MINUTES
COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL
JULY 20, 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 7:31 p.m.

Members present:
Julie Blanchard – Chair
Jonathan Hand – remote (arrived at 7:32 p.m.)
Matthew O’Brien, Jr. – remote
Matthew O’Brien, Sr. – Vice Chair
Lisa Thomas
Richard Williams – Secretary

Members absent:
Lisa Conant

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.

Jason Blakesley, 27 Berry Ave. – Inquiring if the law firm is still investigating ex officer Hicks and if Council members can speak on such matters as private citizens.

Linda Blakesley, 27 Berry Ave. – Pleased the Town Council crafted a statement denouncing racism. Can the Town share what is being done to combat racism that exists in town policies and practices?

Chris Morgan, 62 North Ayers Road – No explanation has come out about the unconstitutional actions taken in regard to the taxing of citizens. The Council needs to make an explanation for this action.

Carolyn Garrity, 229 Geraldine Drive – Opposes the proposed “Resolution Calling on the State to Expand Voting Options”.

Page 1 of 19
Laurie Jacobs, 2646 Boston Turnpike – Expresses concerns about the changes at Hunt’s Family Farm. She was sorry to hear that it has been sold. With the property under new ownership, she has a few questions for the Town.

Jennifer Burdette, Andover – Pointing out inconsistencies in the Palmer report. She has absolute disgust and horror that the Town of Coventry breached protected personal information regarding a victim of sexual abuse.

Elsesser said after Ms. Burdette’s statement was read that the report was reviewed by the Town’s Labor Attorney, the Town Attorney, and a law firm. The Town Attorney recommended this action and information was redacted that was not already part of public record. It was not published as a vindictive action. This was a full disclosure of what the public has a right to know.

4. Acceptance Of Minutes:
   • June 6, 2020
   Motion: I move to amend the agenda item 4 to read Acceptance of Minutes: July 6, 2020.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Hand

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

Motion: I move to accept the minutes of July 6, 2020.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Thomas

With the following corrections:
• Page 3, item 6.B., first paragraph: first sentence – add “Nathan Hale” in from of “Homestead”, and sixth sentence - add “water chestnut plant” after “invasive”.
• Page 4, item 6.C.: eighth sentence – change “purchased” to “donated”, ninth sentence – change to read “The CPD paid to have these permanently modified to be semi-automatic.”, twelfth sentence – change “reconfirmation” to “recertification” and add “CALEA” before “recertification”, fifteenth sentence – change “common place” to “commonplace”, twenty-first sentence – change to read “She said a Civilian Review Board should be comprised of mental health professionals, educational professional, people of color, and other stakeholders.”, and thirty-second sentence – change “past positions” to “resignations”.
• Page 6, item 6.E., second sentence – change “needed” to “need for”.
• Page 6, item 6.F.1., fifth bullet – change “South” to “Main” and change “sidewalks” to “sidewalk project”.
• Page 7, item 6.F.2., sixth sentence – change “indicated” to “indicate”.
• Page 7, item 6.F.3., last sentence – change “bite” to “interest expressed”.
• Page 7, item 6.F.4., fourth sentence – add “be” after “will”.
• Page 7, item 6.F.5., last sentence – add “plant” after “invasive”.
• Page 10, first paragraph: second sentence – add “project” after “field” and fourth sentence – change “may” to “will.”
• Page 13, fourth paragraph, fifth sentence – add “application” after “ballot”.
• Page 14, item 9.A. – leave the first sentence, add the following – “O’Brien, Sr. said the
• BOE minutes read for the FY21 Budget Dr. Petrone noted the adjustments that were made to reach the $50,000 reduction made by the Town Council, which were as follows:
  LAP Renewal ($11,868.00)
  Chromebooks vs iPads @ GHR ($6,069.00)
  Non-Union Wages ($8,879.00)
  Reduction of GWI Placeholder to 2% ($18,250.00)
  Maintenance Dept. ($4,934.00)”

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

5. **Consent Agenda:**
All items listed with an asterisk (*) will be acted on by one motion. There will be no separate discussion on these items unless a Council members so requests, in which case, the item will be removed from the consent agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the agenda.

**Motion:** I move to accept the Consent Agenda.

By: Thomas  Seconded: Williams

Thomas requested item 9.A. be removed from the Consent Agenda.
Hand requested item 6.F.8 be removed from the Consent Agenda.

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

6. **Reports:**
6.A. **Council Chairwoman: Julie A. Blanchard**
Blanchard did not present a report.

6.B. **Council Members:**
Thomas asked if the offer of a book in the previous Audience of Citizens of Robin Gallagher’s has been responded to? Blanchard said she bought her own copy. Members can respond or take up Gallagher’s offer as individuals. Thomas thanked Elsesser, Town Hall staff, the fire and police departments, and DPW for the efforts that have been heroic since the shutdown started in March. This time has not been easy and some have been in
sticky situations. Thomas is appreciative of that. You can't ever please everyone. Elsesser will convey the sentiment to the staff. Thomas said a Last Green Valley meeting was held at Creaser Park. Coventry is the gateway into the Last Green Valley. They promote the economic resources of the area and drive people towards businesses. It was nice to have the meeting in Coventry and they were impressed with Creaser Park. Thomas asked about benches by the pond. Elsesser said the benches are being moved slightly for better views of the pond and to be out of the way of disc golf. Elsesser will verify with Mark Owens that when the benches were pulled out they were determined to not be relocatable because of rot below grade. Wendy Rubin has gotten a LOTCIP grant and someone has offered to make new benches for the park. Thomas said she welcomes hearing questions from residents. Ask the questions and get answers before going to social media. We try to do our best. We prefer to answer your questions with the best information. Thomas received a letter from a constituent with concerns about her road and the trucks going by. This person sent Thomas information about some research she did. This was forwarded to Elsesser and the Council members. A response from a DOT transportation engineer was received. If the vehicle has an origin or destination in town, it cannot be prohibited from traveling the roads. There is a way to collect that data without us having to do it. Thomas thanked the person for doing the research. The Council should look at the data and consider it. The person should formally submit the information. Elsesser said the trucks are going to go somewhere. If truck use is discouraged on one road, they will start traveling another one. We can get the data though it takes a while to do that. Trucks can be restricted by weight by Town ordinance. That is focusing on the weight of the truck. It would be up to the driver to know the truck’s gross vehicle weight. It is a courtesy to not use a road with a weight restriction. Or you could receive a ticket. Elsesser said you are moving traffic around to somewhere else. Swamp Road is the preferred, safest way to get to Route 6. We can monitor the road and do speed enforcement.

Hand was asked by Conant to read her report in her absence.
Member Report - July 20, 2020 Town Council Meeting

Lisa Conant

* Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to address the Council via this report which I’d like to attach to the minutes of tonight’s meeting. I regret that health issues are preventing me from attending on Zoom tonight.

* With regards to agenda item 7.D. 20/21-4: I want to first express my strong support of the recommendations made by the Library Improvement and Renovation Committee, and I urge the Council to support those recommendations and the committee's full estimated dollar amount that’s to complete the much-needed repairs. As has been pointed out earlier, the library already has contributed a substantial amount of “skin in the game” toward those repairs, including assuming 100% of the burden to fix the sagging building joists, securing a grant of $850,000, and their written commitment to sign the building and property over to the town. Additionally, as has been previously noted in writing by the library board, the assets described in their IRS 990 tax report, including their endowment, are legally restricted and limited in terms of how those assets may be used. However, should the Council decide to support a lower amount for bonding, as recommended by a plurality of the Finance Committee, I urge all Council members to continue in their support of that recommendation through the fall referendum.

