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

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

2. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. Audience of Citizens:

   Sandye Simon, 425 Geraldine Drive, has lived in town since 1997. Her husband owns a small business, and they own property, cars, and have had three registered dogs over the years. She has worked with town employees over the years and always found them to be professional, ethical, organized, and helpful. She was very distressed to read an employee of this town state they removed material to keep it safe. She has always felt that information that is private and personal is safe in this town, and she continues to feel that. She would like to thank all of the people both Republican and Democrat, who serve on our town committees. Their service to this town is for all of the people, regardless of whether they are Republican or Democrat. The fact that we have young men and women such as Jon Hand and Mike Sobol who have grown up in this community, have gone to school in this community, and choose to come back, raise their families, and do service to this town, says so much about this wonderful community. She applauds you all and she thanks you.

   Lisa Thomas, 255 Geraldine Drive, was present to express her concerns about recent revelations about the Republican registrar and Republican deputy registrar of voters. Recently, a judge ruled that Republican Registrar of Voters Pam Sewell gave Mike and Kelly Sobol incorrectly copied petition paperwork and ordered that a primary for the Republican Town Council and board of Education slates be held on September 17th. The Republican-elected registrar stated on the record that she had also illegally removed the Sobols’ petitions from Town Hall prior to their certification and filing with the Town Clerk, and that the Republican deputy registrar illegally shared either the petitions themselves or a description of their contents with members of the Coventry Republican Town Committee prior to the petitions being certified, or even notifying the Sobols that the paperwork was defective. According to one of several excellent ongoing articles in the Journal Inquirer, “Inge Pope, the deputy registrar, said the Republican Town Committee was alerted of the issue because they needed to know the primary might not occur.” Apparently, she didn’t think the Sobols also needed that information. To top it off, she told the reporter that the Sobols “are not true Republicans.” Since when does a registrar decide who is a “true” anything? This shows clear animus towards the Sobols by someone who is expected to be professional and neutral in doing their job. Additionally, after the judge’s order, Coventry Republican leadership seems to have attempted to influence the certification process by meeting with the Republican registrar and deputy registrar to examine the petitions and review a complaint from the Republican Town Committee “behind closed doors” at Town Hall, a public place, and denied a Journal Inquirer reporter access to that unwarned, potentially illegal meeting. Why was the meeting between a current member of the Coventry Town Council, the chairman of the Republican Town Committee, and the Republican registrar conducted behind closed doors in a public building funded by taxpayers, and with access denied to a newspaper reporter? Under
what authority did Councilman O’Brien inspect uncertified petitions submitted to the registrar and not yet made public? Why were this same councilman and his son, both candidates for the office that Mike Sobol is petitioning for, seeming to try to influence this decision-making process? Those same elected Republican registrars were the ones with the power to allow or deny the petitions the Sobols submitted in order to force a primary election. How does Pam Sewell, the still non-certified Republican registrar of voters for Coventry, have the qualifications to make this decision when she was the one who provided incomplete forms and inaccurate guidance to the Sobols in the first place? Today she finally did the right thing and certified the petitions, filed them with the Town Clerk, and there will be a Republican primary on September 17th. Yet, the same registrars whose illegal and negligent acts set all of this in motion are the ones tasked with the responsibility of setting up and running the primary. Evidently, the Coventry Republican Town Committee Chairman Matt O’Brien Jr., Vice Chairman, Julie Blanchard, Treasurer Matt O’Brien Sr. and Secretary Monica Debowska, who are the leadership of the Republican Town Committee, think laws and codes of ethics do not apply to them or to their elected registrar of voters. How are we to trust that there will be no election interference on September 17th? Lisa hopes that the Town Council and the Town will address this prior to that election.

4. Acceptance of Minutes:
Motion #19/20-36: Lisa Conant moved to accept the minutes of the Town Council meeting on August 19, 2019, seconded by Jonathan Hand. The following corrections were requested:
- Page 2, last paragraph, next to last line: change “savings” to “additional savings.” Last line: change “earnings” to “earnings.”
- Page 3, 4th bullet: add the word “is” after “tax sale.”
The motion to accept the minutes as requested carried on unanimous vote.

