MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL
JULY 6, 2020
7:30 P.M. – REGULAR MEETING
TOWN HALL ANNEX & VIRTUAL

1. Call To Order, Roll Call:
The meeting was called to order by Blanchard at 7:30 p.m.

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

Members absent:

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

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

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

The following citizen statements were read. The statements in their entirety are attached to these Minutes.

Linda Blakesley, 27 Berry Avenue – This email was received at 7:00 p.m. before the last Council Meeting and distributed to the Members the next morning according to Backhaus. It was read into the record this evening. Blakesley forwarded some workshop opportunities for leaders and board members covering how to move toward racial equality. She was pleased by the number of people who participated in the Black Lives Matter protest.

Jim Murphy, President, Coventry Historical Society – The Society has a suggestion about the Caprilands property.

Robyn Gallagher, 984 Main Street – Thanked the Council for their statement on the murder of George Floyd. She offered to buy the Members and Elsesser copies of Nobody: Casualties of America’s War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond.
Chris Morgan, 62 North Ayers Road – Morgan is again raising the issue of the Council’s unconstitutional act in regards to the town budget.

Joseph Jankowski, 3899 South Street – Recounted some activity of the Library Renovation & Improvement Committee and urged the Council to make a long-term investment for this valuable community resource.

Colleen Robbins, 3899 South Street – Wrote about her concern with the amount of truck traffic using Swamp Road to South Street to access Route 6.

4. **Acceptance Of Minutes:**
   - **June 15, 2020**
   - **Motion:** I move to accept the minutes of the June 15, 2020, Regular Meeting.

   By: O’Brien, Sr.  
   Seconded: Thomas

   With the following corrections:
   - Page 17, first paragraph, sixth sentence – change to read “O’Brien, Sr. asked if the statement was intending to condemn all police departments?” and strike the next sentence.
   - Page 20, second paragraph, fourth sentence – add “no” after “not”.
   - Page 20, second paragraph, eighth sentence – change “stated” to “commiserated”.
   - Page 20, second paragraph, last sentence – remove “and sane”.
   - Page 20, third paragraph, seventh sentence – add “to act” after “us”.

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

   **Motion:** I move the Council move to item 8.F. next.

   By: Hand  
   Seconded: O’Brien, Jr.

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

   - **Special Meeting: June 29, 2020**
   - **Motion:** I move to accept the minutes of the June 29, 2020, Special Meeting.

   By: Thomas  
   Seconded: Hand

   With the following correction:
   - Page 4 – change “Burns” to “Best” in two instances.

   **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 member 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: O’Brien, Jr. 
   Seconded: Hand

   **Discussion:** O’Brien, Sr. asked to have item 9.C. 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 was contacted by a citizen who said fireworks can be upsetting to pets, wildlife, and people. There have been an extreme amount of fireworks being set off in town. Blanchard is fearful for some of the wildlife. Elsesser said if it flies into the air or goes boom, the firework is illegal in Connecticut.

   Blanchard said we are heading the right direction with the merged Fire Department.

   6.B. **Council Members:**
   Thomas attended a July 4th event at the Homestead. People could buy a flag to honor any veteran, living or deceased, and plant it in the field of flags. The organizer did a nice job with the ceremony. Thomas said July is Coventry Lake Awareness month. She is grateful for the Lake Advisory Monitoring Committee. The committee is all over the new invasive found in the lake recently. Thomas knows that Elsesser stopped making the Zoom link available to the public because it could not be controlled enough and streaming via YouTube should be available. If streaming is not working there would be no access for viewing the meeting. Elsesser said the YouTube issue has been solved and has been working ever since.

   O’Brien, Sr. said can the public comment about trucks on South Street be looked into by the Steering Committee? Elsesser said the roads are public and trucks pay taxes to use the public roads. There are a lot of technical issues involved. Wethersfield was involved in a lawsuit because trucks were banned from some roads. The result was the town had to pay mileage for the detour the trucks had to take. The roads and signage on them are controlled. Bridge weight limits are different. On Swamp Road 30 mph is the speed limit for that type of road. Vehicles do faster than the speed limit which is true everywhere. Blanchard said it
could go to Steering to gather educational information and the Council could answer this person. Elssesser said this is the way GPS directs drivers and it is safer to go down Swamp Road to get to Route 6 than to go down to Bolton Notch and have to merge onto I-384 to proceed to Route 6 towards Willimantic. This is especially true for garbage trucks. It can be added to an agenda for Steering. O’Brien, Sr. attended the Fire Department swearing in ceremony.