* I also want to express my strong support for agenda item 7.E.20/21-7: Adoption Of Right To Vote Resolution, as revised. Although absentee balloting is indeed under the purview of the State, this Council has recently established precedent in urging the State to take action, as evidenced by the No Tolls Resolution passed in January. Additionally, if the state were to heed this resolution, Connecticut would join the majority of states - 33, including our neighbor Massachusetts, and five states that vote exclusively by mail - that have no-excuse-needed absentee balloting. This isn’t a new concept. Approximately one in four Americans voted by mail in the past two Federal elections, and the military has been voting that way for a century and a half. Absentee ballot fraud is also extremely rare, and our registrars ensuring that their voter lists are continuously kept up to date can reduce that slight possibility even further.

* I also have a personal reason for supporting this resolution: the health issues that are preventing me from being here tonight can crop up without warning, and also place me at a high risk of death from COVID-19. However, under the current law, I don’t qualify for an absentee ballot. I hope everyone will seriously consider voting “yes” to the proposed resolution.

* On a somewhat related note, I would respectfully like to ask the Chair if she could please make a statement on behalf of the Council that addresses Mr. Christopher Morgan’s concerns about this year’s budget adoption process, and how the governor’s orders affected the usual town meeting and referendum. He has written us at least 3 or 4 times with these questions and I don’t believe that he is accepting the explanations provided earlier. I’m also wondering how Mr. Morgan is able to directly quote, twice, communications between John Elsesser and the Council. The comment that he remarks on was taken from an email that included medical information about a third party, and references to an ongoing confidential and sensitive internal matter. Did Mr. Morgan submit a FOIA request for that particular email?

* Finally, I’d like to say that I’m pleased that the findings of the recent internal investigation have concluded that Chief Palmer committed no improprieties. However, I’m concerned about the quality of the redactions in the final report. Although it’s my understanding that they weren’t strictly required by law, since the redactions were indeed done, they should have been done in more professional manner than using what appears to be a black magic marker that left the text underneath visible. Adobe has a basic redaction tool that will completely remove text from both scanned documents and original PDFs. This tool could and should have been used instead of the marker in order to protect privacy and personally identifiable information to the fullest extent possible.

Hand reported he attended, virtually, the Swamp Road Realignment public hearing. There was generally positive feedback.

Blanchard asked Steering to recommend a response to citizen Chris Morgan’s concerns.

6.C. Finance Committee: Matthew O’Brien, Sr., Chairperson
O’Brien, Sr. read his prepared report which is attached to these minutes. O’Brien, Sr. added the question from the Gerald Park Association was on the agenda that evening.


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

6.E. COVRA – John A. Elsesser:
No COVRA report was given.

6.F. Town Manager – John A. Elsesser

6.F.1. Projects Update

Updates from Elsesser’s distributed report are:

- A treatment of the hydrilla in the lake will take place tomorrow. People are asked not to swim. This is because the boat needs to maintain a certain speed while dispersing the treatment. There is one primary colony left in the lake that is larger than thought. This is off Woodland Road near a stream. A containment basin may be needed to keep the chemical from being washed away from the area because of the stream. Dr. Kortman is part of the team. There is good news that we could get money from the federal government; we may get up to $60k instead of $25k-$30k. It is felt the treatments have been very successful. It is dangerous to harvest hydrilla; it is not like the water chestnut.

- The CGS parking lot project has had the sidewalks completed; curbing is almost completed. We are waiting for the transformer. Paving will take place next week. Carl, the inspector, resigned this week.

- There was a no-show of one of the contractors for the Northfield project. That work will be divided between the other two companies. The binder course is laid wider than the road so the curbing can sit on asphalt. People don’t understand this so Staff is getting yelled at and are getting frustrated with this. Hopefully, the project will be finished this Fall.

- A contract was signed on Friday for the Folly Lane Bridge project. The beams have been ordered. Construction is expected to start August 1, 2020.

- The binder course has been laid on Old Eagleville and Depot roads. The roads will be finished up with a different crew.

- Taxes are due and coming in. The Town Attorney and the Attorney General have said the Governor has the authority to issue the Executive Order. We did what was legal and required. Elsesser is offended to be accused of lying. The advice of the Town Attorney was relayed to the Council. With each Executive Order the attorneys were consulted. We wanted to protect the Town Charter. The Governor has the support that his orders are legal. There will be penalties if you choose to not pay your taxes. We hope this never happens again.

Thomas said what stood out to her from Elsesser’s memo was about the Farmer’s Market. The vendors are not happy with the market sales. Is our market now in jeopardy? How can the Council support the Market? Elsesser said the meeting will be critical. He cannot say what the outcome of that meeting will be. The vendors want it the way it was. However, the volunteers are not willing to return to the way it was
because of safety concerns. Sales are way down. Some other markets have gone back to normal ways of holding the events. If the vendors that are part of the market don’t want to be there, other vendors can be brought in. Vegetables are just starting to come in. Our market was not just a market. Now we don’t have the socialization that people like. Thomas said this is a hallmark of the Town now. Ours is the largest and the biggest and that makes it difficult.

6.F.2. COVID-19 Update
Town Hall has been reopened; overall it has worked well. There was one incidence of someone not wanting to wear a mask. The messaging and signage have been updated. Tax bills are due and the time will be critical. The drop box in the back is emptied several times a day.

6.F.3. Microgrid Update
Elsesser said there was a PURA hearing for master metering. There is an issue with crossing the street to tie in the fire and police departments as only town utilities can go across the road. Negotiations with the utilities are needed to address the issue with PURA.

Although DEEP explained in their letter the project was dead, a call with DEEP gave the Town a path forward. Mike Rouff is working with that with Jacobsen Engineering helping. We will continue to provide information for a final decision. We want to create an atmosphere for a preferable route. It is hoped the information will be ready before September and allow the State to make a decision.

6.F.5. Swamp Road Intersection LOTCIP Project Update
Hand covered that meeting in his report. The presentation will be posted to the web page soon. Construction is expected from April – August 2021. The three additional acquisitions are more positive. Todd Penney is to be given credit for helping this to happen. This is a complicated signal plan.

6.F.6. Update From Congressman Courtney: Crumbling Foundations
Elsesser said significant money was put in the House bill and made it out of the House. It is a critical week to see if the Senate looks at the bill. Thomas asked if we can send a letter of support to our Senators? Elsesser said we can and he will get something out tomorrow. It is important to hear from people who want something to happen. Thomas said we can show as a Council we stand behind the residents. Elsesser said there is a big hurdle between testing and replacement. There is a need in communities. He has reached out to CRCOG; they have not been having foundation meetings because of COVID-19. The fund expires in 2021.

6.F.7. *Notice of Blight Ordinance Violations, 1660 Main Street

6.F.8. *Voter Registration Summary
Hand pointed out a total of 2,554 Democrats and 2,080 Republicans can vote in the primaries. Voters can use the absentee ballot to cast their vote without having to worry about their health safety.
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 (Not Ready For Action)**

Elsesser said we can put this on the agenda for the end of August. We have the auditorium for a Town Meeting or we can use the football field. Hand supports this idea. Elsesser will get it ready for consideration.

7.B. **19/20-69: Consideration/Possible Action: Amendment To Charge, Veterans Memorial Commission And Call To Public Hearing (Not Ready For Action)**

O’Brien, Sr. asked O’Brien, Jr. if he (O’Brien, Jr.) has talked with Peter DePaola. O’Brien, Jr. said DePaola has not gotten back to him about needing assistance with the race.


