

Town Council/School Committee  
And Coventry State Delegation Work Session  
February 4, 2013

Present: Senators Nicholas Kettle and Leonidas Raptakis, Representatives Jared Nunes, Patricia Morgan, Patricia Serpa, Scott Guthrie, Lisa Tomasso

Town Council members Karen Carlson, Gregory Laboissonniere, Kerry McGee, Gary Cote, Thaddeus Jendzejec

School Committee members Katherine Patenaude, Nancy Sprengelmeyer, Judith Liner

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Michael Almeida, Town Manager Thomas Hoover,  
Town Solicitor Fred Tobin

Representatives were present from the Department of Environmental Management and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation.

Topics discussed:

FY 2013/2014 Budget

Manager Hoover advised that this will be a tough budget cycle. One major consideration are the bond issues that were passed in November, five for the school and one for the town and the second consideration is pension funding. With those two issues, we won't be able to do much more with the budget. One driving force is pension reform, which has really caused a great deal of change in the state as it pertains to independent pension systems, as we have in Coventry.

Dr. Almeida reported that because of the school bonds, there is a very small capital improvement request of \$156,000. There are some unanticipated requests totalling \$900,000, broken down as \$300,000 pension increase, \$200,000 for out of district tuition, \$200,000 to open Oak Haven School and \$300,000 for one on one devices for technology in grades 5 and 6.

Manager Hoover raised the issue of acceleration of the \$3+ million school funding formula. Representative Tomasso responded that the legislators can advocate for that for the Town of Coventry. Representative Serpa agreed and asked the Town Council to approve a resolution and send it to the legislative delegation.

President Cote asked if that in moving forward, the Governor will provide any funding for school security. Superintendent Almeida added that a committee was formed to perform a needs assessment with regard to school security and it has been determined that it would take approximately \$110,120 to remodel the front offices, install wireless panic buttons, provide ID badges, uniforms for custodial staff, surveillance systems and access codes. Funds were diverted from somewhere else in the school budget. He questioned whether in the future the Governor will provide any funding for security, and if so, if the school could receive a portion of the money retroactive due to what was already spent.

Chief Volpe reported on the security that the police department provided since the Sandy Hook tragedy, at a cost of \$13,000 per week, now scaled back to \$9,000 a week.

Senator Raptakis offered to write a letter to the Congressional delegation representing Coventry requesting assistance and to talk with the Governor to see if there will be some sort of state program to help with costs. However, any new legislation language should be careful to avoid the word "shall" as that leads very easily to an unfunded mandate. President Cote agreed and requested that Superintendent Almeida make recommendations and that Chief Volpe remain involved in the process also.

Dr. Almeida then addressed the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for Career and Colleges (PARCC), the need for more computer labs, and to improve on the one on one system in grades 5 and 6 at a cost of \$300,000.

He also spoke about a school issue involving a one-hour delay (for example in bad weather) and the fact that coming in more than one hour late does not constitute a school day; however, being dismissed early does count as a school day. Having to add a day to the end of the school year is expensive considering that you need to pay an extra day for busses, staff, and food services. He would like to see a two hour delay established and allowed.

Dr. Almeida advised of a plan to reopen Oak Haven School, which would allow preservation of space in other schools for computer labs. Oak Haven would be used as an early learning center for Pre K and K.

Manager Hoover called attention to our independent pension plans and financial improvement plans. Our most recent actuarial report shows the municipal pension fund is 25.3% funded and the Police Dept. is now reported 9.9% funded. These are critical situations and the state commission has determined that any plan under 60% funded is considered critical. The State desires all independent plans become 80% funded. We submitted a plan which calls for the town to reach 60% funding in 19 years, 80% funding in 26 years; and for the Police to reach 60% funding within 20 years and 80% funding within 24 years. In addition, there is a requirement that within 5 years you need to meet the annual required contribution, both for the police and municipal plans, and we do have a plan for that.

Manager Hoover added that he would like to see the town be able to go to the MERS plan and try to get legislation to transition to the plan within five years. If that can be done, there are a lot of towns that will look favorably to moving to the MERS plan.

#### D2 – License or permit to carry concealed pistol or revolver – RIGL 11-47.

Chief Volpe suggested a change in criteria and language in the statute for a license to carry a concealed weapon. As far as language, he suggested a change from “shall” to “may” issue, which would give him more leeway in making a decision whether or not to issue a permit, and without the threat of lawsuits. In addition, these permits all need to be in the state database.

#### D3 - Guy Lefebvre gave update on status of the greenway and the greenway equestrian project.

Representative Nunes urged bigger and better signage on the greenway, especially in the area of Pulaski and Whitford Streets. People need to slow down on the bike path; there are many near collisions in that area.

#### D4 – Suggested legislation for per capita funding of Senior Centers and Division of Developmental Disabilities to maintain local funding.

