

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
January 26, 2009 - 6:00 p.m.

WORK SESSION - 6:00 p.m.

Work Session with Town Council, School Committee, Senator Leo Blais, Senator Leonidas Raptakis, Representative Patricia Serpa and Representative Scott Guthrie relating to the Governor's supplemental budget proposal, outlining the total decrease in aid of \$1,693,186 for the Town of Coventry as follows:

- \$859,727 in General Revenue Sharing
- \$91,860 in Motor Vehicle Phase-out Tax
- \$125,438 in Education aid, which was money that would have been received from the Permanent School fund as a result of expanded hours at Twin Rivers
- \$221,952 elimination of Professional Development funding
- \$394,209 decrease in School Housing aid

Additionally, Coventry will see a decrease in aid to Education.

Senator Blais stated that all cities and towns are in the same situation across the board and the financial situation for Coventry could even get worse. Senator Raptakis suggested that the legislators and Town Council meet within the next thirty days to see where Coventry stands at that point. Further, next year the State could be facing a \$400 million deficit.

Representative Serpa advised that several pieces of legislation are being considered to save money:

- eliminate publishing school committee agendas in the newspaper
- repeal professional development fund
- possible elimination of school bus monitors, only after a public hearing
- limit bus transportation to charter schools
- establish voluntary school improvement teams

Councilman Spear suggested coordination of activities to save money; five collaboratives are already established and this concept should be implemented. Costs are coming across the bargaining table and from mandates being imposed by either legislators or the Department of Education. There is a need to look at all the mandates that have been imposed over the last ten to fifteen years and ask whether they are necessary in educating our students and running the community.

Ms. Flanagan - Inquired whether the municipal and police pensions fall within the governor's control as the state pension plan does regarding eliminating the COLA?

Representative Guthrie – Should be no effect. This budget has to do with state pensions, not the municipal pensions.

Ms. Flanagan asked legislators what the chances of getting any money for the stimulus package would be, what projects we should target and what most likely would be successful.

Senator Raptakis was unsure of what would be contained in the stimulus package.

Representative Serpa – Have heard that the anticipated education aid from the stimulus plan for Coventry is slated for \$2,330,500 over a two year period.

Congressional delegation indicated that the Town Council needs to stay in communication with them and identify where they will focus their needs.

According to Superintendent of Schools, Ken DiPietro, the current health care plan is a cheaper plan than the state implements. Why should Coventry want to lose money because the State decides that the town should have a different, more expensive plan, when for the last ten years our collaborative has done its job.

Legislative delegation was invited to come back on February 23, 2009 in order to stay up to date with the town regarding budget information.

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING – 7:00 p.m.

Present: Frank Hyde, Raymond Spear, Kenneth Cloutier, Glen Shibley,
Laura Flanagan

Interim Town Manager Paul Sprague
Town Solicitor Patrick Rogers

Pledge of Allegiance
Invocation
Review of evacuation plan

Councilman Spear requested two corrections in minutes: 1) change to "*it is proposed*" that bus monitors are dropped; 2) change ten of the most significant issues that "*the community*" is faced with.

Motion made by Laura Flanagan seconded by Ray Spear to approve minutes of the January 26, 2009 Town Council meeting with corrections. All voted Aye.

President's Remarks

- Recommend moving less timely issues to the front of the meeting.
- Intend to hire a search firm for permanent, full time manager probably within a week.
- Recommend halt of the Sewer Program for now, since there is a shortfall from Contract 5 of the Sewer Program due to changeovers.
- Need to figure out how to come up with the unexpected amount of \$849,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30.

Potential sources: Unrestricted fund of \$4,924,056
 Self Reserve fund of \$4.1 million
 Cell Tower fund \$664,295
 Reduce pension contributions
 Reduce DPW services
 Lay offs

- Appointed the following liaisons:

Councilman Ray Spear (School Committee)
Laura Flanagan (Human Services)
Frank Hyde (Department of Public Works)
Glen Shibley (Police Department).
Ken Cloutier (Parks and Recreation)

Regarding a recent Planning Board appointment, Solicitor Rogers explained he looked into the charter provisions as well as ordinances regarding potential termination on certain boards, but "due cause" is not defined in the Coventry ordinances. The legal conclusion is that if this council was to try to remove a member of the Planning Commission, and the person hadn't done anything in their capacity as a member of the Planning Commission, I didn't feel confident that I could advise this council that this termination wouldn't be challenged in court and require significant expenditure of town funds. This council should make changes to its ordinance with regard to what constitutes "due cause" before taking any action in the future.