Hand also attended the swearing in ceremony. Station 18 is off to a great start with the administration and leadership. Hand was at a rally to show support for Jashaun, an alleged victim of a racism situation, on Cross Street. He saw representatives from the school district and members of the community. Hand is proud of the town for coming out to show support for the child.

6.6. Steering Committee: Matthew O’Brien, Jr., Chairperson

O’Brien, Jr. said Chief Palmer was at the last meeting on June 22. Palmer spoke about current events and what the department is doing to mitigate discrimination and its community outreach. O’Brien, Jr. said people can view the video of the meeting. There are hundreds of variables with officers pulling over minorities. The officers warn before using tasers or deadly force. Body cams are always used. Military surplus equipment has been donated to the department; if the items are no longer used they must be returned. The standard issue shotguns have been replaced with modified M16 rifles that were purchased. These have been modified to be semi-automatic. A Civilian Review Board (CRB) was talked about as a possibility. There will be an ongoing conversation about racism in Coventry. The department is waiting to hear about reconfirmation due this month. The public should watch the video to hear what the Chief had to say. Blanchard added Coventry was one of the early police departments willing to have officers wear body cams. These are now common place and very useful. O’Brien, Jr. said the footage is spot reviewed at random. When police cars pull into the station parking lot the dash cam footage is automatically uploaded to the server leaving no room for it to be manipulated. Thomas got the sense from the Chief that the Council and the Town Manager would provide the oversight of the Civilian Review Board. It is not appropriate for the Council to be a CRB. Thomas does not want this to be politicized. This should be comprised of mental health professionals, educational professionals, and people of color. This should be pursued at Steering. Elssesser said the Council will create the charge and can be written to seek out different people. The Committee would serve at the pleasure of the Council. We would not want a CRB to make judgements or changes to the police department without Council review. Conant said this was a mention at the meeting and needs to be explored a lot more to iron out these kinds of details. Steering can look at how other towns have proceeded. With the committee serving at the pleasure of the Council, we have the final decision making power. Thomas said there was also talk about the CT Police Office Standards that includes a process of decertifying officers including those that resign. Does this apply to Officer Hicks? Yes. O’Brien, Jr. said if an officer applies to another department that department will be notified of past positions under specific circumstances to create a paper trail. Thomas said this is important because some people have asked about this.

6.6.1. Reappointments:

6.6.1.a. Building Code Board Of Appeals: Gemmell

Motion: I move to accept the reappointment of Joshua Gemmell to the Building Code Board Of Appeals, term to expire June 1, 2025.
By: O’Brien, Jr.  Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Thomas noted on the reappointment form it is not indicated that this person is a registered voter. We can verify with the Town Clerk that this is indicated on the original appointment form. O’Brien, Jr. added someone is automatically disqualified if not a registered voter.

Friendly amendment – The reappointment is contingent on verification this person is registered to vote.

By: O’Brien, Sr.  Accepted by: Hand

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

6.C.1.b. Eastern Highlands Health District: Walsh

Motion: I move to accept the reappointment of Deborah Walsh to the Eastern Highlands Health District, term to expire June 7, 2023.

By: O’Brien, Jr.  Seconded: Conant

Discussion: Hand noted the form has M. Deborah Walsh. It should be stated in the motion this way.

Friendly amendment – The motion should indicate M. Deborah Walsh to match the Statement of Interest.

By: Hand  Accepted by: Conant

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

6.C.1.c. Lake Advisory & Monitoring Committee: Gallo

Motion: I move to accept the reappointment of Scott Gallo to the Lake Advisory & Monitoring Committee, term to expire August 1, 2023.


Discussion: Blanchard appreciates Gallo’s experience and his willingness to be reappointed to the committee.

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

6.C.2. Appointments:
6.C.2.a. Fire Transition Study Committee: Meyers

Motion: I move to accept the appointment of Bud Meyers to the Fire Transition Study Committee, term for the lifetime of the committee.


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

6.C.2.b. Municipal Historian: Holmy

Motion: I move to accept the appointment of John Holmy as Municipal Historian, term to expire June 19, 2024.

Discussion: Thomas likes the information on the form and appreciates John’s interactions about the history of Coventry on Facebook. Thomas thanked the previous historian, Carol North.

By: O’Brien, Jr. Seconded: Thomas

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

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

6.E. COVRRRA – John A. Elsesser:
Bid specs are out to get the landfill capped for the grass growing season. This will be a week of work to minimize the needed oversight by a certified Haz Worker.

