

SPECIAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

November 14, 2005

6:00 p.m.

Present: Gregory Laboissonniere, Ted Jendzejec, Frank Hyde, Richard Sanetti, Justin Pomfret

Richard P. Sullivan, Acting Town Manager
Patrick Sullivan Town Solicitor

Mr. Laboissonniere - In the best interest of the town, I make a motion to table this matter. Seconded by Frank Hyde. Motion fails.

Mr. Hyde - Motion to remove Richard Sanetti as Vice-President and put Ted Jendzejec in as Vice-President, seconded by Gregory Laboissonniere. Motion fails.

Mr. Sanetti - Motion to remove Council President Hyde from Presidency and to place Ted Jendzejec in as President of the Town Council. Motion seconded by Justin Pomfret.

President Hyde - I think that I have a right to speak my mind, and I want everybody to hear what I have to say, so I hope you can hear me loud and clear.

Alan Gelfuso, Esq., attorney from Gelfuso and Lachut, 1193 Reservoir Avenue, Cranston - As Mr. Hyde knows, I act as counsel to him in this matter. I have a point of clarification for the solicitor. You seem to have combined two motions into one, and I'm just not sure whether or not there is a different set of rules that apply here in Coventry than there is in the rest of the world. What happens if they want to remove Frank Hyde, but they don't want Jendzejec? Or if they want Jendzejec but they don't want to remove Hyde? I think that you remove first, appoint second.

Solicitor Sullivan - I understand that you represent Mr. Hyde. They can withdraw the motion if they feel it is inappropriate, but I believe this motion is properly before the Council.

Mr. Hyde - I'm going to read to you folks, and I hope I have your attention because I mean what I say and I'm going to say what I mean. It is unfortunate that this Town Council has inappropriately determined to remove me as President based upon threats by the Acting Town Manager, Richard Sullivan. Sullivan should be ashamed for having called a press conference to attack me last week.

As council president and member of this council for the last three years, I have done all I could to protect the financial stability of the town and its taxpayers, and I mean this. Fiscal responsibility and integrity is my agenda. All I have ever asked for and still demand is fiscal accountability by the administration of this town and its taxpayers.

These actions against me tonight to remove me as Council President for standing up for the rights of the voters of this town is a shame on the people who support it, and I mean what I say. Let me now enumerate for you five or six items that have caused me great concern, that our town manager has ignored to the financial detriment of the Town of Coventry.

1. Notwithstanding the provisions of Town Charter Section 5.02, wherein the Town Manager must give his full time and effort to the town. Mr. Sullivan continued to serve as a part time assistant town solicitor. He is paid approximately \$630 a week for these illegal, unauthorized additional legal duties.

2. The Charter does speak in terms of the council having the authority to allow the town manager to perform other duties. The Charter, however, is our law, our constitution. It is clear that the manager may not be paid for these additional duties. What's right for one is right for all. When I inquired of Mr. Sullivan as to the propriety of him serving both offices, I received a fax that did not pass the "giggle" test, but attempted to explain that because he was only the acting manager, that these charter prohibitions did not apply to him.

Let me set forth additional concerns that I have.

Mr. Sullivan and his son, Patrick, serving as acting town manager, acting prosecutor, town solicitor and counsel to the tax department regarding auctioning off property for non payment of real estate taxes is a gross conflict of interest. And, anyone can see that. It's as blatant a violation of the State of Rhode Island's ethic rules as I have ever seen.

Mr. Jendzejec - Point of order, Mr. President.

Mr. Hyde - This is my speech, and I have a right to speak. I have a right to be heard and I will be heard.

Mr. Jendzejec - You are not allowed to attack personnel during council meetings. The issue in front of us is election of officers.

Mr. Hyde - I have a right to be heard and the people of this town have a right to be heard. I speak to the people, for the people. I would also call your attention to Section 7.02 of the Charter, wherein, it is set forth that the Town Solicitor and any assistant shall not hold any other office in the town government, except that of Acting Probate Judge as necessary.

