

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

March 12, 2012

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

Recently, members of the Town Council participated in the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick's Parade in West Warwick. President Cote commented on the phenomenal job that was done to make it a great parade.

He also advised that the employees of the Town of Coventry recently sponsored and held a fundraiser to benefit the Hawkins family, a family from Coventry whose house recently burned down. Pauline Hawkins, a former employee at the Town Hall, was injured very badly in the fire. There was a great turnout at the fundraiser/steak fry and would like to remind everyone to keep the family in your prayers.

The Coventry Town Council welcomed new Public Works Director, Robert Clarkin, to the Town of Coventry. Mr. Clarkin competed with 36 other job applicants and was the former DPW Director from Foster.

Motion was made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve minutes from the February 27, 2012 Town Council meeting. All voted aye.

PROCLAMATIONS

Recognizing the Coventry Parks and Recreation Department for being chosen as the Department of the Year by the Rhode Island Recreation and Park Association (RIRPA)

President Cote presented certificate to Director Guy Lefebvre. Mr. Lefebvre accepted certificate and credited members of the Parks and Recreation Department for their support in helping achieve this award.

Recognizing the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School Wrestling Team for winning this year's State Championship

Members of the Wrestling Team could not appear this evening and will be invited back to a future meeting.

Recognizing the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School Girls Basketball Team for winning this year's State Championship

President Cote presented proclamation to girls Basketball Team.

PRESENTATION - 2011 Fiscal Year Independent Audit

Mr. Paul Dansereau and Mr. Craig Parese of Baxter Dansereau & Assoc. presented the audit report. Mr. Dansereau summarized the 2011 fiscal year independent audit. He guided Council through various funds and reports, assets, liabilities, income statements and activities leading to an overall \$8,363,982 general fund balance. He noted that a qualified report was performed this year due to the uncertainty over a school pension plan.

President Cote noted that some progress has been made in the pension funds and Councilman Jendzejec feels that as the stock market improves, so will pension funds. Manager Hoover added that although we are better off than many communities, the pension fund liability is the biggest problem we have.

Further discussion ensued on the audit report; Mr. Dansereau indicated that the actual cumulative surplus that we have in the general fund right now is showing about 13% of the town's budget, which is a good number. Usually the bonding agencies look for a surplus and 13% is in a good range. Mr. Dansereau feels we did well within the budgets, both school and town. The pension issues, like many communities, are long term issues that won't be corrected next week

*** Entire audit report is available in Town Council folder ***

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Application for renewal of Private Detective license by David Thatcher, Sr.
2. Approving the tax abatements and additions for February, 2012

Councilman Spear commented on the abatement amount of \$63,250.30 and how this could impact the budget this year. Manager Hoover responded that this would not have an impact on the budget, but he does expect improvement with regard to abatements for the rest of the fiscal year.

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

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Town Council, acting as the Liquor Control Board, considering the Class B liquor license (with victualling, liveshow and dance licenses) of Chatermike Restaurant Corporation, 446 Tiogue Avenue

Motion made by Councilman Spear seconded by Councilman Mattson to open public hearing. All voted aye.

Manager Hoover advised that in order to issue the liquor license, the proprietor needs to meet certain obligations of the town and state. So far, he has not been able to obtain a letter of good standing from the State Division of Taxation or a letter of good standing with regard to reinstatement of his corporation. I regretfully suggest that this business be closed tomorrow morning and remain closed until he is able to comply.

Motion was made by Vice-President McGee seconded by Councilman Mattson to close public hearing. All voted aye.

Motion was made by Vice-President McGee seconded by Councilman Spear to close this business until it is able to come into compliance. All voted aye.

RESOLUTIONS

1. Memorializing the General Assembly to enact legislation authorizing the Town of Coventry to finance the acquisition, construction, renovation, demolition, improvement, alteration, repair, additions to, and furnishing and equipping of, new and existing school facilities in the Town by issuance of not more than \$ 8,550,000 bonds, notes and/or notes other evidences of indebtedness

Manager Hoover explained that this issue began last year, when both the town and school departments were looking to improve their investments with some capital needs. However, this did not get through the General Assembly last year and we have to resubmit the request. I indicated a couple of meetings ago that from the town standpoint we do not believe the town is in a position to make a request for capital needs this year. The original breakdown was about 2.5 million for the town and 7.5 million for the schools.

School Superintendent Mike Convery, Finance Director Robin Pelletier, School Committee member Tom Hetherman and Brian Steverman explained the requests of the school department. Mr. Convery referred to his memo of March 5, 2012, where he prioritized requests. Topping the list is roofing needs at \$5 million; followed by fire alarm updates of \$400,000; athletic complex at \$1 million; grounds improvements of \$300,000; flooring at \$250,000 and HVAC upgrades of \$1.6 million.