6.F. Town Manager – John A. Elsesser

6.F.1. Projects Update

 Updates to the previously distributed project memo include:

- A treatment date is still not known for the hydrilla. Authorization of the work via the DEEP permit is pending. Normally, the first treatment takes place this week. The growth does seem stunted or has slowed per the survey work.
- The parking lot at CGS is making progress. The final drainage is going in and paving is scheduled for July 27th.
- The Northfield road milling and paving is being broken up into two or three sections. Contractors are not available for a long period of time to do the entire project. Out of state crews do not have a place to stay because of the virus restrictions. There is frustration being felt in the neighborhood.
- The bids for the asbestos work at the high school came in under the expected cost. The HVAC work at the high school/middle school is being rephased. The fire doors have been approved by the State School Review Board.
- A public meeting for the South Street sidewalks will be held in August.
- The Pucker Street Bridge load standards have been determined. The load restriction currently in place will no longer apply.
• The Plan of Conservation and Development was adopted. The PZC and Staff were thanked for their work on this. Not only did they come up with a really good plan, it was done with the efforts of volunteers. Generally, these are written by consultants at a cost of $60k-$100k. Our plan is better because the volunteers and Staff that made this happen know the nuances of the community. O’Brien, Sr. would like to echo what Elsesser said. The State does have to accept the plan which will probably take another month. Some copies will be printed with some sent to the Library. The POCD is available online.

6.F.2. COVID-19 Update
Elsesser said the hope was to have Town Hall fully open last week but some changes were not in place. This will be a limited capacity opening allowing ten visitors at a time through appointment only. There will be a Town Hall Ambassador at the door asking some questions, taking temperatures, and issuing visitor badges. The badges will help keep a record for tracing. A person from the Rec program will be taking this position. Signage will be changed to indicated the limited capacity. There will be a drop box and ballot box available for taxes and ballots. Some of the employees have been taking abusive phone calls that adds to their stress. O’Brien, Sr. said the public should be appreciative of the employees and understanding of their efforts. O’Brien, Jr. said if a person has an issue with taxes the correct process to use is with the Board of Assessment Appeals. Conant said she was appalled by the phone call Elsesser shared with the Council and is even more appalled that staff has to put up with this on a semi-regular basis. Remember that is a human being at the other end and be civil. Anger is understandable and that kind of abuse is disgusting. O’Brien, Sr. said the employees will direct you through the process you have to go through. Hand said this may be a good time for 30 second explainer videos. People are uneducated on the fine technique that goes behind processes. If people understood more, they may be less angry.

6.F.3. Microgrid Update
The team felt the long PURA hearing went well. This is a couple of months away from the master metering approach that provides better management control. There has been bite from another financing company.

6.F.4. Folly Lane Bridge Replacement: Bid Opening Results
The chosen bidder has good references from around the state. We are waiting for DOT in order to proceed. We hope that happens this week so the company can order the spans. It will tight to get the bridge reopened in December. DOT does know we have a tight schedule. If we have to wait for another construction season costs go up dramatically.

6.F.5. Lake Advisory Update: Rapid Response To Water Chestnut
Elsesser said this is a great example of finding something quickly that was unexpected. The water chestnut can be geo-located. It is easily removable. This is the first time we have seen this invasive in the lake.

6.F.6. Registrar Of Voters: Change In August 2020 Primary Polling Location
Elsesser said approval has been received from the Superintendent and the State to hold the primary at the old gym at the high school. Holding this in one location requires fewer poll workers. The plan for the primary was shared at the last meeting. The
State model calls for having a police officer posted; Elsesser does not see an issue with that. A lot of people will choose to submit an absentee ballot. It is clear this is an option for the primary. There is a requirement to wear a mask when voting. There will be a drop off option for those who cannot wear masks and the poll workers picking up the drop offs are aware of this. Backhaus said we have a good volunteer group including kids from college and high school kids. We look okay but we can use more volunteers.

7. **Unfinished Business:**

7.A. 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**

Elsesser said we can push this off to the next meeting. The issue of holding a virtual town meeting is that we need a process to verify voters. We are looking at holding it in a larger meeting space, such as the auditorium.

**Motion:** I move the Council table this matter.

By: Blanchard                Seconded: O’Brien, Sr

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

7.B. 19/20-68: **Consideration/Possible Action: Appointment Of Eric Trott, Director Of Planning & Development, As Long-Term Recovery Coordinator**

This is a key person to work with other town staff. The Council of Governments can’t do it all.

**Motion:** I move the Council appoint Eric Trott, Director Of Planning & Development, As Long-Term Recovery Coordinator


Discussion: Thomas said she knows how overwhelmed the town staff is already. Is Trott the best person to take on this task? Will this include our schools? Elsesser said with the POCD finished Trott’s workload is a little better. Trott has been working with businesses, Chambers of Commerce, and CRCOG. This is really focused on small and medium businesses recovery. The Superintendent and the BOE is charged with meeting the Governor’s plan for schools.