5. Consent Agenda:
Motion #19/20-37: Jonathan Hand moved to accept the Consent Agenda, seconded by Carolyn Arabolos. Matthew O’Brien requested to remove item 6. D.1., the Finance Committee minutes. The motion to accept the Consent agenda with the removal of the requested item carried on unanimous vote.

6. Reports:
A. Council Chair – Joan Lewis: Joan reported that Coventry lost two citizens who were great volunteers recently, Eric Ohlund, and Bill Hoffman. Eric was chair of the Veterans Commission for many years. and a Clerk of the Works for several building projects. Bill Hoffman was a teacher at CNHMS also helped organize the winter farmers’ market. Bill was also a former Town Council member and active on many other things. We are sad. They will be missed.

B. Council Members:
Lisa Conant said that the recent Arts on Main event was fantastic. She is looking forward to next year’s. She also went to Wicked Slice on Sunday to the car show. It was a lot of fun and there will be another one at Coventry Country Market on the 15th.

Matthew O’Brien also attended the Arts on Main event and it was great. He helped Eric set up in the morning and thanked Boy Scout Troop 65 for helping to set up. He also gave a shout out to Coventry Softball who came in second. Their annual golf tournament is coming up and people can put together a team. He also looked through the Library Renovation Committee meeting minutes and there was a discussion of presenting to the community – when will this be? John Elsesser said that the Committee is planning to do it in October. We are still trying to get numbers. They are meeting diligently. Matthew said he would like to get a preliminary idea of what they are doing before they get too far along. John replied that concepts were just approved
last Wednesday and now they are getting estimates. Joan Lewis noted that we do have a huge grant toward that project. John said yes – it is $850,000, and requires a match. We have some money from the elevator project which was placed on hold. We are also investigating whether any other funds are available in lookback.

Carolyn Arabolos also attended the Arts on Main event. It is nice to see it becoming an annual tradition. She made her first run to the transfer station and it is clear that Charlie takes pride in his work.

Jonathan Hand said it was amazing to see sculptures throughout town at the Arts on Main event. They are still there. Matthew said that more than 30 people came on the bus tour to see the sculpture field property which was fantastic. Jonathan, along with Lisa Conant, represented the Council at Bill Hoffman’s funeral service. It was a very sad day. Jonathan was Bill’s paper boy and later his student. He was one of the most engaging teachers, and Jonathan consider himself lucky to graduate from calling him Mr. Hoffman to Bill. Jonathan also gave a shout out to the “PJ Day people”, the Wesoloskie family, who had a lemonade stand and raised over $1,000 in a day. This is a testament that people really care.

8. **New Business:**

B. 19/20-11: Presentation On Census “Complete Count”:

John Elsesser introduced Catherine Marx, a municipal leader in Hebron who is now working with the Census. Catherine is the regional representative and is here to share why the census counts. Catherine said she is here to talk about the 2020 census and why it’s important. We are starting the field work. A count is mandated every 10 years of everyone residing in U.S. The first one was done in 1790. It determines representation and funding. It defines congressional and legislative districts, and annual allocation of federal funds. The data is used for planning. It important to count children. The data is safe and confidential, and is encrypted. Taking the census is easy. You can respond online, by phone, by paper, or by personal visit. It only takes 10 minutes to fill out. Support is provided for 12 languages in addition to English. Invitations to respond will begin to go out on March 12, 2020. Several reminders will be sent prior to a personal visit. Census jobs are available in this area. The jobs pay $21 per hour with flexible hours. April 1, 2020 is Census Day. The data will be tabulated and released December 2020. Catherine hopes that Coventry will consider establishing a Complete Count committee. She distributed materials to promote the Complete Count committee and shared a commercial about what to expect in 2020.