Mr. Convery stressed the urgency regarding roofing needs, as just a couple of weeks ago there was a problem with water getting into the electrical system. At that time Fire Chief Seltzer advised that if this should happen again, he would close the school and send the students home.

Discussion took place with regard to the bond request, with President Cote agreeing that although the roofs and fire alarm are very important needs, he questioned \$1 million for the athletic complex and \$250,000 to fix worn tile in corridors, especially in this economic climate. Don't want to see you shoot yourself in the foot to ask for all of this, unless you are going to split them up as separate bond items, giving the taxpayers a choice to approve or not approve. They may be inclined just to vote for roofs and fire alarm.

Councilman Spear added that he served as Chairman of the committee which made these recommendations six years ago. These are long term outstanding needs of the Coventry Public Schools. I hope that whatever is agreed to, that we get the largest bond that we can before the community and get our school facilities put back where they belong.

Manager Hoover asked Superintendent Convery if the 50% reimbursement from RIDE is applicable to these items. Mr. Convery responded that if considered health and safety, Coventry would receive 50.26% on the dollar. Although the refund is not immediate, it would help repay the bond.

Mr. Hetherman noted that energy projects remain outside of the bond, but that you really can't do any of the energy projects without first addressing the roofs, and I believe there is a time frame with the General Assembly to get this going.

Councilman Mattson asked if the School Committee had considered naming rights and advertising to help fund athletics. Mr. Hetherman remarked that the athletic field is already named for someone who was prominent in Coventry; it wouldn't be proper to change the name. There has been talk of putting signs around the fences, advertising space, to make money that way.

After discussion, a motion was made by Councilman Jendzejec seconded by Councilman Spear to approve resolution. All voted aye.

Requesting the General Assembly to introduce and support legislation which would allow the establishment of a Tax Amnesty Program with the Town of Coventry

Councilman Jendzejec explained that this program is a way to help the taxpayers due to the hard financial times. It's a tax amnesty where taxpayers can come forward and meet their obligations to the town without paying any penalties or interest. This is a 45 day period, set in the next fiscal year by this Council. If approved, it would have to go through another step with the General Assembly in order for us to implement this program. I think it would do a world of good for the taxpayers who are hurting, trying to make ends meet and can't pay their entire tax bill because of fees, penalties and interest. This is a win/win situation for both the taxpayers and the town to meet their financial obligations.

When Councilman Spear asked what this would do for our community and whether other communities have tried this, Councilman Jendzejec pointed out Page 15 of the audit book, where it is documented that \$2,106,000 (in real estate and personal property taxes) are receivable. Johnston has implemented this and I don't know how successful they were, but I think it is a success if we can help even one taxpayer. President Cote added it would allow people to come in and pay their tax bill, waiving penalties and interest for that 45 day period.

Councilman Mattson suggested that you may end up with a situation where taxpayers think they have 45 more days, and then wait to pay. Councilman Jendzejec agreed that it is possible to take advantage of a program, but my position on this is doing good for the people who need it. Unfortunately there are people who may do exactly as you suggest. This allows them more breathing room.

Councilman Spear questioned if we have the latitude to terminate the program if we feel that this system is being abused. President Cote clarified that this would be a one-time 45 day period for one fiscal year and it would be the Council's decision when to enact it. This does not mean 45 days per quarter or per year. You would have to go back to the General Assembly and ask for permission to do this on a yearly basis.

Motion made by Councilman McGee seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve resolution. All voted Aye.

Authorizing the Town Manager to sign a settlement agreement involving a former member of the Coventry Police Department

Manager Hoover explained that this resolution would authorize him to sign a settlement agreement for \$3,859.56.

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

Authorizing a contract with Cybercom Inc. for the narrow banding of all fixed equipment which are narrowband capable within the Coventry Police Department

Chief Volpe informed Council that work will be performed on the backup radio system. There is a deadline with the FCC to make upgrades to the system, with a completion date of January 1, 2015, in order to be in compliance with the new narrowband initiative. There has been \$40,000 set aside in our capital budget for this project, but after research, it is only going to cost about \$5,737.

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

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCE

Revisions to Article 6 of the Coventry Zoning Ordinance

Motion made by Councilman Jendzejec seconded by Councilman Spear to refer to Planning Board for recommendations. All voted aye.

Public Comment

Kathy Patenaude, 38 Fieldstone Drive, thanked the Town Council for moving forward with the \$8.5 million bond. She also informed the Town Council that there is a leadership conference being offered at Bryant College, and if you have time to attend, it is a worthwhile conference.

Ron Gizzarelli, 50 Harrington Road had several comments:

1. Asked that the public have access to the 2011 FY audit report
2. Would like to see public comment placed on the agenda before an item is voted on
3. Feels that it is taking a big chance with an \$8.5 million dollar bond

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

Town Clerk