

Town Council Meeting
August 20, 2012 – 7:00 p.m.

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

Town Manager Thomas Hoover, Town Solicitor Frederick Tobin

Pledge of Allegiance led by Town Sergeant
Invocation by Reverend Bove
Review of Emergency Evacuation Plan

President's Comments

President Cote commented that he takes pleasure in being able to celebrate the accomplishments of Coventry's Little League and Babe Ruth teams. These teams have had a great season, represented the Town of Coventry phenomenally and the Town Council is very proud of them, both for winning the Rhode Island State Championship and for their participation in the Northeast Regional Tournaments.

Approval of Town Council Minutes from July 23 and August 6, 2012

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

PROCLAMATIONS

Recognizing the Coventry Little League American Division All Stars on winning the Rhode Island State Championship and for their participation in the Northeast Regional Tournament in Bristol Connecticut

President Cote presented proclamations to Coventry Little League American Division All Stars; Senator Shibley also presented citations from the State of Rhode Island Senate.

Recognizing the Coventry Babe Ruth 15 Year Old All Stars on winning the Rhode Island State Championship and for their participation in the Northeast Regional Tournament in Quincy, Massachusetts

President Cote presented proclamations to the Coventry Babe Ruth 15 year old All Stars; Senator Kettle also presented citations from the State of Rhode Island Senate.

Recreation Director Guy Lefebvre recognized League President Jim Spearman, who has been instrumental in the success of this program for 35 years. Mr. Spearman was recently presented with the "Man of the Year Award" and is now the District Commissioner of the statewide Babe Ruth Program.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Application for Renewal of Private Detective License for Bruce Capwell, 5555 Flat River Road
2. Application for fireworks display on Johnson's Pond for Sunday, Sept. 2, 2012
3. Approval of tax abatements and additions for July, 2012

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

RESOLUTIONS

1. Appointing one member to the Board of Assessment Review, representing District 3

Councilman Jendzejec stated that he would like to table this resolution and allow more time for candidates to submit applications, as we currently have just one applicant. Councilman Jendzejec made a motion, seconded by Councilman Spear, to table resolution at this time. All voted aye.

2. Appointing one member to the Planning Commission

Motion made by Councilman Jendzejec seconded by Councilman McGee to appoint Joshua Nunes to the Coventry Planning Commission. All voted Aye.

3. Approving the award of a contract to provide catch basin cleaning for the Department of Public Works to Lloyd Truax Inc.

Manager Hoover explained that this item has been out to bid, was before the Town Council at the last meeting and due to a misprint in the recommendation, granting of the award was tabled to tonight's agenda. Truax submitted prices, both per basin and per hour. The other bidder gave a price per catch basin cleaning only with no hourly rates; the catch basin cleaning bid was considerably higher than Truax.

Mr. Smith from DPW advised that Truax has worked for the town for about 15 years. They clean the town's approximately 2,500 catch basins in three to four weeks, use their own trucks and crew and charge on a per catch basin basis. If there is an emergency, then they charge by the hour. There are not many emergency situations. We check on their progress daily, do spot checks and if they have missed any basins they'll come back and do them.

Motion made by Vice-President McGee seconded by Carl Mattson to approve resolution. All voted aye.

4. Authorizing the Town Manager to enter into a memorandum of agreement with the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) for paid details provided by the Town of Coventry Police Department to RIDOT

Chief Volpe explained that this resolution applies only if we are working a DOT job. We work on a reimbursement basis, paying from the police budget and getting reimbursement from the State. Basically it is a wash.

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

5. Approving the exchange of a retired police vehicle for necessary radio equipment within the Coventry Police Department with the Central Coventry Fire District

Chief Volpe explained that former Fire Chief Seltzer was looking to obtain a car from the Police Department because the fire department has acquired an accelerant sniffing dog and they were looking to have a car set up for the canine and handler. In return, we were looking for an antenna/radio system.

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

6. Approving the award of a contract to Northeast Revaluation Group, LLC to perform a Statistical Update and Revaluation Project of all taxable real property within the corporate limits of the Town of Coventry at a cost of \$194,600

Manager Hoover advised that every three years a statistical revaluation is required. We have received one bid from Northeast Revaluation Group and we are very familiar with them as it is the same company who performed our last reval. The bid is well within our budget. In addition there is also a 60% reimbursement from the state of RI on a statistical reval.