John Elsesser noted that we have a lot of capabilities among our staff to begin the formation of a committee, including our Town Planner, and his Executive Assistant for social media.. It is up to the Council to determine whether to appoint others. We hope to involve the schools. Catherine emphasized that children under 5 are under-counted. It is important to get into the schools. If we don’t count a child, we don’t get another opportunity to count them for 10 years. Matthew O’Brien asked whether funding and representation are regardless of citizenship. Catherine replied that certain suits are ongoing, but currently yes. Joan Lewis asked when you are going into schools for younger children, how do you collect information. Catherine replied that we try to get information to parents. When we do a quarter count we go into dorms. Lisa Conant said she has used census data in her job and it is tremendously helpful. It is great to see how it has progressed. Carolyn Arabolos asked if we need to take action. John replied if the Council wants to give me guidance you can. We have a good communication plan already – we can put it in the newsletter, social media etc. If the Council wants to branch out and have a larger committee we might want to refer it to Steering. Lisa asked what bandwidth we have for staff. John replied that a lot a milestones were met last week so we have a little more breathing room right now. We can talk about things like setting up a computer at Town Hall, the Library, etc. Communication and access
are two things we are going to be talking about. Carolyn suggested having this as an action item and that will give us a chance to go through the material. The Council members agreed.

6. Reports, Cont.
   C. Steering Committee – Jonathan Hand:

1. Personnel policies and procedures, section 1-8: The Steering Committee agreed to break this large document up into manageable sections. We have reviewed sections 1-8 and wanted to put them in front of other Council members so they would be familiar with the changes. No action is required tonight. Joan Lewis said we would appreciate if you would look at what Steering has put forward, and if you see anything you want changed so we can look at it at the next Steering committee rather than waiting until the end to do everything. The next Steering Committee meeting is 9/23.

2. Appointments:
   A. Motion #19/20-38: Jonathan Hand moved to appoint Arianna Mouradjian as an alternate to the Planning & Zoning Commission, term to expire 11/1/2021. The motion was seconded by Matthew O’Brien. John Elsesser said that she was interviewed by the Steering Committee. Jonathan said that the Committee interviews candidates for major land use boards. Motion #19/20-38 carried on unanimous vote.
   
   B. Motion #19/20-39: Jonathan Hand made a motion to move Joseph Malon from an alternate to full member of the School Energy and Building Efficiency Building Committee, for the duration of the committee’s work. The motion was seconded by Matthew O’Brien and carried on unanimous vote.

D.1 Finance Committee minutes:
Matthew O’Brien noted that when we set the mil rate it has a collection bias in it already. He asked Amanda Backhaus if there is any further understanding of why we didn’t collect $348,000. Amanda replied that she will have that adjustment on Friday and will have a final number for Finance next week. John Elsesser said that one other factor was that there was not a tax sale this fiscal year – we couldn’t schedule it so will come in next year. That hurts collections to some degree.