Director of Human Services, Pat Shurtleff, asked to maintain funding for developmental disabilities since in recent years it has decreased dramatically. At least maintain or level fund, but not reduce. Additionally, she received word that there is funding available for elder residents. Currently we receive only \$8,000 and yet we service over 5,000 people in the elder category. Considering all the services and programs we provide in our Human Services Department, have any of you heard of legislation now where they are talking about \$5.00 per capita for the elder population? That would be wonderful as we have seen a steady decline in the amount of funding we receive, beginning at \$21,000 and now down to \$8,000 over the past ten years. All senior centers have been hit, and all but two communities have a senior center.

## D9 – Street paving and sidewalks

Manager Hoover inquired about the construction of sidewalks on Reservoir Road and if there is any extra money coming from the federal highway administration. This is an extremely important issue with such proximity to the high school. He questioned the possibility of shifting priorities in the contract and installing sidewalks.

Councilman Jendzejec called attention to the issue of road striping and urged DOT to continue striping from Exit 6 in West Greenwich to Reservoir Road in Coventry.

Another concern is the “dip” in the road at Reservoir Road and Route 3 . Representatives from the Department of Transportation are aware of that problem and advised that the road needs to be repaired with better, higher quality materials due to the heavy truck traffic.

Councilwoman Carlson asked about repaving of Route 102 in Coventry, commenting on the difficulty driving in your designated lane due to road conditions. She asked if there are any plans to resurface or repave the section of Route 102 in Coventry. DOT responded that the Coventry portion of Route 102 is next, probably in 2014.

Senator Kettle reported that he has received complaints regarding plowing on Routes 117 & 14, which is being done by Mike's Professional Tree Service. Complaints indicate that he is not plowing on time or correctly.

Items D6, D7 and D8 relate to exemptions from assessed valuations on business expansions, improvements to historic buildings and legislation for interlocal control of dams and water bodies created by dams.

Planning Director Paul Sprague discussed legislation regarding taxation, allowing the Town Council to provide exemptions from assessed values of real estate. Precipitating this discussion is Anthony Mill, currently undergoing renovation. It is presently on the tax rolls for \$800,000. Through a court order, the town and developer allow for a phase in for real estate taxes. What that has done is allow a vacant mill worth \$800,000 to jump in value to \$12 to \$16 million within a very short period of time; the mill will be ready to open in June or July of this year.

This legislation would give some flexibility to the Town Council to create such a stabilization type of accord to entice a developer to come into town to redevelop a structure. Representative Morgan asked for a resolution before moving forward, so that it is clear what it is that you really want to accomplish. It also helps us make the case in the General Assembly.

President Cote pointed out that the Council would greatly appreciate any help regarding incentives and creating tax incentives. We are always looking for more tools to bring business to Coventry.

Planning Director Paul Sprague also discussed types of legislation to control water levels on dams; there are 63 dams in Coventry. DEM has jurisdiction to establish standards for dams. Cities and towns have authority to exact ordinances requiring repair and maintenance of dams. Vice-President McGee commented that Middle Dam is privately owned and the water level is taken down to nothing in the summer. The dam was inspected and it is working, but yet these residents have no water and are just infested with mosquitos in the summer. It amazes me that a private land owner can control how much water is in the lake. There should be legislation mandating them to maintain and keep the dam up to par.

Mr. David Chopy from DEM says there is no state law and only the owner of the dam can control it and raise the levels. In an emergency, the state can go in. Representative Guthrie discussed Middle Dam. There is no state law right now that gives anyone but the owner control of the dam. There is nothing the town can do to go in and manipulate the water level. If the town took that over, the liability

would be on the town.

Representative Guthrie said at Middle Dam it's not a case of the water, but the physical height of the dam was lowered after the flood. When he changed the dam, he changed the environment of the whole pond.

A couple of general issues were brought up involving Economic Development and coming up with ideas as to how we can improve economic development in the Town of Coventry. Vice-President McGee remarked that we don't have a lot to offer new businesses. We want to give people currently in business a reason to stay with us and we are looking for whatever we can to help them out, enhancing economic development and bringing in new business.

President Cote asked for no more unfunded mandates. They cause a negative impact on our budget, usually after the budget is approved and not adjustable.

Solicitor Tobin talked about the State-Local Relations Commission RIGL 45-13.1 dealing with state-local relations. It appears that this is sort of an unused mechanism for state and local relationships. Perhaps this commission should be rejuvenated. It appears that an annual report is required on certain items which are spelled out in the legislation, if the commission is actually in existence. If not, it might be helpful to reestablish the membership.

Senator Raptakis advised that he is submitting several bills which will give the Town of Coventry authority to prohibit any asphalt plants within 4,000 feet of hospitals, nursing homes, schools, areas of environmental concern, residential housing, etc. This will give the town more tools to use with regard to any new asphalt plants. Another piece of legislation will be introduced to look at the hours of operation, in order to give the Town further control. Senator Raptakis urged the town to move forward on both pieces of legislation. He further clarified that these are not statewide bills, but only for the Town of Coventry.

Meeting adjourned.

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Town Clerk