Michael Nagel of Northeast Revaluation was present to answer questions. He explained what a statistical revaluation is, how they derive their results after looking at sales over the last two years and how that data is used to create tables and schedules to assist in the evaluation of the community.

He also discussed foreclosed and abandoned homes and how they would or would not figure in to an analysis. In previous years they would never have used foreclosed homes in their analysis, but today there is an impact on the market with more than a small sampling of homes having this distinction. However, distressed sales are investigated because with foreclosures, for example, it is actually only the bank foreclosing on the mortgage amount, having nothing to do with value of the property.

President Cote is concerned about the effect this could have on neighborhood property values and the impact to home sale values in the neighborhood. Mr. Nagel responded that they

look at these things closely, a lot of research is required on distressed sales.

In 2015 the town will need to have a full revaluation performed.

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

ORDINANCE INTRODUCTION

1. Amending Article III of Section 217 of the Coventry Code of Ordinances entitled "Exemptions for Elderly or Disabled Persons"

Councilman Jendzejec, who proposed this ordinance, explained that constituents on the senior tax freeze have asked why they can't pay taxes on the lesser amount that has been assessed to them. As it is now, if they take the lower amount, they would have to come off of the current tax freeze. I would like to see this ordinance on the books, so that it can be legislated by the Town Council and not administratively, resulting in taxpayers being able to take the lesser of the assessments; however, if taxes should go up above their *previously* frozen amount, they would not pay a higher tax than that previously frozen amount.

President Cote commented that although he is an advocate of the senior tax freeze, he also looks at the people who are not eligible for the tax freeze. The money that is lost on the tax freeze program has to be made up somewhere, which should not be on the backs of the taxpayers who do not qualify for the freeze.

President Jendzejec remarked that the town will take in revenue from the reduction in the tax treaty at Centre of New England and that could be considered. However, tonight's meeting is only to allow introduction of the ordinance for public hearing.

President Cote stated that part of the reason that this Council could go with no tax increase this year is because we were counting on that revenue from Centre of New England to cover additional expenses and were able to submit a budget with no tax increase to the taxpayers because we were counting on those increases in revenue. If we eat it up with this ordinance change, we would have to make that money up somewhere.

Councilman McGee remarked that he was in favor of this ordinance when it was first presented, but after finding out what the financial impact could be, the town cannot afford it. Coventry has the best tax freeze program in the state, we are very generous to our seniors but we do not have an extra \$275,000 in our budget to allow this program.

Tax Assessor Pat Picard advised that just under 10,000 homes make up the tax base, of which 2355 (1/5 of the town) is already frozen.

Councilman Mattson inquired that if another 829 families were to be effected with a lower tax, it could bring the revenue loss up to \$275,000. Would that \$275,000 be borne on the backs of the other 4/5 of the taxpayers? Ms. Picard replied that it would.

Councilman Mattson then asked whether it would behoove us to put this in another budget cycle, since tax bills have already gone out for this year. If this was implemented now, then next year you would have to make up for the deficit you create now. Councilman Spear also had concerns as to how we would replace that money.

Manager Hoover remarked there are two choices, you would either have to make it up through the other taxpayers or cut services.

Motion made by Councilman Jendzejec seconded by Councilman Spear to approve proposed ordinance amendment for advertisement for public hearing. All voted aye.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lisa Finneran, 4717 Flat River Road stated that she would like to see a dog park in town.

President Cote raised some issues that would have to be dealt with including liability and the added responsibility on the Parks and Recreation Department to do maintenance.

Manager Hoover agreed to set up a meeting with Ms. Finneran, Councilman Jendzejec, President Cote, Recreation Director Guy Lefebvre and himself to talk about the issue.

John Lewis, 4 Veronica Court, raised an issue he has with taxes since the purchase of his home. Manager Hoover advised him to speak with Tax Assessor Pat Picard.

Ron Gizzarelli, 50 Harrington Road, has concerns pertaining to benefits for the elderly and disabled, and suggested that the proposed ordinance is checked for loopholes so that people can't take advantage.

Jerry Bouchard, 64 Rebecca St, President of the Central Coventry Fire Department thanked the Town Council for allowing a police car to be traded and used for the canine unit.

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

Town Clerk