

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

January 9, 2012

Budget workshop with School committee

Coventry School Superintendent Michael Convery and Finance Director Robin Pelletier presented the school's pre-budget discussion for fiscal year 2013. Mr. Convery emphasized that this is not the School Committee's requested budget, but preliminary figures based on what we know as of tonight. The School Committee is currently in negotiations with the Coventry Teacher's Alliance and part of the process is setting ground rules that require confidentiality. We will not be able to discuss all issues freely tonight as several of our contracts are presently under review. We are still waiting for figures on health insurance for this year, and all this will unfold during our budget process. Tonight the focus is on student enrollment, both current and projected; certified FTE (full time equivalent) personnel and capital requests.

Mr. Convery noted the annual decline in enrollment over the past few years. However, one outstanding factor for all of us would be recovery of the economy and if that happens, there are several housing projects either underway or about to be underway. Any increase in construction can effect enrollment.

Superintendent Convery highlighted major cuts that the School Department has undertaken over the past few years, most notably the closing of Flat River Middle School in 2006 and Oak Haven Elementary School in June 2009 along with staffing reductions at all levels. He projects certified staffing needs for the 2013 school year as equal to what we currently have based on what we know tonight.

Finance Director Robin Pelletier began with a recap, noting level funding for the schools in 2007, 2010 and 2011. In fiscal 2012 the town allocation increased by \$1.2 million, with an agreement that \$600,000 of the \$1.2 million would not be requested in FY 13 as maintenance of effort. \$1.2 million is less than 2% of the school budget.

In FY 2013 the salaries for both certified staff and classified staff will be subject to contract ratification. Everything that we are basing our projections on this evening is what we know currently in our fiscal 2012 budget.

Further, we are projecting an average step increase of approximately \$400,000, and this indicates a decline, the reason being because the bulk of our staff is already at top step.

Although it is still premature regarding any health care figures or increases from the health trust, we have taken a look at the past few years and are projecting 5% in health care and 4% in dental insurance, which would total approximately \$325,000, based on current staffing. This may also be affected by negotiations, so we don't know where we will end.

With regard to pensions, in fiscal 2012 we contributed 13.23% of salaries for our certified staff; in FY 2013 that number will raise to 13.48% (approximately a \$250,000 increase based upon current staffing and salary tables). And finally, our projected transportation increase is \$80,000.

President Cote clarified that at this point, we are looking at \$1,055,000 over and above last year, not including the \$600,000 that will not be counted towards maintenance of effort of the \$1.2 million that the town transferred to your side last year. So, as we speak we are looking at a projected increase of \$1,655,000. Mrs. Pelletier again noted that collective bargaining agreements are currently being negotiated for FY 12-13.

Ms. Pelletier remarked that there may be over \$800,000 sitting out there in job funding that may be coming to us through state aid, and would have an impact on the deficit. Everything else is up to professional contract negotiations through the School Committee's budget process.

Discussion took place on FY 12-13 capital budget requests. Capital requests were listed in priority order with #1 fire code upgrades at Coventry High School mandatory before opening schools in August 2012. Superintendent Convery explained that the fire code upgrades, which originally had a two year extension was changed by the fire marshal to only a one year reprieve, so there are \$400,000 worth of upgrades that have to be completed in order to open next year.

Councilman Spear asked about roofing needs at the high school and whether or not these upgrades have been fulfilled. Superintendent Convery replied no, but there is a 5 year plan that will be presented and will include more information with regard to roofing needs.

Brian Steverman was asked about asbestos removal and he replied that every year we put in a request because basically a lot of the floors have asbestos tiles with the exception of the Middle School and Washington Oak. The floors are kept in good shape so it's not like there is asbestos dust released into the air, but at some point it is nice to get a plan together for removal.

President Cote asked how imperative roof replacement is and Mr. Steverman replied that it is very important as we have been patching the roofs and are throwing good money after bad. We have probably spent \$50,000 on patching the CHS roof and about 2/3 of the middle school is complete. This will be included in the 5 year capital request when it is ready.

Manager Hoover remarked that the Town is planning not to increase anything on the town side.