E. Town Manager’s Report – John Elsesser:
1. Projects Update:
   • EDC is doing site visits with larger employers to see in what capacity the Town can help them. They went to Boggini’s flavor factory and they are looking at some exciting things for CBD products that are in line with keeping things suspended. They need to expand their building and want to do it where the reserve septic is. We are trying to work with them on that. It was a productive visit. They were linked up with Farmers’ Market to highlight their products which are all legal – and they did a good seminar on how you know. EDC also went to Teleflex which is up to 80 employees from 30 and working 3 shifts. They are looking to hire 15 more people and parking will become an issue. We are working with them to help on that. They are committing to reconstructing their equipment and leaving it here. They have significant linkages with UConn for engineering work. We will also be working with them on outreach to trade schools, and with the apprenticeship program through CRCOG. They offer good well-paying jobs with benefits. Lots of their employees have been there for 20 years or more. They have a fascinating product line. It is an ISO 9000 plant. We will be working with their plant manager to see how we can help them. Carolyn Arabolos suggested the school’s program that is connected to the Goodwin College manufacturing program – she thinks this is the first year that Coventry schools will be involved in a manufacturing certification program.
• There will be a Republican primary on September 17th. Polling places are at the firehouses from 6 AM to 8 PM.
• The Lewis Hill paving project will get side striping as an accident reduction measure. It is not cheap but we are picking out roads with more major traffic volume for this work. We are not doing it on every road.
• The Jones Crossing culvert work is going well. The box culvert is in, with end walls to come. The project is on track and we are starting to line up a paving contractor to do the final paving.
• We own the house on Swamp Road. The process was very cordial. Matthew O’Brien asked if the price changed. John said no. There is a market adjustment after they buy a house - there is a look-back. We have to wait to see what they buy. The procedures are set through the Uniform Relocation Act. They took what our appraiser indicated the property was worth.
• The oil tanks were removed from Town Hall and the high school. We are waiting for work to be done at the grammar schools.
• The sidewalk on Ripley Hill is nearly completed. Some ADA features are to be installed.
• The scale at the transfer station was ordered and we will have it in a couple of weeks.
• Chip seal for roads listed in the newsletter is starting on the 16th. Crack sealing is planned for October.
• Matthew O'Brien asked if the Town Hall flagpole project is still on the list. John said yes. We may have to get contractors in to do it.
• We are about ready to go out and get individual prices for drainage in the Northfields neighborhood.
• Joan Lewis asked if there is anything new on the crosswalk at Main Street and Ripley Hill. John said that the State emailed Todd Penney with a question that we have to answer. Now we are getting lots of requests for sidewalks and crosswalks. We are a rural town and parents have a responsibility to train their kids to cross safely or be with them. Sidewalks are incredibly expensive and there are long-term maintenance issues, so we have a plan for target areas only – which have higher volume. The Planning and Zoning Commission has chosen not to take that route for development.
• Matthew O'Brien noted that the WPCA says we may have to submit a detailed environmental study for the Bolton sewer extension project. We have been looking at this for a long time. John replied that we had to hire an engineering firm, run an ad, and hold a public hearing if people sign a petition. Mike Ruef was checking to see the end date and whether there are signatures. It is moving along. Matthew said it seems like they keep throwing obstacles in the way. John said that CT DEEP came and inspected our plant for first time in 12 years and are seeming to indicate we are not in compliance with nitrogen. We anticipate some instruction on that. They are worried about nitrogen and prescription drugs. We can do a smaller plant. There is not a lot of money out there. As part of a mandate we might be able to gain additional capacity which would help economic development.
• Julie Blanchard asked if we can get a list of houses that are going in the tax sale. John said yes, it is being prepared for Finance and will be in Amanda’s monthly report.
• Joan said she saw a notice about an auction at Caprilands on 9/27 by the Arts Guild. John said it is actually the Historical Society. They will run it at Caprilands to capture what remains of the items that were donated to them. Julie asked who the current leader is. John said he has been dealing with Susan Way. Joan said that Jim Murphy is the president.
• Matthew O’Brien asked if the Skungamaug cell tower is operational – he is still getting poor reception in that area. John replied not yet. They are getting the electricity hooked up.
• The newsletter is at the printer and will be available online tomorrow. It will be in homes the third week of September. Joan noted that her mail route was late with the last issue.
2. Microgrid update: John Elsesser said we had a long and complicated conversation on Friday. The new Attorney General told all state agencies that any contract not signed by the end of August will not be authorized by him. They rescinded our contract. It may be that they changed some state laws and are stopping things for Oct. 1. The team asked what the changes are and were told that CT DEEP hasn’t been told. If they are minor technical changes we might be able to go ahead, but we have to wait for it to be reissued. They changed the drawdown requirements that would require the businesses to cover the financing for a longer period. These are small businesses. They are looking into that and still seem positive. They are trying to get firm pricing for the Housing Authority for their meeting on the 10th and the joint meeting of the Council and Board of Education on the 12th. Matthew O’Brien said we can’t sign the contract then. John replied that the team can sign with them. The decision on Friday was to continue. If nothing else the meeting on Thursday will provide more detail about how things will work. The team is moving ahead as if we will proceed. We haven’t had an opportunity to discuss it with Rep. Ackert. They are saying the payment structure is non-negotiable. Eversource made an error with Orchard Hills – it is not three-phase power; it is only one phase. They are looking at that. On Thursday we should know where all the equipment will go and start to see how things will all work. It is complicated, but the conference calls have been very helpful to come up with solutions. We might not take a vote on Thursday but might be asked to indicate whether we are on track. The virtual net metering application is in. Matthew reminded John that he has asked for more information on that.