O’Brien, Sr. said Elsesser and Backhaus did a good job in developing this. Elsesser said the purpose of this is for the financial rating companies to show that Coventry has developed a strategy. Hand asked the phrase “unassigned General Fund fund balance” be changed to “unassigned fund balance of the General Fund”.

**Motion:** I move the Council adopt the Town of Coventry, Connecticut COVID-19 Financial Response Plan as amended.

By: Thomas Seconded: Williams

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

7.D. **20/21/-4: Consideration/Possible Action: Financing Plan And Prioritization For Possible November Referendum Projects (8 PM)**

- **Library Renovation – including discussion with Board of Trustees regarding end-of-year savings**

  Libby Parda read this prepared statement — Town Council 7/20/20
  Good Evening....My name is Libby Parda and I am the current treasurer of the Board of Trustees of the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library. Thank you for allowing me time tonight to address the library’s end of the fiscal year numbers... But first I would like to introduce you to a group of people... Kathy...a mom of three and former substitute teacher in the Coventry schools and an avid traveler
  Tim... a Coventry resident of 35 years and a retired Civil Engineer and Land Surveyor, and a proud husband, father of a son and daughter and grandfather of two boys
  Claire... a Coventry resident for 56 years...she is a retired Attorney-at-law and retired probate judge for the town of Coventry...I know she is also a mom and proud grandparent.
Mary... a retired library technician and children's librarian... also a mom and loving grandmother
Linda... also mom and grandmom, is a retired Youth Services Consultant for CT State Library... she began her career right here at the Booth & Dimock as a part-time library assistant
Jacob... is a museum educator and a happy dad of two young children
Cory... one of our current heroes... she is the mom of a one year old and a nurse working in behavioral health....
Joe... an eleven year Coventry resident, is a retired public school science teacher and athletic director and his bees make delicious honey
Me... I am a former preschool teacher and elementary school library assistant as well as a mom of three and proud grandmother of a little boy who calls me Ama.

This is the group of people who currently sit on the Board of Trustees of the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library. Some have served for many years and some only a year or two... there have been numerous others over the last 30 years. All are and have been volunteers, citizens, taxpayers and ordinary people who just happen to have a heart for libraries... our Coventry town library in particular. We are Coventry and have the best interest of other Coventry residents, young and old at heart... just as you and all other town departments should. We believe in the overall mission of the library which is to provide materials and services to help ALL residents of the community meet their informational, educational, cultural and creative needs. Our goal is to help the staff accomplish this mission for the citizens and to help them rise to the challenges of changes in technology, culture, and society and the important role a library plays in them.

In so doing, over the last 30 years we have gratefully accepted a grant from the town of Coventry and have taken great pride in using that grant as our operating budget in a highly efficient, ethical, honest and open manner.

Over the last few years we have heard a lot of innuendo, deliberate misrepresentation and outright lies about the Board, the Association and the library staff. But the words we heard at the last Finance meeting of the council topped them all. I personally and on behalf of the Board members past and present, was outraged and offended by the remarks, wild speculations and the attitudes displayed. The idea that we have been “squirreling away”, hiding, or “funneling” town grant money into accounts for the purpose of “making money” (i.e. investment accounts) is insulting and absolutely false. As fellow taxpayers, we take our fiduciary responsibility very seriously. Our financial records have been forensically accurate every year.

Every June our standard practice has been to evaluate the amount of money that may not have been spent in that year’s operating budget for a variety of reasons. At that time the board looks at expenses that may be coming up and allocate money from the ‘unspent’ amount to be used when needed. As you can see from the document you were given by our director, this year we had $10,514.47 that was unspent. We instructed our director and bookkeeper to pay for the upcoming cost of changing our new centralized cataloging and computer network system. Some went toward YA summer programming and the rest into our Building Maintenance and repairs account.

As for funds that we have available at this moment... again you have that document... the numbers you see there show that a limited number of funds are immediately available for the renovation project. Those amounts are made up of accumulated, undesignated ‘yet to be spent’ money from membership drives, donations and fundraisers as well as the amount allocated by the board this year for
Building Maintenance and Repair. Also you will see the amount that has already been designated toward the current project for repair of the floor joists in the front room of the library. That amount, by the way, was patron donations designated for building repair.

As for other funds, you received a letter previously from our Board president that we are committed to finding funding in a variety of ways to finance items (like window replacements, etc) that were cut from the renovation project in an attempt to meet the lower cost that you requested. The Library Board conducts its business in a respectful and professional manner and we expect our elected officials to act in the same way. I do believe that you owe a written apology to the Board of Trustees, our director, bookkeeper and accountant.

If you have any reasonable questions that have not already been addressed, I will do my best to answer. Thank you.

Thomas thanked Ms. Parda for speaking and clarifying the information. She thanks the volunteers for the incredible work they do.

Williams said this project started at $6.7 million. He is the one who pulled up the 990s. The library has quite a bit of money. Some of that money could be used to help fund the project. The Board of Trustees is restricted on the use of some of that money; some is available. Pulling some of the money that has been saved or accumulated cash over the years to get to the point of the proposed amount would be a great thing to do. We are searching for every nickel and dime to even run the Town government. We are being asked to approve a library project that has failed a number of times. This number was not secret. Parda said the 990s show a moment out of time and includes the building, the property, and the money we have at that time. Donations are often very specific in their use. The endowment was the seed money that was put into accounts way before any of us were hear. That is our legacy and have been entrusted to manage it. The Board of Trustees is committed to spending some of that money and are looking at other methods of funding. It would be foolish to spend it unwisely. The Trustees guard that money and use it wisely. Backhaus said the Trustees do not have the right to redirect a donation if a specific use was stated when it was made. An accountant is paid to complete the 990s. The endowment interest may be spent up to a certain amount. The Trustees have decided on reinvesting the interest. There have been no contributions made to those funds in 20 years. No town grant money has ever gone into the endowment fund.

Hand said the library Board is bringing to the table:

- They pursued the grant.
- They will foot the bill for the sagging floor joists.
- They will deed the building and property to the Town.

The Board is contributing mightily to this effort. The floor joists may even cost more and the Board will have to find the money. The Board has quite a lot of skin in the game.

Williams said the $850,000 grant is your tax dollars. Hand said that did not show up without effort. Williams said the $850,000 is your money and it is being repurposed. Hand said he is aware of where grant monies come from; the library Board did the work to make the money show up.
O’Brien, Sr. is disturbed about the sentiments stated by the Board about the Finance meeting. The purpose was to find a fiscal solution. The project has come in beyond what the Council had determined to put forward for the project. He appreciates what the Board does. Parda said the sentiments are an accumulation of years of this attitude.

- **School Roofs**
- **School Alarms**

**Motion:** I move the Town Council send the school roof renovations and fire alarms projects to referendum as one project with estimated project costs of $2,680,000, estimated grant reimbursement of $1,250,000 leaving the net borrowing amount of $1,430,000.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Hand

**Discussion:** Elssesser noted in his background memo that the bonding costs have to be put in one project. He said he would put it in the schools projects. If the Booth & Dimock Library is moved forward by the Council and it passes, it will ride on the coattails.