Town Council was in agreement that Capital Improvement budget hearing be moved from Thursday, January 29 to February 5, 2009 at 6:30 p.m.

- District 1, Raymond Spear

Stressed the need for a liaison between the Town Council and Sewer Subcommittee. Previously the town engineer attended meetings; this is something that we need to be thinking about.

- District 2, Laura Flanagan

1. Stimulus request was sent out to legislators on Friday. The Town Council has the support of the legislators. Any money awarded to the town will be used for capital improvement items.

2. Current working with the Interim Town Manager to identify ways to funnel money to those in need through our charitable funds.

3. Do not recommend *not* funding pension contributions, as that cost in the future would be on the back of every Coventry taxpayer.

4. Interested in getting some sort of questionnaire out to employees and get their ideas of ways in which we could save money within each department.

- District 3, Frank Hyde

1. Have been in communication with Senator Reed's office regarding stimulus plan. Was told the town needs to be able to move on it within 30 days.

2. Suggested that a Town Council "hotline" may be beneficial to residents since we have a part time Town Council.

- District 4, Glen Shibley

Business continues to open in District 4 with the recent grand opening of Family Dollar. Potholes are a problem on Arnold Road and should be filled.

- District 5, Ken Cloutier

The Hopkins Hill condo sewer assessment issue still lingers. This is not a single item, but only part of a huge picture. Solicitor Rogers has been having meetings with the Centre of New England and we are still working on it.

Public Comment

Gary Cote, Chairman of the Board of Coventry Fire District, Anthony Station. A previous administration entered into a lease on property that the Town of Coventry owned, the former Mapledale School. The Fire District no longer needs that building and wants to turn it back over to the town. We have worked with DEM and the federal government to get the building cleaned up as there had been hazardous chemicals stored there. It is completely cleared up now and I am here tonight to give the building back to the town,

Solicitor Rogers - Need to look into the lease obligations, and get a clean bill of health on the building. Should not accept building tonight.

John Assalone spoke in opposition to the appointment of Michael Baird to the Planning Commission and feels that he should be dismissed.

Solicitor Rogers informed Mr. Assalone that the Town Council has to define the definition of "due cause" in its charter. The conduct of the commission member had nothing to do with his service as a member of the commission. Therefore, it is up to this council or future councils to tighten that up to ensure that it doesn't happen in the future. This council cannot rewrite ordinances retroactively.

Arthur Capaldi, Esq. announced good news from the Coventry Housing Authority in that it has received over \$4 million dollars for more housing and currently they are under contract for development of 40 more units.

Charles Vacca – Cost saving suggestions raised were: Contacting an energy saving consultant as to where we might save on electricity such as the lights at Paine Field or the Town

Hall; cuts in school bus transportation, charge nominal library fees, raise copy machine fees, and look into how the Waterman and Fiske funds along with how other funds are being used.

Louis Diamonte, Chief Steward, Coventry DPW - Informed Council that a lot of DPW equipment is not in good shape. Also urged town not to think about privatizing and discouraged layoffs.

Mr. Hyde plans to assess and get update on DPW equipment.

Councilman Shibley indicated that he has received reports, and will look into certain issues such as running of equipment when not needed, plowing private lots.

Raymond Budziak – Council needs to take a look at DPW operations.

Lucas Murray – In favor of hiring a planner who could multi-task and take some of the load off the administration. Town should consider generating income through recreation department.

Nicholas Cambio - Believe Paul Sprague is extremely qualified and the best man for position of Town Manager.

Ron Gizzarelli – Agrees Paul Sprague is the best man for the job. Opposed to hiring freeze; urge Town Council to establish an ongoing budget committee that meets each month.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Resolution authorizing Town Manager to hire the firm of Bennett Yarger Associates for consulting services with regard to search for permanent Town Manager

2. Resolution reaffirming Resolution #101-06-2705 as amended herein respecting Town Council Rules of Procedure

3. Application by Ernest Legault for renewal of Private Detective license

4. Application for new Sewer Contractor's license by A. Di Fazio Construction, Inc., 132 Shun Pike, Johnston, RI

5. Resolution awarding contract to J.C. Madigan, Inc., for 6-8 C.Y. dump body, central hydraulics, snow plow and push frame for Dept. of Public Works

6. Resolution awarding contract to Altrui Bros Truck Sales, Inc. for GVW dump truck for Dept. of Public Works

Motion made by Councilwoman Flanagan seconded by Ray Spear to remove Items #5 and #6 for discussion.

Motion made by Ray Spear seconded by Glen Shibley to approve consent Items #1-#4. All voted Aye.

Councilwoman Flanagan – Inquired how the bidding process works, if both companies in #5 and #6 were low bidders and how the successful bidder is chosen.