Finance Director Ted Przybyla explained that the worksheet which has been handed out represents revenue projections that have been prepared by our tax assessor. The critical column reflects the fact that only with growth in 2013, without increasing the tax rate, we will generate an additional \$400,000 of revenue. The total amount of levy that you increase if you raise the taxes by 4% would be \$2.5 million; and of that \$2.5 then \$400,000 is from growth, the only amount that you can generate over and above would be a little over \$2 million. What is striking about this is that if you look at the projections for 2014 and 2015, that's pretty much where we are tracking for the following three years, limited growth assuming a 4% increase over the next three years. It's a very difficult situation, we don't expect any surprises for the current fiscal year that would complicate matters during this budget process. The weather has been holding well for us, hopefully we will continue to get a break there.

Manager Hoover remarked that when you consider having to plan to fund projected increases, and all the contracts are due in by June 30 on the town side, we do have some negotiating to do. There is going to have to be some continued hard discussion to get some help from our bargaining units. When you talk about funding, an unfunded pension system or a low funded pension system and meeting your annual contribution, you could use up the entire possible cap of 4% just to meet the ARC. Considering all the other projected increases, it's going to be difficult to find places to cut. Maybe we will get some savings from a "good" winter, but this will unfold as we get towards the end of March.

President Cote noted that under Senate Bill 3050 we have the authority to go up 4% on taxes but that gains us nothing, as that is about what we would need for the ARC payment, it doesn't give us any money for increased fuel, electric, gas, contractual obligations, roofs on schools or increased transportation costs, it's just meeting that ARC payment.

Further, it was clear at our meeting with the Governor that as much as he wants to help with unfunded pensions, it's not a one size fits all kind of solution. There are 39 cities and towns in RI each with their own set of problems. Historically in Coventry the ARC payment is not met. This council did the same thing last year that every other council did, rather than put the maximum tax increase on the taxpayers and try to make our ARC payment, we made a partial payment to the pension fund and the rest of that money goes into the general fund to help balance the budget. The employees in town have always made their contribution because it comes out of their checks before they get them, they have no choice.

We need to make some tough decisions. This council may leave office with less friends than when we walked in, but I didn't take this job to make friends, I took this job to do the right thing. Every department head in town is going to have to make tough decisions.

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman McGee to close work session. All voted aye.

Town Council Meeting

Present: President Gary Cote, Vice-President McGee, Councilman Jendzejec, Councilman Spear, Councilman Mattson.

Town Manager Thomas Hoover
Town Solicitor Frederick Tobin

Pledge of Allegiance led by Town Sergeant
Invocation by Councilman Spear
Review of Emergency Evacuation Plan

President's Comments

President Cote reported that recently members of our Dept. of Public Works Dept. traveled to Arizona, on an all expense paid trip by a vendor in Arizona, to check out certain equipment that the town was interested in purchasing in order to begin a pilot program within the town. As a result of the visit, we will not be going forward with this program. After research, especially by Jodi Tomasso of DPW, we have found that the equipment was not as originally presented on-line and would not work out for us. President Cote thanked everyone involved in this project for their time and effort, especially Mr. Tomasso of DPW, who did a lot of research on his own, spent time away from his family, and asked for nothing in return.

President Cote also paused to remember Officer Wayne French, a 21 year member of the Coventry Police Department who passed away last week due to a tragic accident. Officer French began his career in our Public Works Department before becoming a member of the Coventry Police. President Cote commended Chief Volpe and members of the police department for the professionalism shown during this time.

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to address Resolution I (1) in remembrance of Officer Wayne French at this time. All voted aye.

Resolution declaring a thirty (30) day mourning period in the Town of Coventry in recognition of the passing of Coventry Police Detective Wayne French and ordering the lowering of all flags to half-mast during this mourning period

Motion made by Councilman Jendzejec seconded by Councilman McGee to adopt resolution. All voted aye.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Renewal of Firearms licenses:
 - a. Midstate Gun, Sandy Bottom Road
 - b. Hawkins Machine, 374 Hopkins Hill Road
2. Approval of tax abatements and additions for the month of December, 2011.

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve Consent Agenda. All voted aye.

Approval of December 12, 2011 Town Council minutes

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve minutes. All voted aye.

PUBLIC HEARING

Transfer of Class B Liquor license with new victualling license from West Coventry Pizza, Inc., 2260 Flat River Road to Michael Manish, dba Patriot Bar & Pizza

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to open public hearing. All voted aye. Proprietor Michael Manish was sworn in by Solicitor Tobin.

Manager Hoover stated that before license may issue, Mr. Manish needs a good standing letter from the RI Division of Taxation, the RI Board of Health along with food manager and alcohol server certificates.