**Friendly amendment:** ...school roof renovations and fire alarms projects would have estimated project costs of $2,780,000, estimated grant reimbursement of $1,250,000 leaving the net borrowing amount of $1,530,000.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Accepted by: Hand

**Discussion:** Thomas asked if there is a certain amount of money you need to bond or you should bond to make it worthwhile? O’Brien, Sr. said if you combine all of the projects it is more efficient. Thomas said why wouldn’t we combine all of these projects then? Blanchard said the library will ride on the coattails. O’Brien, Sr. explained there is a difference between passing projects to go to referendum for approval and putting together the bond package. When you put the bond package together you combine all of the projects. We are not saying this is how it will go to referendum. Elsesser said going under a million in borrowing is probably not advisable but we won’t go to market when we have low cash flow. It is later on in the project while in the construction phase. We also need to look at the timing of the sale. Typically we will go to market in July because of tax payments. We wouldn’t want to do something in December when we are low on cash. There is an art to when we go to market. O’Brien, Sr. said you might get a lower rate by offering a larger bonding. Thomas asked what happens then if the school roofs and fire alarms projects fail and the Library’s $100,000 is included in the bonding amount. It is under a million dollars. O’Brien, Sr. said we would probably wait and combine it with other future projects. Thomas said so why wouldn’t we put these all together as one question. Blanchard said she thinks each should stand on their own merit. O’Brien, Sr. would like people to have a choice. Blanchard agreed.

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

Page 11 of 19
**Motion:** I move the Council move forward to approve $1,833,180 for the library renovation project with $850,000 that will ultimately come from the State Library grant leaving $983,180 for the Town ________.

By: Thomas  Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Thomas made the same motion at the Finance meeting where it did not get a second. Oftentimes Council goals can be flexible. The goal we set is not necessarily hard and fast with the matching of $850,000. The additional money that the library project needs to do what was presented to us really won’t affect the cost of the bonding. She thinks this is a time that calls for that flexibility. You may recall when we adopted those goals this was actually one goal that she was in opposition to. Thomas knows it is a controversial issue in town; it’s been used as a divisive wedge in our community, but when we all step back we all recognize the importance of a community library and the services it provides. As was mentioned earlier in this meeting it started as a $6 mill. project. It is now a project that is under $2 mill. and we as taxpayers will be asked to pay less than $1 mill. which is so far removed from where we started. This reminds Thomas of when we were trying to get the North Coventry fire station built. And that failed three times until it was down to no more wiggle room and it was a tight project and people did feel comfortable with it. Thomas really feels what the Library Committee has presented to us at this point is pared down. It does exactly what needs to be done in regards to the remediation of the water problems. It provides a good usable space for the community. Thomas hopes that all Members will consider that fact to go that extra bit of money. It doesn’t change what it looks like in our debt services, it doesn’t change what we go to bonding for. Thomas respectfully puts that forward.

O’Brien, Jr. asked Blanchard to repeat the motion. It is heard to hear remotely. Blanchard will have Thomas repeat it as she had a lot of numbers in it.

Thomas repeated the motion - I move to approve bond $1,833,180 for the library renovation and repair project. Basically she will leave it there. Ultimately, $850,000 will come from the State Library grant. It is always confusing to voters when they see the big number on the ballot and not understand that pretty much half of the money is not coming out of their pocket. Elsesser said may be that be worded differently. He pointed out our Charter allows for ______ grants. I think you still need to put a net total to be spent but the question would say of which this amount would be borrowed. Thomas was trying to say that. Instead of saying the funds from the grant it should say the amount to be borrowed.

Hand strongly supports this motion. He took the time to listen in and observe the meetings of the committee. He thinks the goal has been achieved. There are no frills in what was presented at the $1.833 mill. It has been nickeled and dimed just about the bare minimum, at the actual bare bones minimum to get the project done. Clearly this library is not something we spend a lot of money on every year with respect to projects done. The last one was what 32 years ago? O’Brien, Sr. said $230,000 was spent two years ago. Hand said then the one before that one did not address the water intrusion issue. The HVAC system not withstanding Hand still feels this is an extremely important community resource that is going to be needed more in this environment as we try to claw our way back. This is the type of thing that supports community
members in so many ways. Hand really feels the work that Committee put in, I mean, we had Rep. Ackert there and he put his time in and weighing in and making sure the constituents were heard. Really they have taken away functionality that would have enhanced the new space that we will hopefully end up with. So now it is even a little less useful. Replacing the wooden windows has been taken out. That was a cost savings maneuver many years ago. They did the wood frames instead of the metal frames. Now here we are thirty years later that is another project that will need to be done after this if it were to go through. That will still need to be addressed. Hand really feels this is a time for investment in our community for the benefit of the citizens of our community that use that and that is quite a lot. We’ve all seen the statistics. Hand feels that going the additional $133,000 to get to what they have whittled it down to. Hand can’t overstate that...they have whittled this thing down, it’s bare bones. Hand thinks we should step up and support them with the charge that we gave them and they went and did the work and came back with that plan. And then we changed the charge on them and they went out and did that work and came back. I really feel we should support their efforts of volunteers in the community that worked a year and one-half for just this renovation and improvement committee portion of this. I think if we want volunteers in our community to step up for projects like this we have to stand behind them and support the work they did. That’s why he supports this very strongly. It’s kind of like not standing behind our community if we go and take this that has already been whittled down to the bare bones and say we are going to whack off some more just to make it doesn’t work for some reason I just don’t understand. This is a resource for the community at large. This is something we need to support. When you look at we are spending on these other projects or talking about spending on these, the increase of $133,000 over the $1.7 mill. and there is $850,000 in grant money in there. Hand feels there is very little reason not to go that small step. To meet them where they whittled it to after we told them to. Hand feels strongly about it. He thinks this is one way that Coventry can succeed.

Thomas said it was very clear during the last November election that the library issue became the big wedge issue. Thomas feels it would be such a disservice to the community at large to not have the heart and the courage to do this library project as it currently stands because some ran on this as an issue. Thomas really thinks you still uphold your promise to your constituents by bringing forth a project that is millions of dollars less. I think this is what collaboration means. I think this is what compromise means and I think this is what communities want to see.

O’Brien, Sr. said when the last Council proposed this, and he was part of that Council, I interpreted the charge to the committee differently than the majority of the Council. I tried to bring it their attention two to three times to get the Council to give input to the committee, to understand what was different than what they were proposing from what I thought we had included in our charge. Given all that, we got to a point where an $850,000 grant became available. O’Brien, Sr. went through and did the numbers and thinks the Town will be spending in the neighborhood of $750,000 to do the maintenance costs, the code violation improvements, and solve the water intrusion problem. He is more than happy to step up. It was not easy to do because not a lot of people support the project that I know. It makes sense to get the money we are going to give them to leverage that to get the grant and do that and add value to the library and to the town. That’s at $1.7 mill. He is not willing to go higher than that. I don’t think I would want to do that to my taxpayers. I told them why I was supporting that. I am not
supporting that plus adding another $150,000. And I also think that they will be able to adjust the budget and work within the $1.7 mill. to do a wonderful project. He is not concerned. O’Brien, Sr. was amazed they cut off $500,060 within two weeks from when we gave them the charge back to change it to $1.7 mill. He is not saying they have not looked very carefully at what they proposed but does believe there are ways to adjust their budget to come within the amount we have put forward. $1.7 mill. is a lot of money. They can do a lot of improvements to that library and hope they would want to. If they don’t want to bring it in at what passes here they should let us know that and then we wouldn’t put it forward. I’m going to vote for $1.7 mill.

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

The motion fails.