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

7.C. 19/20-69: **Consideration/Possible Action: Amendment To Charge, Veterans Memorial Commission And Call To Public Hearing (Not Ready For Action)**
This type of public hearing does not require verification of voter eligibility. The people most interested in the topic are older and likely not Zoomers though. We don’t always have to use this building.

8. New Business:

8.A. 20/21-1: Consideration/Possible Action: Acceptance Of Parcels On 1294 And 1312 Main Street

Elsesser said these are leftover pieces of parcels from the construction in the Village. These would be for municipal purposes. The barn is structurally sound on the inside and the Town does have some storage needs. There is potential to create walking paths from Bidwell Village.

Motion: I move the Council accept from CT DOT the parcels at 1294 and 1312 Main Street.

By: O’Brien, Sr.  Seconded: Hand

Discussion: PZC did make this recommendation to the Council.

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

8.B. 20/21/-2: Consideration/Possible Action: Adoption Of COVID-19 Financial Response Plan

Discussion took place on the items in the proposed plan. A clean copy with the changes suggested will be sent to the Members for input. Responses can be sent to the Finance Committee.

8.C. 20/21/-3: Consideration/Possible Action: Conservation Easement, Right-Of-Way Conveyance And Highway Purposes Easement For Sweeney Subdivision On North School Road

This has been through PZC. Blanchard read part of the memo. The ownership remains with the owner. This would allow for drainage work that is needed on this road.

Motion: I move the Council accept the conservation easement, right-of-way conveyance and highway purposes easement for the Sweeney Subdivision on North School Road.

By: O’Brien, Sr.  Seconded: Thomas

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

8.D. 20/21/-4: Consideration/Possible Action: Financing Plan And Prioritization For Possible Referendum Projects
- **Library Renovation**
- **School Roofs**
- **School Alarms**
- **Softball Field**

Elsesser said this can be kicked to Finance so the committee can come back with a recommendation. O'Brien, Sr. said information was received about the softball field and there are a number of approvals that have to occur – the easement, WPCA and PZC approvals, for instance. Elsesser said the easement from DeSjato would require 4-6 weeks to work out and WPCA could need 4-5 months because they meet once per month. It may not be possible to include the field in this referendum. Elsesser has contacted Andrew Bushnell to meet with DeSjato about the easement. Todd Penney, Town Engineer, walked the site and raised issues around possible future access to the river. Penney opined the river access is stunning; this is an amazing piece of land. In applying for grants we want to indicate this would be more than a baseball diamond. Although the softball field issues can’t be wrapped up for August that does not mean we are not moving forward. Thomas said this is a really exciting project for more than the softball players as it has grown into access to the river and including senior housing is innovative and exciting. Blanchard assumes the Softball Committee is paying attention and realizes the timeline. Elsesser got the clearance from the EPA that this plan does not constitute us getting rid of land and the lien will not be invoked. Elsesser is keeping in touch with the Softball Committee.

This item was referred to Finance.

**8.E. 20/21-5: Consideration/Possible Action: Creation Of School Roofs Building Committee – Possible Modification To Charge Of Existing Committee**

Elsesser said we need to keep the School Roofs Building Committee budget going and recommends giving this to the Energy Efficiency Building Committee that is chaired by Tom Glogeee rather than create a new committee. The wording can be fine-tuned in Steering. Elsesser does not think the school alarms are code eligible as they are considered maintenance; he will check with Bob Carroll. The code was changed for school roofs to have a minimal pitch so they have become a code violation. We can check to see if there has been any code changes for the alarms.

**Motion:** I recommend we form a Town Council Committee to handle the Robertson School project and the Coventry High School project and possibly the alarm project if that is determined to be appropriate. And I am not excluding the fact that it can be the same committee.

By: O'Brien, Sr  
Seconded: O'Brien, Jr.

**Discussion:** Hand asked what is the advantage of this being the same committee that handled the CHS walls? Steering will handle that possibility.

**Voting:**
For: O'Brien, Sr., O'Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Conant, Thomas, Williams  
Against: None  
Abstain: None
8.F. 20/21/-6: Consideration/Possible Action: Appropriation From CNREF For CHS Walls Repair (8 PM)

Ed Cofrancesco was present. Elsesser said this is more complicated than realized. Cofrancesco has been working with DiBlasi.

Preliminary pricing was provided to strengthen the walls in the auditorium and the band room. Safety-wise these are considered the most critical locations but they do have tricky access. Based on the walk through there is a higher cost of an additional $30k. DiBlasi will start looking at the next phase in the science wing. These walls are not as tall and it does not have large groups of people at one time.