Manager Sprague clarified the process: Dennis Smith prepares a request, Town Clerk's office advertises the bid, and unless there is a problem, the lowest bid is awarded.

Motion made by Glen Shibley seconded by Laura Flanagan to approve #5 and #6. All voted Aye.

DISCUSSION

Councilman Spear reported on the results of the ten most significant issues facing the community at this time and asked for comment.

Mr. Assalone questioned whether the town could face legal action regarding fair share development fees (#5 on list, unresolved legal matters).

Mr. Vacca – Use of town owned vehicles should be reviewed

Wayne Asselin – Move issues #27 (grant writer) and #35 (Comprehensive Plan) higher up the list. Also amend #2 (achieving a balanced budget -add fiscal year 2009).

Mr. Cote – Would like to see Items #23 (WW-1 Memorial Park reconstruction) and # 24 (TIF district encompassing Anthony Mill and Clariant) higher on the list.

Mr. Gizarelli – Don't move #3 (matters relating to sewer operations) any further down on the list

Submission of Town Manager's proposed Capital Improvement budget

Interim Manager Sprague submitted proposed Capital Improvement Budget for 2009-10. Public hearing will be on February 5, 2009 at 6:30 p.m. at the Coventry Town Hall.

PUBLIC HEARING AND ENSUING ACTION

Amendment of Zoning Ordinance and Map, Assessor's Plat 24, Lot 125 (The Woods at Red Brook) from Residential 20 to R-20 Planned Development (Continued from December 8, 2008)

Attorney John Brunero represented JBFM Properties. Several residents were there from the Town of West Warwick, along with Town Councilwoman Philomena Gustafson from the district including Red Brook Lane.

Applicant seeks to develop 36 unit condo complex on Coventry's border with West Warwick. Property located in Coventry, access goes out through a West Warwick road.

Several residents spoke in opposition to the condo development. Councilwoman Gustafson feels the major issue of concern is traffic and speeding on New London Turnpike.

Attorney Brunero provided the town with fiscal impact study, also noting that Coventry would acquire a positive cash flow, would eliminate the use of town services such as plowing and garbage removal, only using town fire and emergency services. Coventry Planning Commission rendered a favorable decision. If the council sees fit to grant this, it doesn't end here. Still have to do a detailed traffic study, lighting plans, landscape plans, soil and erosion control and obtain final approval from DEM.

Attorney Brunero also noted that this development would not attract families with children.

Ms. Flanagan disagrees, especially with the current economy and so many people losing their homes.

Mr. Brunero noted that if the condos are not approved, that there is nothing to prevent the developer from putting in ten single family homes. With the condos, you would have 36 condos x \$6,600 each for sewer fees plus \$7,800 per unit for fair share fees. Would bring money into Coventry.

Opposition – West Warwick residents Frank Voccio, Red Brook Lane and Tony Lima, 7 Terra Mar Drive.

West Warwick Councilwoman Philomena Gustafson will have a meeting with constituents on February 18. She stated that there is a need for more studies since this is a problem for both towns, Coventry and West Warwick,

Atty. Brunero - Asked for 60 days to complete a traffic study.

Mrs. Flanagan - If this were granted, and your development didn't go through, then what?

Atty. Brunero – If this didn't go through, we could still put ten residences there. Then you would have the chance of more children than a condo development would bring in.

Mr. Hyde – You can't ignore the money it will bring in to Coventry.

Motion made by Raymond Spear seconded by Laura Flanagan to continue public hearing to Town Council meeting on March 23, 2009 to give applicant time to complete a traffic study. All voted Aye.

Mr. Hyde – This was a unanimous decision of our Planning Board. There is an issue of revenue for the town. We can debate the amount of net we will realize, but sewer and fair share fees are nothing to turn away from in these economic times.

LICENSE

Application for victualling license by Ronald Oakes for Riccotti's Inc., dba Riccotti's Subs, at 718 Centre of New England Boulevard

Motion made by Frank Hyde seconded by Laura Flanagan to approve license. All voted Aye.

RESOLUTION

Resolution appointing Councilman Glen Shibley to Sewer Subcommittee.

Councilman Shibley will take the place of Councilman Spear.

Motion made by Raymond Spear seconded by Laura Flanagan to adopt resolution. All voted Aye.

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCES

Ordinance relating to Town Council appointments to boards, commissions, and committees with respect to appointments between Election Day and the installation of a new Town Council.

Clerk will advertise for public hearing.

Motion made by Raymond Spear seconded by Laura Flanagan to adjourn Town Council meeting. All voted Aye.

Town Clerk