



TOWN COUNCIL & TOWN MANAGER

Right: The Town crest. The motto, Altiora in votis, in Latin, translates as "I pray for the higher things."

Town Council



L to R: Julie Blanchard, William Zenko, Lisa Thomas, Steven Hall, Elizabeth Woolf, Valdis Vinkels, Richard Williams.

After being sworn in on November 4, 2009, the new Council got to work on developing council goals and priorities for itself, as is the practice for new Coventry Town Councils. The overall purpose is to create a framework for decision-making and action for the Council, itself, as well as for the Town Manager and his staff.

Our council goals and priorities for the fiscal years 2010 and 2011 fall under the following categories: Financial Management; Land Use and Economic Development; Citizen Involvement and Communications, Municipal Infrastructure and Services; Community Quality of Life.

I am pleased to report that the Council has made good progress in each of these categories. Following are some of the most notable for the 7-01-09 – 6-30-10 fiscal year:

- **Financial Management:** The Council spent long hours deliberating the 2010-2011 fiscal year budget. Our goal was to preserve appropriate levels of town and educational services and programs while at the same time, recognizing economic reality. The result was a budget that increased taxes by 2.2%. Our citizens voted their approval by passing it first time around. This was the second budget in a row that passed on the first vote. This came on the heels of another success! Successful refunding of over 10 million dollars of outstanding town debt, resulting in a saving of \$720,000 in future debt repayment.
- **Land Use and Economic Development:** Land Use and Economic Development: One of our goals has long been to acquire open space for perpetual preservation. The Council has now identified a parcel of land owned by the Malon family and expects to acquire it with monies from our Land Acquisition Fund, the Capital Budget and a grant that was just awarded to us by the CT Department of Environmental Protection with funds from the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program.
- **Citizen Involvement and Communications:** We have increased communications to our citizens by preparing and issuing explanatory texts for all scheduled town meetings/referenda on budgets and general bond resolutions. The information is mailed directly to all households and provides background and financial detail for the budget and/or resolution. We have received very favorable feedback on this initiative.

We continue to attract talented and enthusiastic volunteers to serve on the multitude of town boards, commissions and committees. The Council Steering Committee recruits on an ongoing basis so as to ensure a steady stream of candidates to fill vacancies as they occur.

- **Municipal Infrastructure and Services:** Both the present council, as well as the prior one, has had goals for a new public works garage. The last Council was successful in acquiring 15.6 acres of land for the eventual construction of a salt shed and the new garage facility. The current Council will oversee actual construction of the salt shed with \$350,000 in a state grant, as well as the start-up for the new garage building that will be funded with a bond issue.

The long awaited pedestrian walkway on Route 31 from Rte. 275 to just south of Root Rd. was finally completed using ARRA funds. Likewise, ARRA funds enabled us to upgrade the Town Hall heating and air conditioning system.

- **Community Quality of Life:** In response to a community survey from several years ago, as well as feedback from citizens who took part in *Community Conversations* in October 2008, the Council developed and passed a Blight Ordinance as a tool for staff to address neighborhood concerns. The Council worked hard to strike a balance between the rights of property owners with affected neighbors' property values.

The highly anticipated construction of bleachers, a scoreboard and a press box at the high school became reality through a \$250,000 state grant and site work by our Public Works Department. This is a winner for everyone and reinforces the pride that we have as a community for our Coventry High School and its superb athletic programs and athletes!

There have been many, many projects during the past two fiscal years and they are continuing as we complete fiscal year 2010 and move into 2011. Included are school roofs reconstruction; renovation and addition to the North Coventry Firehouse; Orchard Hills siding/windows; cable access upgrades; replacement of the Pucker Street bridge; installation of automatic door openers for the Senior Center and the library; and the list goes on!

These activities reflect a dynamic town – one on the move, but respectful of its past! We are proud of our Town, home of Nathan Hale, Connecticut's State Hero, and of its many noteworthy, historic properties. With a backdrop of a 19th century mill village, Coventry is rich in history and is a beautiful place to call home. It is truly the gateway to Connecticut's quiet corner and has the status as being one of several CT towns comprising the "Last Green Valley."

Town Manager



*John A. Elsesser, Town Manager and
Laura Stone, Executive Assistant*

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Town of Coventry for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010 to the Coventry Town Council and citizens. The Town accomplished a great deal, especially in light of the national economic climate and deep recession. This report will highlight the significant activities of the year including changes to policies, infrastructure and the numerous grants received. I urge you to read through the Department's reports included to gain a better appreciation of the breadth and scope of the Town's activities. I want to thank all the volunteers and dedicated staff who helped make this a productive year.

Financially the Town's revenues exceeded expenditures, allowing a modest increase in the unencumbered fund balance which on June 30, 2010 was \$2,669,427 or 7.8%. This is progress toward our goal of 10% and was accomplished through prudent spending and management. An example of this was refinancing our long-term debt to take advantage of lower interest rates. This saved \$720,000 over the life of the debt.

Several significant community initiatives were implemented including deciding to modify our pay-as-you-throw trash system from a per-bag system to automated collection using tipper barrels for both trash and co-mingled recycling. The Planning & Zoning Commission completed a multi-year task of updating the Plan of Conservation & Development including establishing short-term goals of design guidelines and form-based zoning. Land was acquired for a new Public Works facility and grants obtained for a new salt shed on the land. The building committee continued work on developing plans for the new facility with plans for a fall 2010 vote.

In response to citizens' concerns raised in a town-wide questionnaire and community conversations, a modest Blight Ordinance was adopted balancing the rights of property owners with the rights of neighbors. Our Police Department achieved State accreditation and continued toward National accreditation. Contracts were finalized with both Fire Services and the Town started processing bill payments on their behalf. A study of school roofs was completed with a recommendation to plan for a vote and design work with an eye toward replacement during the summer of 2011. Per State mandates our Probate Court was merged with another court to create a four-town district. We took back operation of the waste water treatment plant from a private operation, saving thousands of dollars and had success with self-funding dental insurance.

Working on Council goals we also enhanced communication with our citizens by starting a monthly e-blast, significantly enhancing our newsletter and web page and planning for enhancements of Channels 13 and 17. We also bid out energy services for our citizens, offering an opt-in energy purchasing plan at a group discount.

It was a huge year for grants. Several Federal grants were received through the Economic Stimulus Program (ARRA) including a segment of sidewalks on Rt. 31 and a replacement central air conditioner for the Town Hall. We completed a Small Cities project to reconstruct and take ownership of Kings Road and applied for \$500,000 to renovate 80 units of senior housing at Orchard Hills with new windows, siding and energy saving features. Grants were also submitted for a major open space purchase. Parker Bridge Road's bridge replacement was completed with an 80% Federal grant. Bleachers and scoreboards at the High School were installed with funding by a State grant. Smaller grants included a Historical Documents grant to preserve maps, an Invasive Plant Species grant and Police dispatch software. North Coventry Fire Department applied for and received a grant to replace a cascade system to refill air tanks. A solar array and a wind turbine were installed at the Town

Hall/High School complex; a new 14-person senior van grant was received; walking trails at Riverview Park were completed and a study of housing needs was undertaken.

The Town does not stand alone and has increased efforts to work regionally. We are now part of a regional GIS mapping system and are working with other towns on an on-line building permit tracking system. We received funds to enhance Public Works radios in our region through Homeland Security. We have participated in two regional economic development plans. Discussions on other regional initiatives continue as we look for cost-effective solutions to deliver necessary services.

All in all, a productive year of moving forward and improving services even in an era of diminishing resources.

Respectfully submitted,

John A. Elsesser
Town Manager