**Motion:** I move the Council send the Booth & Dimock Library Renovation project to referendum in November with an estimated project cost of $1.7 mill., estimated grant receipts of $850,000, net borrowing amount of $750,000.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Williams

Discussion: Elsesser said to set the record straight – Jon Hand pointed out the windows issue. The Committee had talked about the windows being an add alternate to the bid so that if they are able to work the numbers down and they get a great bid then the windows could be added back in, the windows that had to be taken out. It was windows and furniture. They are hoping as they go through design/build there might be some money savings. Everyone agrees, long term, having matching windows for the old building makes sense and it’s the right thing to do and we are hoping to get to that.

Williams asked if the schools roofs and alarms fail and the library passes is there a way to move their project forward without bonding which seems pretty expensive. Elsesser said yes, we could look at that. Elsesser would be surprised if the school roofs don’t pass because people understand a leaky roof needs to be fixed. O’Brien, Sr. said the bonding costs are in the roofs project so if it fails we will have to do something else. There is different kind of borrowing or hold off until next year when we have something else to attach it to. We’ve done that before, we’ve funded it through our fund balance. Elsesser said it is not appropriate for us to ask for more money than we need to borrow. We would need to figure it out. We could go to a traditional bank and you don’t have those fees and you pay a bit more in interest, but not as much as through the bond process.

Thomas said clearly this is not the amount she originally would advocate for but I’m not going to vote against this because I want this library project to move forward. She hopes O’Brien, Sr. is correct that it will all work out in the end and that the library will be able to accomplish everything that is in its plan.

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

Blanchard distributed the Purchase and Sale agreement. Nobody had questions? O’Brien, Sr. said the purchase and sale is already signed. His question was the $500,000. Elsesser said it would need to be amended. We can start talking about that.

7.E. 20/21-7: Consideration/Possible Action: Adoption Of Right To Vote Resolution  
Blanchard thanked Thomas for reworking this and sending it back to the Members.

Motion: I move the Coventry Town Council adopt this resolution calling on the State to expand voting options –

WHEREAS, there is currently a global pandemic of novel Coronavirus 2019 ("COVID-19"); and Whereas this public health emergency negatively impacts 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  
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 pursue all options to make our general elections safe for voters and poll workers and extend absentee voting privileges to all registered voters in the 2020 election cycle and Urges the General Assembly to convene in special session for the purpose of (1) amending the Connecticut 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 and Urges 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.

By: Thomas  Seconded: Hand

Discussion: Thomas said she also included information when this was sent to
everybody – the order from the Massachusetts Governor and information fraud being
rare in mail-in voting.

Thomas is okay with taking out language about this being for all future elections to get
this passed. O’Brien, Jr. does not have a problem with expanding absentee voting
especially for this year; if we are taking out the last two paragraphs he can probably vote
for it. Expand the list of reasons to get an absentee ballot to include COVID-19. Elsesser
said define fear of illness as illness. O’Brien, Sr. said fear of Covid as a disability.
Thomas said what is in the Constitution language is at odds with what is in the statutory
language. The definition is broader in the statute. O’Brien, Sr. said you want to broaden
the interpretation of current state law to enable those who are afflicted with or in fear of
COVID-19 to be able to secure an absentee ballot. Blanchard said she thought if you are
applying for an absentee ballot and your choices are check the box I’m in the service, I’m
out of the state for the day, or COVID-19 is really sufficient in this case for the
November 2020 election. O’Brien, Sr. said he doesn’t know if they will change the
boxes. It may say illness if that’s what Thomas is trying to say. O’Brien, Sr. thinks it is
expanding the interpretation of the statute. O’Brien, Sr. said he had two concerns. One
was sending out applications to registered voters. Thomas said it is really in the last two
paragraphs. Discussion took place about eliminating the ‘his or her’ before illness in the
statute. The legislative attempt being to leave ‘illness’ covering this COVID-19
situation. O’Brien, Sr. is not suggesting changing the absentee voting procedures; I’m
just allowing people to use it for that purpose. The Governor changed the whole thing
because the applications were sent out. Williams asked aren’t they doing this is special
session already? Thomas said yes, so we are supporting that. O’Brien, Sr. said this is
like the No Tolls resolution. Williams said we want to give our support behind this.
Thomas said we don’t know what it is going to look like. Thomas would like to see more
but if there is a way with compromise to find a way we are all agreeable as a Council to
urge our legislators to help us out in the November election. It is bipartisan. O’Brien, Sr.
said this would change the statute so in the future if there is another pandemic or
something similar they could utilize the same absentee process.

Thomas said we are striking the last paragraph. The second to last paragraph now says –
"Urges the General Assembly during special session to amend the Connecticut General
Statutes to interpret illness as including fearing being at risk of contracting an illness – so
you wouldn’t have to have the illness. Thomas said she thinks it is better to go a little
broader in case there are other ways to fix this. O’Brien, Sr. said basically the legislative
intent enables a voter to utilize illness as a reason to obtaining an absentee ballot to
include whether they have been inflicted or are in fear of that disease. Strike the eighth
and ninth Whereas paragraphs.

Friendly amendment of the resolution to read:
WHEREAS, there is currently a global pandemic of novel Coronavirus 2019 ("COVID-19"); and Whereas this public health emergency negatively impacts 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 covid-19 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 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 pursue all options to make our general elections safe for voters and poll workers and extend absentee voting privileges to all registered voters in the 2020 election cycle and Urges the General Assembly to convene in special session for the purpose of (1) amending the Connecticut General Statutes to adopt the changes to absentee voting procedures made by Governor Ned Lamont in Executive Order No. 7QQ for all future elections during the July 2020 special session to align the State Statutes pertaining to absentee ballot procedures with the Constitution to broaden the term illness to address the pandemic and (2) appropriating sufficient funds to municipalities to defray the significant increased cost of holding elections during the pandemic, and Urges 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.

Accepted by: Hand

Voting:
For: O’Brien, Sr., O’Brien, Jr., Hand, Blanchard, Thomas, Williams
Against: None
Abstain: None
7.F. 20/21-8: Consideration/Possible Action: Possible STEAP Projects For Grant Submission
Elsesser sent out a list of possible STEAP projects. State grants have been reduced to $128,205 and are requiring a match for STEAP projects. It was hinted that COVID related projects may have some benefit. The three projects proposed on the planning list – a Town Hall addition to replace the Annex, the water tower for fire protection, and the girls softball fields. These are not ready to go and may be beyond the $128,000.

Instead, Elsesser suggests constructing a transfer station at DPW or landfill venting, repair, and athletic field enhancement. These are two primary project and one is more essential. There is a crack in the cap of the landfill and the enhancements would be to allow grass to be grown and possibly adding a multi-use field. The landfill project is ready to go ahead this year and COVVRA would have to spend the core of that money.

Other project were listed in Elsesser’s memo but the two to benefit COVVRA are the most shovel ready. STEAP grant projects have historically been on the Town side. The grant has to be used for capital items, not operating items. Even safety dividers between people would not qualify because that is furnishing.

Elsesser said the landfill is the most critical that has to happen now.

O’Brien, Sr. suggested submitting the grant application for the landfill venting, repair, and athletic field enhancement. Williams agreed with O’Brien, Sr.’s suggestion. Elsesser will bring the resolution to the Finance meeting and then we can get the grant application out.

8. New Business:
8.A. 20/21-9: Consideration/Possible Action: Capital Lease Resolution
Motion: I move the Council approve the Resolution as submitted with the agenda.

By: O’Brien, Sr. Seconded: Hand

Discussion: This includes a dump truck, one of the two police cars, and fire service truck. The total is $343,500.

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

8.B. 20/21-10: Consideration/Possible Action: Resolution, FY 2020 Homeland Security Program MOA And Authorization For Town Manager To Execute
Motion: I move the Council accept the resolution and authorize the Town Manager to execute it.