No further questions or comments, motion was made by Councilman Jendzejec seconded by Councilman Spear to close public hearing. All voted aye.

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Mattson to approve license transfer subject to obtaining a good standing letter from the RI Division of Taxation, RI Board of Health approval and food manager and alcohol server certificates. All voted Aye.

Approving the Budget Calendar for submission of the 2012/2013 fiscal year budget

Manager Hoover recommended approval of the budget calendar for FY 2013; calendar will be altered if we need to change scheduled meetings.

Motion made by Ray Spear seconded by Carl Mattson to approve subject to adjustments to calendar if necessary. All voted Aye.

Reestablishing the position and new pay grade of Director of Public Works and establishing the position and pay grade of General Foreman – (Working General Foreman) within the Department of Public Works

Manager Hoover recommended reestablishing the position of director of Public Works, since DPW Superintendent Dennis Smith retired at the end of December. In addition to that he recommended creation of a new position within the department of Public Works, called General Foreman-Working General Foreman, and that position would be filled with an existing highway supervisor working foreman. He also recommends that the position remain within the structure of the AFSCME local 3484. A job description and salary schedule has been prepared, but will have to continue to be negotiated with the bargaining unit.

Until a new director of public works is hired, Chuck Smith will act as the acting superintendent of Public Works. Manager Hoover also recommends that once a director is hired, not to fill the Superintendent position but to leave it vacant.

Councilman Spear clarified that although we are creating two new jobs, it really isn't creating two new jobs, but only a title change with one and elimination of Superintendent job on the other. I have read through this material and it was very well represented. Manager Hoover agreed that only one new person will be hired.

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman McGee to approve resolution. All voted aye.

Councilman Jendzejec asked if AFSCME concurs and Manager Hoover responded that he has not heard back yet.

Approving the purchase of eleven (11) new Taser X-2 models for the Coventry Police Department at a total cost of \$13,984.33

Manager Hoover explained that before the holidays he was notified by Chief Volpe of an opportunity to replace old tasers, but in order to be able to take advantage of the prices, they had to be purchased before the end of the calendar year. I approved that request and am asking the Town Council for their approval this evening.

Chief Volpe added that he believes the use of tasers is a safer option with a less lethal response. It allows us the opportunity to mitigate a situation without lethal force. There will be 5-7 officers on each shift that will carry the tasers; we will trade in the old ones.

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve resolution. All voted aye.

Rejecting all proposals received on November 3, 2011 for a Wind Power Development Project and authorizing rebidding of same

Manager Hoover explained that three proposals were received, with the Town recommending that the bid be given to rTerra. However, an objection was raised by one of the bidders, Wind Energy Development as to the selection of the successful bidder. After consideration of the objection, it was determined that all bids received on November 3 are rejected and that the RFP/RFQ be re-bid. This resolution recommends that the Town Council uses its authority to reject all three bids so we can rebid in order to avoid any objections or questions.

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve resolution. All voted aye.

Approving the installation of sewer connections at 1208 Main Street as recommended by the Sewer Subcommittee

Manager Hoover explained the urgency with regard to the sewer hook-up installation at this location.

Motion made by Councilman McGee seconded by Councilman Mattson to approve resolution. All voted aye.

Appointing a member of the Coventry School Committee to fill the unexpired term of Lianne M Russell, District 3, who has resigned from the Committee

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman McGee to table resolution at this time. All voted Aye.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Raymond Budziak, 429 Fairview Avenue questioned the need for a traffic light at the intersection of South Main Street and Route 117 to remain red for 2-3 minutes at 3 a.m. President Cote replied that he believes the State controls the road and the light, but asked Chief Volpe to check with the RI Department of Transportation.

Mr. Budziak questioned the number of trucks sitting idle at the DPW; Acting Superintendent Smith replied that men were out in crews today doing hand work, cleaning and cutting brush, filling sandbags and removing inappropriate signage.

Motion made by Councilman Jendzejec seconded by Councilman McGee to recess to Executive Session for the following:

1. For the purpose of discussing pending litigation in accordance with RIGL 42-46-5, subsection (2)
2. For the purpose of discussing the Anthony Mill Project and the possible investment of public funds, where premature disclosure would adversely affect the public interest in accordance with RIGL 42-46-5, subsection (7)

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to come out of executive session. Individual voice vote . All voted aye.

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to seal minutes of executive session. All voted aye.

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to adjourn meeting. All voted aye.

Town Clerk