should be up to the LECC to consider waiving such fee. Jon noted that there is a cost to processing the applications and $50 is not even close to the amount of staff time that is needed to review and approve the applications. Jon thinks the process and review at LECC supports professionally held events in town and that the fee helps to ensure this. Matt asked Amanda her opinion on the fee waiver. Amanda agreed that staff effort far exceeds the cost and if an event is having over 300 people, the applicant should have funding to cover a $50 fee.

Matt asked if the 300 people rule was remaining the same. Jon notes that over 300 people is a sizable event and feels if you have a group that large you should have a formal process to review. He notes the formal review process allows for all the logistics – police, fire, and emergency, even general such as bathrooms – to be planned ahead of time.

Matt noted the age change from 21 to 18 – which is the age of a legal adult. Lisa inquired if an applicant the age of 18 would have limitations in obtaining the liability insurance necessary to hold an event. Amanda did not see any reason that this would hinder obtaining insurance – it might be more expensive for a younger person. She noted further there are still guidelines in the process related to alcohol in section 66-62 so the LECC can ensure that legal requirements related to serving alcohol are met. Lisa requested we run this question through the Town Attorney when he reviews.

Jon requested we go back to the first page edit regarding the accelerated process and he was wondering how long a typical application review usually takes. Matt says they want at least 30 days’ notice for all events as they need time to plan and coordinate. The accelerated process would only be for those choosing the pre-planned location – which will have pre-planned courses of action set in terms of emergency/non-emergency coordination. Jon noted he was just curious if the 14 days was a large enough window. Amanda noted LECC only meets once a month and inquired how the 14 days’ notice would work for LECC approval if no meeting was scheduled at that time. Amanda noted perhaps the LECC would need to come out with pre-approved packages with certain guidelines – the 14 day would then give the Town enough notification to plan accordingly. The Committee agrees they will want to see what the LECC develops and approves in regards to the list of locations and necessary required preparation for each location.

Julie noted agreement with what has been discussed. She notes at the LECC meeting they felt very strongly about people going through the correct process for events.

Matt noted the language in section 66-63 regarding investigation of applicants. He inquired as to who is the judge of character and who determines what is “good moral character” versus “lack of good moral character” – and how that is determined. Lisa noted we had talked about this prior with John Elsesser about moving it from himself to the Police, but the phrase good morale character is problematic for her as well. She felt it could lead to legal issues and perhaps should be brought up during the attorney’s review.

Matt asked if there were any other questions. Amanda asked if we were going to make any changes in the language about the fee waiver. There was general consensus to remove that language. Amanda stated she will send revision to the Town Attorney along with the questions that arose from our discussion.
9. Consideration/Possible Action: Proposed Ordinance Changes for Creation of Coventry Fire/EMS Department 18 Amanda noted that the Attorney has not reviewed these revisions. She noted that James McLoughlin Fire/EMS Director did review and had two proposed changes: renaming the fire houses based on new names under Station 18 and section 42-3(g) outlining the supervisory responsibility over the Vintech contracted services. The Committee unanimously found these changes reasonable. Matt asked what the next step is. Amanda noted she can send these along to the Town Attorney. She would like to touch base with Bud Meyers first to make sure he has had a chance to review.

11. Consideration/Possible Action: Modifications to Ordinances: Inspection/Permit, Open Burning: The Committee noted this item is not yet ready for action.

12. Adjournment: Motion made by Jon to adjourn at 8:37 pm. Motion seconded by Lisa and passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted

Amanda L. Backhaus, CPA
Finance Director

These minutes are draft until approved at a subsequent Steering Committee meeting.