By: Hand Seconded: Williams
Discussion: We have to adopt the resolution on an annual basis. The resolution (included in the agenda packet) was read.

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

9. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:
9.A. *Board Of Education: 7/16/20 Agenda
Thomas said she really liked where they remind everyone how to watch the live stream of the meetings and how to participate in the audience of citizens portion. This method seems to make the BOE more accessible to the residents of the town. Williams and Hand agreed. Elsesser and Laura Stone will work on this for the Town Council agendas.

10. Executive Session
- Personnel
Elsesser stated he will send a memo on this matter rather than go into Executive Session.

11. Adjournment:
Motion: I move for adjournment at 11:08 p.m.

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

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

Respectfully Submitted,
Yvonne B. Filip
Yvonne B. Filip, Town Council Clerk

PLEASE NOTE: These minutes are not official until approved by the Council at the next Council meeting. Please see the next Council meeting minutes for approval or changes to these minutes.
Amanda Backhaus, Finance Director reported that tax collections are at 99.45% and total revenues are at 99.99%.

COVRRRA collections are at 99.56% and the COVRRRA balance is currently around $18,000 higher than what had been projected.

Sewer use collections are at 112.23% and the sewer fund increased $77,000 overall from the prior year. They have a large balance of $880,000 but have $350,000 in capital projects planned for FY21.

We discussed the monthly financial reports and discussed the many end of the year transfers and the difference in the way the town handles transfers and the Board of Education handles transfers.

We discussed the Board of Education Management Report dated 7/13/2020 and the changes that are reflected compared to the 6/19/2020 Management report. It was noted that the Board continues to deduct $32,000 of unbudgeted Covid-19 expenses that were submitted to FEMA for potential 75% reimbursement, from the total Covid-19 net savings amount,. The chair said that it is clear that these expenses were included in the expenses in each of the appropriate line items in the Board of Education’s Management report and had been paid for during the fiscal year. When these expenses were added into the expenses in those line items they reduced the “Balance Available” of each line item in an amount equal to those expenses. The Balance Available in each of those line items is the net amount available at year end and together represent the total amount of net Covid -19 savings. These expenses reduced the balance in those accounts and were paid for out of what would be available net Covid-19 savings during the fiscal year. Put more simply. If these expenses had not occurred, then the total amount of net Covid-19 savings (before deductions) would be $32,000 higher. It is improper to then deduct another $32,000 from the net Covid-19 savings amount. Amanda Backhaus agreed with this analysis and told the committee that she has discussed this with Bob Carroll and she had believed that Bob was going to change his report based on their discussion – but this did not happen.

It was also noted that the Board had made changes to their Special Ed Tuition/Excess Cost line item, increasing it to $42,513. We wondered if this represented the final results of negotiations with the Special Education Programs.
We will discuss these and other matters with the Board of Education Fiscal Committee at our joint meeting on July 30th.

Then the Committee discussed the possibility of recommending sending one or more of the four capital projects to referendum in November. The committee discussed the Library project and the Committee recommends that the Town Council send the project, at a total cost of $1.7 million and with the Town bonding $750,000, to referendum.

We discussed the school roof projects and the fire alarms. The Committee recommends that the Town Council send the two projects to referendum as a single question, in the amount of $2,680,000 with the Town bonding $1,430,000.
The Girls Softball Field project was discussed and the Committee is recommending that the Town Council not include this project in the referendum in November. A number of permits/approvals will need to be completed, an updated estimate of total costs will be gotten (due to the removal of the paving of the parking lot) and the Girls Softball Committee has indicated they will be pursuing a number of fundraising activities, once they get additional documents to use for that purpose. It was discussed that depending on how things progress, we may be able to consider a spring referendum for this item. John Elsesser has been keeping the Girls Softball Field committee updated on what is happening.

Next the Committee recommends that the Town Council approve the Covid-19 Response Plan. Changes have been made since the prior Town Council meeting so the chair asked that we all review them prior to approving the plan and make any final recommendations at the Council meeting.

The members of the Town Council had received an email from David Sutherland of Gerald Park Lake Association asking whether they would be able to get a garbage and recycling cart for their Association. The chair had reached out to David by phone and was told that the Association is not sure what they will decide to do but just wants to know if this is an option they can consider.

John Elsesser said that Yes the Association could pay for year round COVRRRA service and get a tipper barrel and recycling barrel with the caveat that someone would have to bring the barrel(s) to the road, as the company requires, on collection day.

Respectfully,

Matthew O’Brien Sr.
Chairman Town Council Finance Committee
Is the Law Firm of Kainen, Escalera, and McHale still investigating Chief Palmer's handling of Jennifer Burdette's complaint against ex officer Mike Hicks? At $300 per hour, how much has this investigation cost?

Recently, I sent an email to John Elsesser. It reads below.

At the last council meeting, Lisa Thomas said that she could not speak out on the matters involving Mike Hicks because it would violate council policy and was advised by the lawyers not to do so.

Do council members forfeit all first amendment rights while serving? Can council members speak during the audience of citizens as a private citizen on any matter of their choice as long as they do not disclose confidential information or related to the case?

John Elsesser replied, "I think Lisa Thomas can speak for herself."

I would appreciate some clarification on this matter. As always, thank you for reading my email.

Jason Blakesley
27 Berry Avenue
Coventry, CT 06238
Amanda L. Backhaus, CPA  
Finance Director  
Town of Coventry

From: Linda Blakesley <lindablakesley@outlook.com>  
Sent: Monday, July 6, 2020 6:57 PM  
To: Coventry Audience <Audience@coventryct.org>  
Subject: [EXTERNAL] audience of citizens

Hello. My name is Linda Blakesley and I live at 27 Berry Avenue.

I am pleased that the Town Council craft a statement denouncing racism. That was the easy part. Now the time is to put those words into action and change. Could the town share what is being done to identify and combat systemic and institutional racism that exists in town policies and practices? Has any subcommittee been formed? I would love to hear of anything that is being done in this area.

Could the town provide information about how many Black people or other People of Color are currently employed for the Town of Coventry or the Board of Education?

Thank you for considering my questions. I hope to hear a report on the above at the next council meeting.

Sincerely,

Linda Blakesley  
27 Berry Avenue  
Coventry, CT 06238

Linda Blakesley
Members of council,

Another two weeks have passed and yet no explanation for the unconstitutional actions you have taken in regard to the taxing of the citizens has been offered. The town Manager has offered no public response to his willful and knowing misrepresentation of the facts in regard to the topic.

I wrote to the council to point out and make you aware of the constitutional issue and obligation your oath bound you to back in May, and at every town meeting since yet no explanation of why the council feels it has the authority to strip the rights of the people has been offered.

Let's make a clear reminder also, you as a council, the town manager, nor the governor none of you have the authority to do this. You have been presented with the facts of why this is true and have offered nothing in return except lies from the town manager. Lies that were also refuted.

However during all of this silence, we saw at the last council meeting members of the same council that stripped the rights of the people they represent, and violated their oath of office grandstanding about constitutional rights and voting access. How any of you can have the gall to stand on a soapbox and, let's call it what it was, mine for political talking points about protecting the peoples right to vote while remaining silent about the right of the people to vote for months is baffling. The message that this underscores is that the council and the town manager feel they are above the citizens, this is not how this works.

The council needs to take immediate discussion of, and offering of an explanation for its actions. Every member should make a clear and fact based statement to the people where you think the authority to undertake these actions comes from and how you justify this egregious abuse of authority, or make an immediate statement that what you have done is invalid, that the tax bills you sent out without authority are invalid and will not be enforced, and deal with the actions of the town manager who lead you down this path.