Elsesser said the Committee is seeking another $40k to keep moving forward; $10k of that is for the beginning of the next phase.

Motion: I move the Council authorize up to $40,000 from CNREF for CHS Walls Repair.

By: O’Brien, Sr Seconded: Hand

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

The CNREF fund has $373,000 remaining.

8.G. 20/21/-7: Consideration/Possible Action: Adoption Of Right To Vote Resolution

Thomas asked for this item be put on the agenda. Thomas read the proposed resolution.

WHEREAS, there is currently a global pandemic of novel Coronavirus 2019 (“COVID-19”); and Whereas public health emergencies and natural disasters are occurring with greater frequency, negatively impacting the ability of persons medically at risk and of first responders to vote on Election Day and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 is spread from person-to-person and through contact with a surface or object that has the virus on it; and Whereas the current covid19 pandemic health crisis threatens ballot access and the full participation of citizens in federal, state and local elections and

WHEREAS, in-person voting carries a greater risk of spreading disease than voting via absentee ballot; and

WHEREAS, no person should be required to risk their health in order to vote, and no person should be denied the right to vote because they fear contracting an illness; and 2 Whereas Connecticut law currently restricts use of absentee balloting to: out of town during the entirety of voting hours, active member of the armed forces, illness or physical disability that prevents voting on Election Day, religious
beliefs that disallow secular activities on Election Day, and serving as an elections official at a place other than where you vote and

WHEREAS, the right to vote is fundamental to a free and democratic society, and increased participation in elections enhances our democracy; and

WHEREAS, there are many reasons other than illness or physical absence that may make it difficult for an elector to vote in person, including work schedules and childcare needs; and WHEREAS, absentee voting offers a proven method of secure voting; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the existing need for Connecticut to join the large majority of the states in which any qualified voter may vote absentee without offering a reason; and

WHEREAS, municipalities will incur significant increased costs associated with holding elections during the pandemic, and will therefore require additional funds to procure personal protective equipment, purchase additional equipment and materials for processing a massive increase in the number of absentee ballots, and recruit and train new poll workers and election staff.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF COVENTRY THAT IT:

Urges the Governor, Secretary of State and the General Assembly to extend absentee voting privileges to all registered voters in the 2020 election cycle and Urges the Governor and the General Assembly to adopt statutory and constitutional changes to make no excuse balloting and in person early voting permanent for all future municipal, state and federal primaries and elections and Urges the General Assembly to convene in special session for the purpose of (1) amending the General Statutes to adopt the changes to absentee voting procedures made by Governor Ned Lamont in Executive Order No. 7QQ for all future elections and (2) appropriating sufficient funds to municipalities to defray the significant increased cost of holding elections during the pandemic. Section Two: The Town Council calls on the General Assembly to (1) convene in special session for the purpose of adopting a joint resolution to amend the state Constitution to permanently allow any elector to vote by absentee ballot for any reason and (2) submit such joint resolution to the popular vote for ratification in the November election. Adopted this day, July 6th, 2020, by the Coventry Town Council.

Motion: I move the Council adopt the Right To Vote Resolution.

By: Thomas Seconded: Conant

Discussion: Thomas said there is concern within town about the voting process. It is a fundamental right to vote. There is a general feeling of many voters to leave their mail in their garage for three days. Whether you think the fears are reasonable or not, that fear is reemerging now with spikes in other states. Absentee voting is an option for the primaries. November is right in the middle of the flu season. That will be a perfect storm people will have to navigate to walk into a voting place. This is a way to
honor and recognize that. Throughout the nation and the state voters want to vote by mail with 69% of voters somewhat to very worried to vote in person for the presidential election. We need to consider this. O'Brien, Sr. said this is not related to the virus. Thomas thinks voting should take place over three days to accommodate things like work hours, child care, natural disasters.

Hand thanks Thomas for putting this forward. Hand agrees with having no-excelse absentee voting.

Conant echoes what Hand said. This supports a path forward for a decision to be made on the State level. For personal reasons Conant is in support of no-excelse absentee voting. We have been using the same method since the Civil War. Conant thinks this is a step in the right direction. Conant thanks Thomas for preparing this.

