Minutes
Town Council Finance Committee Meeting
September 9, 2019
Town Hall, Conference Room B

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM.
   Present: Carolyn Arabolos, Lisa Conant, Joan Lewis
   Also present: John Elsesser, Town Manager; Amanda Backhaus, Finance Director
   Absent: Mike Sobol (Joan Lewis seated)

2. Acceptance of Minutes:
   Joan Lewis moved to accept the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting on August 12, 2019, seconded by Lisa Conant. The following corrections were requested:
   - Page 1, item 3, first paragraph, 11th line: change “savings” to “earnings.”
   - Page 1, item 3, second paragraph: add “This gives us the ability to liquidate without penalty” as the last sentence.
   The motion to accept the minutes as corrected carried on unanimous vote.

3. Discussion With Coventry Softball Field Study Committee: Financing Strategies To Implement The Committee's Recommendations:
   Committee members present: Ashley Gagnon, Bonnie Edmondson, Jennifer Rodgers, Mike Blouin, Matthew Hunt.

   Bonnie Edmondson provided an update of the committee’s work. The committee’s objective is to develop a complex that meets the needs and addresses the gender disparities identified in their report, which was recently presented to the Town Council. The next step is to secure a location. The committee has found two feasible locations - the Ansaldi property and the town gravel pit. The Town does not own Ansaldi property. Given the unknown status of that, the committee believes that the ideal location is the gravel pit. The committee would like to request a timeline be developed. John Elsesser said to utilize the gravel pit, we would have to move the transfer station.

   Joan Lewis asked if the committee looked at the other location across the street that the Town owns. Jennifer said she drove there yesterday. John Elsesser showed diagram of the site and the sizing of a major league field on the parcel. He said that we went to the Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) and they are willing to talk about ceding the land over for other public use. We don’t believe a larger treatment plan will ever be permitted. The land is flat with 28’ of gravel so drainage is not a concern. What we don’t have is access to Main Street. John has talked with Phil Desiato over the years - Todd Penney drew a scheme where we could build a road off South Street Extension. We could either buy it, or he could give it. Or we could look at buying the whole property. The market value is approx. $200,000. This option is cheaper than the gravel pit. It would be a separate complex with room for an indoor field house down the road. It also provides a kayak launch point. Gravel makes a septic system easier. We have a bathroom trailer that we could give. Water supply would also not be a problem. The house has a well also. There have been no return calls from Ansaldi after several attempts to contact them.

   Lisa Conant asked if long term there would ever be an issue with expanding the water treatment facility. John replied we will never get a permit. The State wants us to tie into Willimantic. Lisa would not want to see us needing the land 20 years down the road. John said that is why he went to the WPCA first. We also still have the option of using the football field at Miller Richardson. The football league will not be using it. The gravel pit is next to a smelly swamp that floods. Amanda Backhaus noted that we use the gravel pit, so we would need a new site for that, too.
Joan Lewis asked what is most feasible for development and least costly. John replied that would be the football field. Joan said nobody wants the football field. John said it was good enough for football but not for softball? Lisa agreed that the biggest fight would be the cost. Joan said she doesn’t want to do it halfway because then it will take years. John said the other spot that wasn’t on anyone’s list was the parcel on Sam Green. Joan said it is not level. John said it would have to be tiered. Joan said if you have a field that is almost a field you are well on your way.

Carolyn Arabolos asked if the committee has any thoughts about funding. Jennifer said once we have a plan we could pursue grants. When people see the mission and understand that the girls don’t have a field, she thinks there are hundreds of companies that would want to donate to a good cause. Joan said they have to recognize that they will also be coming to the Town for money. How we package it and the cost for development are prime considerations. Carolyn asked how much it would cost to develop the property by the treatment plant. Jennifer said it is a viable option but she has some safety concerns with having fields near the road. We would want to move them back. It is definitely a viable option. Mike Blouin asked if the next step would be to do a cost analysis on this site. Joan replied that Town Engineer Todd Penney is so busy right now. The Council would have to appropriate money for an engineering study. John said the engineer could compare the gravel pit, the football field, the WPCA site, and make some recommendations.

Carolyn asked for details about the concerns with the football field. John replied we have been monitoring it for 30 years. Methane does exist but is very low. It is very close to drinking water standards. Mike said there is a stigma about the field. John replied when you are asking for money you better have a solid answer rather than a perception. We have a CT DEEP permit for this area.