2. Hop River Road Bridge: Our application has been accepted, so we don’t have to pay the 20% - it will be covered by the State. The project will probably be done in 2021 which might be helpful given other projects that are planned. We had a preliminary discussion about how wide it would be, snow removal considerations, etc. There are two culverts in Columbia that would have to be addressed. They will cover 80% of that but it could increase our combined share.

3. Lake Forum, September 17th: John said that he provided a list of upcoming events during September, as we wanted to make sure the Council is aware of them. The Lake forum is on the 17th, and there is also a Fire/EMS appreciation event on the 28th, with a recognition at 1 PM that needs a Council representative. We did an appreciation activity for Fire/EMS at Arts on Main last year but wanted something more central this time. Lisa Conant will attend.

7. Unfinished Business:
A. 19/20-8: Consideration/Possible Action: Appropriation for Repairs to Community Center: John Elsesser said this item is not ready for action. We have not been able to get a second price.
Motion #19/20-40: Matthew O’Brien moved to table consideration of an appropriation for repairs to the community center until more information is obtained. The motion was seconded by Jonathan Hand and carried on unanimous vote.

8. New Business:
A. 19/20-10: Consideration/Possible Action: Charge to Senior Housing Study Committee: John Elsesser noted that this was reviewed at Steering and revised several times to make it better. Motion #19/20-41: Jonathan Hand moved to adopt the charge to the Senior Housing Study Committee as presented. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard. Matthew O’Brien said it is hard to tell if the changes were made correctly without a clean copy. Under 4 A he wants to be sure it says an assessment of community needs, not a needs assessment. Joan Lewis said it is important to move this forward. People have been asking. Motion #19/20-41 carried on unanimous vote.

C. 19/20-12: Consideration/Possible Action: Adoption of Amended Cemetery Ordinance and Call to Public Hearing: Joan Lewis noted that this item has been in Steering for a while. Motion #19/20-42: Jonathan Hand moved to call a public hearing on October 7, 2019 at 7 PM in the
Town Hall Annex for the purpose of amending the Cemetery ordinances as presented. The motion was seconded by Matthew O'Brien. John Elsesser said this is a major re-write of a 1977 ordinance to reflect current practices. Steering had suggested several revisions which were accepted by the Cemetery Commission. We are ready to move to the next forum which is the public hearing, after which the Council could adopt the amendments. Motion #19/20-42 carried on unanimous vote.

D. 19/20-13: Discussion, Consideration and Possible Action: Town Council Role and Responsibility for Oversight of Office of Registrars of Voters: John Elsesser provided a draft resolution prepared by Town Attorney Richard Roberts based on concerns raised. It was emailed over the weekend (attached to minutes). Matthew O'Brien asked if this should be discussed in executive session, or at least have the person here when discussing it. John replied that questions have been raised regarding the Council’s role in overseeing the office of the Registrars of Voters. He was asked to talk with the attorneys - this is a direction that the Council can take. We cannot discuss the performance of an employee in executive session without that person present. Matthew said but we can do it in public? John replied yes; these are statement of facts, not performance. Pam Sewell is not certified as a registrar or moderator. No certified staff is available for elections. The attorneys indicated that discussions should not stray too far from matter of record, vs. opinion or judgment. The Council can amend, ask questions if you don't believe it is a statement of fact, and can add language if you feel it is appropriate. Jonathan Hand asked to verify if she has completed any certification courses. John replied that she completed one course when she first took office. She said she would take more and complete her certification but she has not. Matthew said he has something to share but doesn’t know if he can. He visited the Town Clerk’s office today about some papers he needed to file for the primary and the first comments that came from the Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk were that they didn’t think he had to file anything. It was only because he did his homework that he knew otherwise. Joan Lewis said she doesn’t believe that this comment is relevant to the discussion at hand. Carolyn Arabolos said there is a difference between initially not knowing something and then getting further along in the process. Matthew said he also does not know why it would go to the Election Commission vs. the Secretary of State. Why not exclude that because it seems like a direction to the Secretary of State’s office vs. letting them do their job. John said we covered all options. Joan said that this was done by the attorney and she is not inclined to change it. Carolyn and Jonathan agreed. Lisa read the document aloud as it was not available at the time the agenda was published. Motion #19/20-43: Lisa Conant moved that the Town Council adopt the resolution expressing a vote of no confidence in Pamela Sewell in her service as Registrar of Voters as proposed. The motion was seconded by Jonathan Hand. Lisa Conant said the resolution seems to focus on Pamela Sewell alone - there are two individuals in that office. She would like to amend the last statement of the resolution to include the Republican Deputy Registrar of Voters. She amended her motion as indicated, and Jonathan Hand amended his second. Motion #19/20-43 carried with Matthew O'Brien and Julie Blanchard abstaining, and Joan Lewis, Carolyn Arabolos, Lisa Conant and Jonathan Hand in favor.