O'Brien, Sr. said this is recommending a constitutional amendment. Can it be passed without it going to the public for resolution? Thomas said she wants this to go to the special session the Secretary of State is calling for this fall to allow absentee balloting this November. There may be some way to temporarily make a change to claim concern about COVID-19. O'Brien, Sr. does not agree with the way of doing as sending an absentee ballot to everyone. Thomas asked O'Brien, Sr. if he would consider supporting a resolution for absentee balloting due to COVID-19 reasons for this November? O'Brien, Sr. he would consider it if it was for an at risk group. Thomas said we are all at risk. The definition of illness could be extended to fear of contracting the virus. O'Brien, Sr. is personally opposed to a permanent change. Blanchard does not want to see this as a permanent change either. O'Brien, Jr. is willing to do more research and revisit this. Thomas said sounds like there may be agreement to a resolution to take us through the November election by doing what we are doing for the primaries through the presidential election. Thomas is happy to rework the resolution with everyone’s input. Blanchard asked Members to email their input to her and she will filter those to Thomas and we will get this on the next agenda.

Hand said he is in strong support for this measure as a way to increase the number of people who vote and participate in our democracy.

Williams said this would be changing the whole process of how we vote. Williams can’t support no-excelse ballots going out to everyone. Perhaps Williams may be able to support it for this set of elections. Isn’t this something that has to be done by the State issue? Williams can’t support this going forward without voters checking in at a polling place.

Friendly amendment by Thomas and accepted by Conant: In the second paragraph, second line after NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF COVENTRY THAT IT add “absentee” before “balloting”.

Vote:
For: Thomas, Conant, Hand
Against: O’Brien, Sr., Williams, Blanchard
Abstain O’Brien, Jr.
Blanchard noted the motion fails.

Thomas will rework the resolution based on the discussion comments.

9. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:
9.A. Q&A With The Board Of Education: Year-End Balances
Backhaus and Bob had a good conversation about the FEMA money. The $32k will be reflected differently after this conversation. $37k was added to the Special Education budget and Transportation was changed by $3k. Final costs for Food Services will be known at the end of July or early August. The number available for the COVID-19 savings was not included in the June 15, 2020 report. It was felt the Council should request answers from the BOE before the next joint meeting.


O’Brien, Sr. wanted this off the Consent Agenda to close a loop. The BOE made a motion. The gross wage increase was changed from 3% to 2% saving $22k. The BOE has bought all the Chrome books they needed. The operating budget incorporated the $50k in savings.

10. Executive Session
• Personnel
  Motion: I move that the Town Council enter into Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1-200(6)(A): discussion concerning the employment, appointment, performance, evaluation, health or dismissal of a public officer or employee with the following in attendance the seven members of the Town Council, the Town Manager John Elsesser, and the Finance Director Amanda Backhaus.

By: O’Brien, Sr.            Seconded: Blanchard

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

• Real Estate
  Motion: I move 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 the seven members of the Town Council, the Town Manager John Elsesser, and the Finance Director Amanda Backhaus.

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

The Council entered Executive Session at 10:31 p.m.

12. 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.
From: Linda Blakesley <lindablakesley@outlook.com>
Sent: Monday, June 15, 2020 7:00 PM
To: Coventry Audience <Audience@coventryct.org>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] audience of citizens

Good evening. My name is Linda Blakesley, and I live at 27 Berry Avenue.

First, I forwarded two workshop opportunities a week or so ago intended for leaders and board members. The workshops covered how white people and people of color can participate in moving toward racial equity and justice. The presenter offered practical tips that we can do right now. Did any council members attend the webinar? Part 2 is being offered tomorrow.

Also, I want to share how pleased that so many town residents participated in the Black Lives Matter protest last Friday evening. It really sent the message that white people must be a part of this fight to eliminate brutal police tactics, stop the murder of unarmed black men and women, and abolish racism that is so deeply entrenched in our police institutions throughout this country.

What was disappointing was the lack of passion from the speeches that the town council members read. Nothing came from the heart, and I have to wonder if they just googled generic speeches for BLM rallies. I would really like to see all the leadership of this town take a more active and visible stance on the issue of racism and police violence.

Thank you.

Linda Blakesley
27 Berry Avenue
Coventry, CT 06238

Linda Blakesley
The Coventry Historical Society suggests that the town might purchase the Caprilands property and sell it with restrictions to prevent the destruction of the house. From what I understand the frame is still good and savable. History conscious people might be interested in buying the house.

Jim Murphy
President, Coventry Historical Society
Dear Town Council Members:

I live at 984 Main St.

Thank you for your Statement on the Murder of George Floyd dated June 18, 2020. In your discussion, it was refreshing to hear the perspectives of various members. At one point, regarding the existence of systemic racism, Mr. O’Brien, Sr. stated “if I had evidence and I believed it, then I do oppose it.”