Carolyn said this has been a long-standing concern and she thinks it is important that we bring parity to the town. It is concerning when it looks like they are playing in unsafe conditions and have to beg for parity. Joan asked what an engineering study would cost. John replied $20,000-$25,000. There is also the issue of neighborhood acceptance. Bonnie said she thinks the most useful thing would be to have concrete numbers so we can make a decision about what is most feasible and most cost conscious. Carolyn would like to move forward with a request for funds. Jennifer said we would also like to know if there are any other properties we were unaware of. She asked why we didn’t know about this parcel before now. Joan replied that we talked about it months ago. John noted that the WPCA just granted their permission two weeks ago. Carolyn said she is in favor of moving forward either way, and moved to recommend that the Town Council appropriate funds for an engineering study for the WPCA parcel, the gravel pit and the football field, encompassing septic, well, and parking considerations, for at least two softball fields or possibly three. Lisa Conant seconded the motion, which carried on unanimous vote. Joan will advise which Council agenda it will be on. John said he would be inclined to go back to the engineer who already has the CAD drawings and pricing.

4. Reports:
   A. Committee Chair – Carolyn Arabolos: There was a nice article in the Courant Community about the Arts on Main event – it appeared on the cover and center page (attached to minutes).

   B. Committee Members:
   Lisa Conant reported that the Wi-Fi at the Farmers Market is somewhat improved. She talked with a vendor yesterday and it still took a good 5 minutes to process her card. Perhaps it is just the volume of traffic. Amanda said she will check into it further. Our IT person has gone to the
market twice to test it. John said it could have been the vendor’s cell phone carrier.

C. Finance Director – Amanda Backhaus:
This month is the last report that will show 2019 FY reporting. We are not anticipating any further significant adjustments. We had an end of year surplus of $217,310. Total revenue was $411,911 over budget. The first page of the report shows the original calculation. We take the prior two years and average. John noted that we never collect 100%. We collected what we were projecting to collect. Amanda said overall it was a really good year. COVRRRA had a change from the prior month. The collection costs on the Stewart property have been removed because there will be a receivable. We took encumbrances out from Recreation, and they actually had a gain of $3900 instead of a loss. Amanda and Wendy went through the Recreation budget and a few items were mis-estimated. They are projecting to do better this year.

For the current year we are at 57.1% collection for taxes which is in line with last year. Overall collections and expenditures are also in line with expectations. There is nothing out of the ordinary at this point. The Board of Education just started up with salaries. COVRRRA collections are better than the prior year. We are glad to see that. We are intentionally reducing the balance. We knew we were going to eat away some of the fund balance with the change in recycling fees. John noted that the loss of revenue and the increase in costs will really hurt us. He wouldn’t be surprised if we have to raise our COVRRRA fees long term. The Sewer fund is doing well.

The Tax Collector sent out back tax statements and sewer bills. Sewer use payments are due by the end of September. Carolyn asked whether the back tax volume is fairly standard. Amanda said yes. We send out over 1000 every year. We are down to three tax sale properties. The house and additional lots on Brewster Street is adjacent to town-owned land. We might want to discuss that at the Council level. The Assessor is getting ready to send out personal property declarations. Carolyn asked if there is any value regarding crumbling foundations to tracking when they go off the grand list and when they come back on. John replied that a couple of houses have come back on. Amanda will run some numbers regarding mid-year prorates for further Council discussion.

Finance had a busy month, with union negotiations, the Sustainable CT submission for Silver certification, preparing for the bond rating, and the long form for EMS rates. The Town Hall bathrooms are partially done. We processed four additional pension claims for a total of eight this quarter. Working with the Board of Education, we had planned to prepare for disaster recovery. The quote to do the original project was $160,000, which would involve the use of some existing servers at the police department. We also priced out new servers for $196,000, and there is a higher level option at $197,000. In discussion with the Board of Education, Superintendent David Petrone committed to have $125,000 available. The big difference is the hardware – The Board thinks it would cost $70,000 to buy it separately, and if we don’t get it now it would need to be bought in a couple of years anyway. This alters the split and leaves us $20,000 short. Jeff Beebe is going back to the vendor on a couple of things. John said he thinks this should be a priority. We will put it on the agenda when we have more information.

D. Board of Education Fiscal Reports:
Joan Lewis noted the letter providing guidance on the implementation of the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) for the 2019-20 school year. John replied that they changed the law but we are in compliance. We are not allowed to spend less.

D. Bond Rating Update:
Amanda Backhaus reported that we had the conference call with Standard & Poor’s and we think it went well. We think we will receive a solid AA, or perhaps AA+, rating. We had hoped to have
that information on Friday but are now expecting it Wednesday late in the day. John said that the call lasted an hour and a half. We shared our strategy for dealing with reductions in State aid and they seemed to like our answers. When the report is released we will have an hour to make any material corrections. We are going to market on Monday the 16th.

6. **Adjournment:**
   The meeting was adjourned at 8:49 PM on a motion by Lisa Conant, seconded by Joan Lewis and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone
Town Council Clerk