Motion #19/20-44: Joan Lewis moved to amend the resolution to add “if warranted” to the end of the last sentence of the resolution. The motion was seconded by Lisa Conant and carried with Matthew O'Brien and Julie Blanchard abstaining, and Joan Lewis, Carolyn Arabolos, Lisa Conant and Jonathan Hand in favor.

9. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:
B. Certificate of Appreciation – CoventryFest: John Elsesser said that Coventry Cares issued a certificate of appreciation for the Town’s assistance with the CoventryFest event.
10. Executive Session:
Motion #19/20-44: Matthew O'Brien moved 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: Town Council members present, John Elsesser, and Amanda Backhaus. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard and carried on unanimous vote.

Motion #19/20-45: Matthew O'Brien moved that the Town Council enter into Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1-200(6)(E)-discussion of any matter which would result in the disclosure of public records or the information therein contained described in sub-section (b) of Section 1-210 with the following people in attendance: Town Council members present, and the Town Manager. The motion was seconded by Julie Blanchard and carried on unanimous vote.

Executive Session commenced at 9:14 PM.

Motion #19/20-46: Matthew O'Brien moved to leave Executive Session at 9:49 PM. The motion was seconded by Jonathan Hand and carried on unanimous vote.

10. Adjournment:
Motion #19/20-47: Matthew O'Brien moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 PM. The motion was seconded by Carolyn Arabolos and carried on unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone
Town Council Clerk

Note: These minutes are not official until acted upon by the Town Council at its next regular meeting. Those meeting minutes will reflect approval or changes to these minutes.
RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE
TOWN OF COVENTRY, CONNECTICUT

Whereas, Pamela Sewell is currently the Republican Registrar of Voters for the Town of Coventry; and

Whereas, she has failed to take courses and otherwise seek to obtain the statutorily required certification as a registrar of voters or certification as an election moderator within the period legally allowed; and

Whereas, in March of 2019 she gave assurances to the Town Council during the annual budget meeting that she would make diligent efforts to fulfill those statutory certification obligations and has not taken actions toward fulfilling these statutory requirements; and

Whereas, she has failed to properly perform the duties of the office of registrar of voters, including but not limited to obtaining and assuring the training of Republican moderators so that none are currently available to the Town and not properly following state regulations governing the care, custody and control of official public documents by taking them to her residence; and

Whereas, she has failed to provide proper advice and forms to residents exercising their statutory rights to petition for a primary election, causing unnecessary legal expenses and resulting in considerable time commitments by Town officials and other affected parties; and

Whereas, these failures have caused embarrassment to the Town and a loss of public confidence in the operations of the Town.

Now, therefore, be it hereby resolved that:

The Town Council of the Town of Coventry expresses a vote of “no confidence” in Pamela Sewell in her service as Registrar of Voters and hereby requests that the Office of the Secretary of the State conduct an investigation and take all appropriate actions available to that office under the law, including a referral of the issue to the State Elections Enforcement Commission.