In response to Mr. O’Brien Sr.’s request for evidence, I would like to offer to purchase each member of the Town Council a copy of the book *Nobody: Casualties of America’s War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond*. This book is written by Mr. Marc Lamont Hill, an academic who has affiliated over time with Moorehouse College, Columbia University and Temple University. It was a Nautilus Book Award winner, was named a Best Book of the Year by Kirkus Reviews and was a New York Times Bestseller. This book discusses, in part, the historical development of some of the police practices and theories that have contributed to the systemic racism that we see now. I personally read the book last year and found it accessible but challenging, as discussions around racism should be challenging.

To be clear, it is no one’s job to educate any other person on systemic racism. However, I am happy to provide this resource so that the Town Council Members can choose whether to consider just some of the evidence that exists. In this time, it is especially imperative that our government take steps to educate itself in order to better service and represent all of our citizens. I thank Mr. O’Brien Sr. for his willingness to consider evidence. Please let me know if this is something that would be of value to the Town Council.

I would like this e-mail to be attached to the minutes.

Thank you,

Robyn Gallagher

P.S. John Elsesser I don’t want you to feel left out. I am happy to purchase an additional two to three copies to be maintained at the town hall available for town staff to read.
To Members of council. Once again I Must Continue to raise the issue of your unconstitutional act in regard to the Town Budget.

First I would like to Take a Brief moment to thank Councilman Williams and Councilman O’Brien (Jr.) For, if even tacitly, trying to have this issue discussed in an official manner During the June 15th Council meeting. However, The Explanation Given By The Town Manager in regard to this is somewhere between woefully inadequate and patently false.

Upon review of Correspondence Between Mr. Elsesser and Halloran And Sage as was provided to my By The town manager, most of the information being relayed is Simply a synopsis of the executive orders. It contains no opinion of any constitutional impact with regard to the State Constitutions article 10th (Home Rule) and the protections of our chartered process that are Rights afforded to the people. Let's be clear to remind ourselves that in the state of Connecticut our constitution is the supreme Law of the land, Overridden only by the Constitution of the United States.

Further, there is only one time that the Mr. Elsesser reaches out to Halloran and Sage for any clarification on these materials and that is a request for an opinion on a referendum. The response from Richard Roberts Contains the Proviso “People are definitely Reacting to this. One of the rationales for the mandatory nature of this order was actually to protect local officials from political blowback if the short circuit of town meetings and referenda was optional...” While He is Clearly under the impression that our protected right to a vote is an optional issue as is the case in some towns, John Elsesser is well aware that this is not the case in Coventry. John, by his own previous statements in fact knows that this has not been the case for Almost 30 years Yet he raises no further questions, and asks for no further clarification.

The other information John Provided is a statement from CCM that is again a generic summation of the executive order but contains no specific opinion on constitutional issues or the Charter of our town.

Connecticut General Statutes § 28-9 which gives the governor the ability to produce these executive orders is also quite clear on what the governor can modify with these orders, and He has no authority to suspend the constitution. The additional powers that the CGA gave to him also cannot confer power over constitutional issue as they have no ability to cede powers they do not have. Again CT constitution article 10th is clear that the legislature does not have these powers and has not since 1969.

In the June 15th meeting his explanation is based on “repeated legal opinions” From the towns legal council that he is aware do not address this matter as it applies to our town, and most of which are Generic Summation reports simply stating what the Executive orders contain. This is misleading. This is not an opinion about Coventry From Legal Council but is actually the opinion of the town manager. Again, fully aware that these are non specific to Coventry.

He continues using the excuse that “Like every other Town...” While this is accurate to the information Provided as it is again non specific, John is well aware that Coventry unlike other towns has a clear and protected process that allows the people a vote and a say in the adoption of the budget.

He makes the claim that “your attorneys said that you can’t, that it would be an illegal action...” This again, as it pertains to Coventry is Found nowhere in the information he references. It is his opinion.

Even Matt O’Brien Sr.’s bring up on legal recourse to the state does not take into account that other towns have already taken the stance that the executive orders are unconstitutional and disregarded them without taking that step and with no repercussions from the State. We do not have to sue for our rights, The burden is on the state to prove us wrong and both town and state in fact have an obligation to protect them.

The justification for this process the entire way through has never provided any factual evidence that the Governor, State Legislature, Town Council, or Town Manager have any authority to suspend the Constitutionally protected rights of
the people of Coventry and to silence their voice on how their town is funded and their money is spent. The actions of the council are above and beyond any authority afforded to them in this process and in clear contrast to the responsibilities of the positions, and the oaths sworn upon taking office. It is also generally a great disrespect and a slap in the face to the people of the town.