The citizens have a right to know that the bills they received are completely out of the bounds for the government to issue, and that they should be disregarded. Any attempt to collect on them should be viewed as extortion.

If anyone wondered what their gradeschool history book meant when they read the slogan "taxation without representation" the Coventry town council has created a prime modern day example.

If you don't want to do the job, please leave. Again, regardless of wether The town manager feels he should be "made and offer" its about doing the job and currently that is not happening. No one is forcing you to stay,
nor should they begrudge you for leaving. God only knows i don’t know why you would want to do it in the first place. But there are rules to be followed.

There are rules that Government is beholden to follow first and foremost the protection of the constitutional rights of the people. You have failed in this regard, and the people deserve the respect they were due.

Make things right.

In Liberty
Chris Morgan
62 North Ayers rd

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Get Outlook for Android
I oppose Coventry’s proposed “Resolution Calling on the State to Expand Voting Options”.

No excuse absentee voting degrades the integrity of the entire voting process that my son and other family members have served this country to preserve.

The push to vote without a photo id has been an agenda item for years and now is playing off of fear. There are already reports of deceased residents receiving applications for an absentee ballot. Large volumes of paper votes being cast without absolute verification is an unacceptable means to elect anyone; especially in a Presidential election year.

The vulnerable, i.e. people too ill to vote in person, are already allowed to elect by absentee ballot. Following the CDC and current Governor’s guidelines to be in public spaces has worked for this State and does not suppress the right to vote. Staying six feet apart and offering gloves and face masks to voting officials and voters is a simple solution; a practice that has kept 99% of the population virus-free.

If masses of people can shop at a grocery or retail store for an hour and then stand in-line, they can show up in-person, for a few minutes, with a photo id and vote.

Carolyn Gerrity

229 Geraldine Drive
Laura Stone

From: Coventry Audience
Sent: Monday, July 20, 2020 12:05 PM
To: Laura Stone
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Hunt’s Tree Farm
Attachments: Hunts Barn.jpg; Hunts Barn1.jpg; Hunts FARM letter.jpg

5 of 5. This one has pictures with it....not sure if those get submitted into the minutes too?

Amanda L. Backhaus, CPA
Finance Director
Town of Coventry

From: jacobslaurie11@gmail.com <jacobslaurie11@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, July 20, 2020 11:43 AM
To: Coventry Audience <Audience@coventryct.org>
Cc: rdanehytx@gmail.com
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Hunt’s Tree Farm

Thank you for taking the time to hear my concerns regarding the recent changes at the Hunt’s Family Farm. Please see the attached photos with this email.

Good Evening,

My name is Laurie Jacobs and I reside at 2646 Boston Turnpike in Coventry. As a kid who grew up in Coventry and a longtime resident of North Coventry; I was saddened to hear the Hunt’s Family Tree Farm had been sold. My dad was an active participant at the Hunt’s Tree Farm after his retirement from the State of Connecticut during the Christmas season and our families have known each other for decades. I understand the evolution of family properties, family farms, family heritage and the time for families to move on. However; with the property under new ownership I have a number of questions directed to the Town.

- Does the town allow such forms of public advertisement and graffiti on buildings/barns?
  - In my opinion and many other concerned residents; the mural and advertisement of their proposed venture for whatever their intention is an atrocity to the neighborhood and those who travel on Silver and South Street. Photos from a recent drive by are attached for reference.
  - Based on the zoning regulation Section 5.01.03; it appears the advertisement is larger than 12 square feet and thus not allowed.
  - Have the new owners applied for a variance to have this large advertisement/sign painted on their barn? If so; was there a public meeting announced or advertised for such?
  - What guidelines have been implemented to the new owners about their size and format of the advertisement?
- Are the new owners of the Hunt Family Farm aka “Happy Tree Acres” going to be a marijuana growing farm?
  - And if so; have the new owners gone thru the proper channels and protocols to apply for such a license?
- What is the statement being presented to the public who travel along these roads?
  - Is this the message the Town of Coventry wants to give to folks who live here and folks visiting?
  - Silver Street & South Street have become major means of access to the public boat launch, to the farmers market and bringing outsiders into Coventry. Is this the message and/or reputation we want to give?
- Will Hunts Farm continue to sell Christmas trees, with crops of marijuana scattered in between? As families are walking the fields to cut down their Christmas tree they can purchase pot at the same time?
As a tax paying member of this community; does the community and town’s people have a voice in this?
- Has the new owners outlined their intention and/or business plan they are so adamantly advertising?

As a concerned resident; please advise on how the Town of Coventry is addressing the above mentioned issues. I look forward to your reply.

In regards,

Laurie Jacobs & Bob Danehy
508.274.5190
jakobslaurie11@gmail.com
NOTE SUBMISSION IS BEFORE YOUR 4PM DEADLINE

Jennifer Burdette

Jennifer Burdette

As you know, the Town of Coventry hired the law firm of Kainen Escalera 
& McHale PC (the "Law Firm") to conduct an investigation of my 
complaint against Chief Palmer.

I would like to point out inconsistencies within the Palmer report; as well as 
relay **my absolute disgust and horror that the Town of Coventry 
breached protected personal information regarding a victim of sexual 
abuse.**

In regards to the inconsistencies: Palmer relies on an excuse as to why he did 
not think me, or my family, were in danger from Hicks -- because he didn’t 
even give Hicks my name. However, Palmer says right after, that he told 
Hicks to stay away from me, on the very day he put him on leave? How 
could Palmer tell Hicks who to stay away from without giving him my 
name?

As to why Palmer did not think it would help protect my family and me if he 
took away Hicks’ department-issued handgun, Palmer states that it was well 
known that Hicks had his own private handgun. So, according to Palmer’s 
logic, if Hicks was going to use a handgun to commit violence against my 
family, and me, then it did not matter that Hicks had TWO guns instead of 
one. Well, clearly it would have mattered greatly to my family and me if 
Hicks had two guns instead of one. The focus was more on not 
embarrassing Officer Hicks, rather than victim safety.

In addition, Palmer states that Hicks seemed fine to him when he put Hicks 
on administrative leave. **Relying on Hicks’ demeanor, instead of relying 
upon the seriousness of the accusations and potential adverse effects on 
Hicks’ mental state when the accusations and administrative leave 
become public, was yet another example of Palmer’s primary focus 
being on not wanting to subject one of his officers to embarrassment; 
instead of being on protecting the victim.**

Palmer states that he “forgot” to GIVE me a report to fill out. Does he not 
know his own policy that states the Officer taking the complaint is 
responsible for filling it out? It’s not up to the citizen coming in to tell the 
Police Department how to do their job. Does it sound even remotely 
plausible that a police officer with over forty years on the job forgot to
obtain a written statement or complete paperwork involving a complaint he himself states is serious, for a week? No. It does not sound even remotely plausible.

There is **no miscommunication** regarding whether Palmer told us to not go to the state police and to not talk to anyone about this. He said it. Period. What is left out of the report conveniently is Palmer called September 24th and stated strongly that there would be NO criminal investigation. Why was that phone call deliberately left out of the investigation? Per his own admissions from what I see, Palmer began to notify outside agencies AFTER the state police contacted HIM September 25th.