As tax bills are probably heading to mailboxes all across town at this very moment I will ask for a third time. The town Council, Each and every member who is supporting this unconstitutional act and seeking to back the collection of these bills with the Monopoly of force provided to Government through the Consent of the governed, owes a clear, Fact based and upfront statement of why they think they have the power to take this action and why anyone in this town should be beholden to pay these bills. The town has a responsibility to respect and protect the rights of the people. It is a clear agreement that creates the compact that legitimizes government, and it is without this that government loses its authority.

Lest also be clear to recognize, Taxation is a compulsory act that is backed intrinsically with the use of force. By billing people the town is not simply requesting funds, it is quite literally, at an end, demanding them at the point of a gun. It comes with punishments for non compliance unquestionably backed by force. And all the while you have silenced those same peoples say whom your sworn duty was to protect.

Again, A clear and Factual Explanation is undoubtedly owed to the people in this town that trusted you to stand for them.

We Don't live in other towns, We live in Coventry. Whether by circumstance or by choice does not matter, there are rules in place that protect the rights of everyone in this Town, this State, and this Country, and the Government is clearly prevented from upending those facets of our lives regardless of whether you think it was the correct course of action, or they think it more productive, or efficient, or have any other agenda in mind. These rights are Ours. Again, any member of this towns government, Be it elected official or appointed bureaucrat who does not wish to adhere to these rules, and respect the rights of the people is free to quit and leave at anytime (no “make me an offer”s need to apply, as Mr. Elsesser has Levied) If you don’t want to do the Job, Leave. The people put their trust in you. That is not a thing to be taken lightly.

In Liberty,
Chris Morgan
62 North Ayers Rd

Sent from Mail for Windows 10
Comments to be read at Coventry Town Council Meeting
July 6, 2020 during Audience of Citizens

Joseph Jankowski
3899 South Street

Member of Library Renovation & Improvement Committee
Trustee, Booth & Dimock Memorial Library

On June 29, 2020, the Town Council received an update from the Library Renovation & Improvement Committee. This committee, on which I serve, has been working on a plan to address issues at the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library for almost a year and a half, having met 25 times since February 14, 2019.

The committee has bipartisan representation, but its work has been apolitical. The members of the committee have approached its charge with the idea of Coventry making an investment in one of our town’s most valuable community resources. The charge given to the committee has been its guiding principle – working within the existing footprint of the library to formulate a plan to make renovations and improvements for these necessary upgrades. And the Library Renovation & Improvement Committee has done that.

At its board meeting on June 10, 2020, the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library Board of Trustees unanimously voted to support the library renovation and improvement plan developed by the committee and presented to the Town Council on June 29th. The library board encourages the Town Council to accept this plan and vote to move the plan forward to a November 2020 referendum. The library board is also firmly committed to the transfer of ownership of the library building under the same conditions agreed to prior to the previous referendum.
The Connecticut State Library grant has a November 2020 deadline. The Town Council must move this plan forward before then or the $850,000 grant to fund the project will no longer be available to Coventry.

I urge the Town Council to embrace the idea of making a long-term investment in one of Coventry’s most valuable community resources and to move the plan presented by the Library Renovation & Improvement Committee forward to referendum in time to meet the November 2020 deadline.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Jankowski
Attn: Town Council and Elected Officials

I live at 3899 South Street which, until recently, has been a relatively quiet stretch of road. My concern is the short-cut from Route 44 down to Route 6 via Swamp Road and the last short section of South Street. This has become a heavily used short-cut consisting of commercial vehicles barreling up and down a 30 mph stretch. These are not local vehicles, but huge trucks from other towns and locales. It's not safe to walk down these narrow country roads. With the opening of Cumberland's shortly and the exponential increase in traffic that we have seen in recent years, I would like the town to focus on this problem in their project with the state to rebuild this intersection at Routes 44, 31 and Swamp Road before it is too late.

An article this summer in the Hartford Courant by Professor Mary Donegan describes in detail the need for state and local governments to plan together for the people who walk, bike and live on these streets. I would like to see this short-cut reserved to non-commercial/local traffic. I have seen other areas with signage indicating trucks use the main highway routes and not these back roads. This is just the kind of situation that the article speaks to and which can be resolved with State and Town officials working together.

The construction of Route 384 provided pathways to Routes 6 & 44 to accommodate commercial vehicle use. Taxpayers of Coventry shouldn't bear the expense of the significant noise, danger and damage this commercial traffic imposes on us and our roads. This traffic isn't benefiting Coventry; it's going straight through and out, on our dime.

Sincerely,
Colleen Robbins
3899 South Street
Coventry, CT 06238