**Why Was One Of Officer Hicks’ Victim’s Name And Personal Information Protected From Disclosure In The Palmer Report, But Not The Other Victim’s Name And Personal Information?**

On the very first page of the Palmer Report, the FULL name of my daughter is set out. Her last name is then used throughout the report. Even though her last name is spelled incorrectly, the correct spelling is used in other outside exhibits attached. I am outraged by this. My daughter did NOT give her permission to have her name used in the Palmer Report. My daughter is as outraged as I am.

The Connecticut Supreme Court has determined that the disclosure of the name and identifying information of a victim of sexual harassment or sexual assault would constitute an invasion of personal privacy. *Rocque v. FOIC*, 255 Conn. 651, 665 (2001) (the name and related identifying information of a sexual harassment complainant “are not legitimate matters of public concern” and, by implication, the disclosure of such information would be highly offensive to a reasonable person).

Why was AD, the other victim, afforded the courtesy and privilege of having her identity protected through the use of the pseudonym “AD”? Who made the decision that AD’s privacy rights were superior to my daughter’s? There is no reason for this arbitrary distinction. Was it Attorney McHale, the author of the Palmer Report? Was it Town Manager Elsesser? Was it the Town Attorney? Also, how was the decision to protect AD’s privacy rights and not my daughter’s privacy rights made? What factors (if any) were considered when making that decision? My daughter and I want to know the answers to these questions.
Finally, why was my daughter’s consent (or lack of consent) to have her name and personal information disclosed in the Palmer Report NOT sought by the Law Firm or the Town of Coventry? Clearly, some person or persons made the decision not to protect my daughter’s privacy while protecting AD’s privacy. That person or persons should be identified so he or she can be questioned and held accountable.

Who Authorized The Palmer Report To Be Released Publicly?

The cover to the Palmer Report states as follows: “ATTORNEY-CLIENT COMMUNICATION PRIVILEGED & CONFIDENTIAL.”

Yet, the Palmer Report was released to the Journal Inquirer and the Willimantic Chronicle, as well as to me.

Who authorized the release of the Palmer Report, including exhibits, to those two newspapers? Was there a discussion and vote by the Town Council? If so, there is no evidence of which I am aware that either took place. Was the Town Attorney involved in the decision? Is he aware that her full name, full address, birthday, phone number, email, and other family members’ information were released? Or was the public release of the Palmer Report the decision of Mr. Elsesser acting alone? While it appears that the latter is the scenario which occurred (in that the report was emailed from Mr. Elsesser’s administrative assistants email account and the one-page memorandum dated July 17, 2020 summarizing the receipt and acceptance of the report is from Mr. Elsesser), the facts concerning the release of the Palmer Report without appropriate and necessary redactions and/or use of a pseudonym to protect my daughter’s privacy should be confirmed so that the party who released the report can be questioned and held accountable.

Finally, I wonder if Mr. Elsesser is aware that, by publicly releasing the Palmer Report, he has now waived the attorney-client privilege as to the contents of that report and potentially communications between the Town of Coventry and the Law Firm concerning the contents and drafting of the Palmer Report? The Town of Coventry was/is the client and the Law Firm was/is the attorney. Only the client can waive the attorney-client privilege. The person/entity seeking to invoke the attorney-client privilege is responsible for maintaining the continued confidentiality of protected communications. In this case, the Town of Coventry (acting through Mr.
Elsesser) did not maintain the confidentiality of the Palmer Report and, in fact, **publicly** released that report.

**Did The Town Of Coventry Give Any Consideration To The Negative Effects Which The Publication Of The Palmer Report And the Revelation Of The My Daughter’s Name And Personal Information Might, And Likely Will, Have On The Willingness Of Additional And Future Victims To Come Forward?**

By publicizing my daughter’s name and personal information, the **Town of Coventry has made an intentional and dangerous decision** to "out" her as someone who complained about a Coventry Police Officer’s unwanted, improper, and possibly illegal activity directed against her. Did the Town of Coventry give any thought to how this public “outing” could and likely will impact not only my daughter’s safety, but also the decision by other victims of the Coventry Police Department or the Town of Coventry from filing complaints in the future?

Consequently, not only was the decision to “out” my daughter in the Palmer Report clearly violative of the law (as previously discussed), but it is an egregiously poor policy decision by the Town of Coventry.

**Examples Of Improperly And/Or Illegally Disclosed Personal Information In The Palmer Report.**

The following is not an exhaustive list of improperly and/or illegally disclosed personal information. Instead, the following is merely illustrative of the numerous and utter failures by the Law Firm and the Town of Coventry to properly protect such personal information from disclosure.

**Exhibit 1 to the Palmer Report.**

- Disclosure of the full name of my daughter’s family member.

- Disclosure of the town that my daughter lived in at the time. Also, the name of the street that my daughter said she lived on.

**Exhibit 2 to the Palmer Report.**
• Disclosure of my email address and telephone number. My telephone number is not redacted in any of the exhibits.

*Exhibit 4 to the Palmer Report.*

• Exhibit 4 is a DCF report made regarding Officer Hicks improper and potentially illegal conduct towards my daughter, which report discloses her full name, her precise address and her phone number, and birthdate.

It is unclear why the DCF report was not redacted. DCF reports are confidential, and that confidentially is protected by state statutes.

*Exhibit 6 to the Palmer Report*

• Disclosure of my work email address and, therefore, my employer.

*Exhibit 7 to the Palmer Report*

• Disclosure of my place of employment.

*Exhibit 9 to the Palmer Report*

• Part of Exhibit 9 is a completed Coventry Police Department Personnel Complaint Report. That Complaint Report is entirely un-redacted and discloses my full name, residential address, cell phone number and email address.

Additionally, you revealed information that cannot even be mentioned in this public forum at this current time due to ongoing outside review and extremely serious matters of public safety, but you have been notified privately. As well sending poorly redacted narcotic investigations revealing easily read names of informants and others. I want nothing to do with these cases!

Again, these are merely examples of the utter failure of the Law Firm and the Town of Coventry to protect the privacy of my daughter and myself. **Furthermore, by providing identifying information, the Law Firm and the Town of Coventry has potentially endangered my daughter and my**
family. The Law Firm and the Town of Coventry should have given due thought and consideration to protecting my daughter’s and her family’s privacy to the same extent that they protected the privacy of AD.

Was The Violation Of My Daughter’s And My Privacy Rights Committed In Retaliation For Our Filing Complaints Against Michael Hicks and Chief Palmer?

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution strongly protects an individual’s right to complain of police misconduct. It guarantees both the freedom of speech and the right to petition the government for redress of grievances. In fact, the United States Supreme Court has described the right to petition the government for redress of grievances as among the most precious of the liberties safeguarded by the Bill of Rights. The right to petition includes the right to challenge police actions without fear of reprisal and to complain about police misconduct without being subjected to retaliation.

My daughter and I exercised our First Amendment rights to petition the government when we filed complaints against Michael Hicks and Chief Palmer. However, as I have described, another minor victim of Michael Hicks had her privacy rights protected when a pseudonym (“AD”) was substituted for her real name in the Palmer Report. However, my daughter, other family members, and my privacy rights were not similarly protected in that our full names and other personal identifying information were disclosed throughout the Palmer Report (a report which Mr. Elsesser, acting alone or in concert with other persons associated with the Town of Coventry, provided to the Journal Inquirer and the Willimantic Chronicle).

Clearly the disclosure of our identities and other personal information was intended to give us pause about challenging the facts underlying, or the conclusions of, the Palmer Report; as well as not speaking up in the future about other improper or illegal acts by members of the Coventry Police Department or the Town of Coventry. I am currently discussing possible legal recourse with a civil rights attorney.

Shame on whoever made this decision!!!