What we have here, folks, are multiple violations of the charter by our acting town manager, multiple paychecks collected by the acting town manager and last of all an expenditure of \$50,000.00 of money without an appropriate resolution of this council.

This man was upset that I recommended someone for a job. This man complained that I attempted to interfere with some kind of a criminal investigation. That's ridiculous. What I suggest he do is investigate more interesting things and things that have come to my attention about how special treatment is given to certain councilmen, okay? We are held to a higher standard. I'm held to that standard. I don't know why everybody isn't treated the same.

What I would like to know is if there was any special consideration given. I'm here for the people, I've read enough. They elected me to be their fiscal watchdog, their representative to be here and watch out for their town. You know something, I've got a lot of better things to do if they won't let me do my job, then maybe somebody else should come forward and do it and show me how it's done. That's it.

Mr. John Assalone: Mr. President, I'm really disappointed that you brought this down to a personal attack. At \$600.00 a week you didn't mention that that is probably half the pay that the (former) manager was getting, and the arrangement was made, also as most people know, this was not to be a full time job. And an arrangement was made that you want to get a manager here as

soon as possible and that this position was taken reluctantly. If you are going to talk about money, you have multi-million dollar problems in this town, that's what you should be addressing, not going against somebody that has an unblemished financial record and history in this town. That's wrong. I wish tonight everybody would leave everybody alone and go on with life.

Mr. Hyde – We are talking about two paychecks; one as solicitor and one as manager.

Mr. Assalone – You are six million dollars under funded for the sewers. Get involved with that instead of personal attacks.

Solicitor Sullivan – There is a motion on the floor for the council; it has been seconded.

Mr. Laboissonniere – It is with great pain that I have to read a statement like this. I am appalled and dismayed at the behavior our council leadership has put on display for the whole State of Rhode Island to witness. Our community has been embarrassed on numerous occasions over the past year, from a nineteen year managerial relationship being severed, to the rejection of a budget by Coventry's taxpayers for the first time ever, nearly 40 unfilled positions in town departments, commissions and boards, allegations of political pressure and influence peddling in Town Hall, threats and intimidation of town employees and more. We are in a downward spiral and falling fast.

I got involved in Town Government to serve Coventry in a quiet, effective, professional manner, not to be thrust onto the front page of newspapers, scrolling across TV screens and listed on now infamous blog sites as fodder for jokes because of ill-advised, misguided activities of my council associates.

I am disappointed in the path they have chosen to direct this town. A year has passed since the 2004 elections and the ineffectiveness of their brand of governance has cast a long shadow on this town.

I am concerned that my council associates have not grasped the lessons taught by the lack of communications that prevailed during our budget process. I had hoped that this council would find a way to work in harmony, unfortunately, the majority of this council has become a victim of their own inability to communicate effectively.

We have finally taken a step in the right direction by beginning our search for a permanent town manager with the naming of a search committee that consists of astute, well-respected, statesmen and women and business people of the Town of Coventry.

The ongoing infighting can do nothing but disrupt the task of finding a new manager or in trying to entice economic development in Coventry.

We must not sabotage our quest for a top-notch manager. This council will be interviewing potential managers soon, but these candidates will also be interviewing Coventry. Will a professional of sound mind, ability and the qualifications we are looking for choose to accept this position after a closer look? I only hope this candidate can see the promise in Coventry and not base his/her decision on the current climate.

At this time I call on my council associates to come together for the good of the people we were elected to represent.

I call on this council to move forward by concentrating on Council issues not by attempting to micromanage this town's administrative personnel. Gentlemen, the people's work awaits.

Mr. Sanetti – Gentlemen, to clarify I have asked to remove the council president from his seat for many of the reasons just mentioned to you by Councilman Laboissonniere. But specifically for what I feel is a lack of appropriate leadership and has absolutely no bearing on the allegations leveled against the president in the last few days, but I think Councilman Laboissonniere said it very well, that we need to get some new leadership in here and address the real issues. We do not need a threatening and intimidating person leading us. I feel that we could have been much more productive in the next year and I feel that under the leadership of Ted Jendzejec we will be able to do just that, I have a lot of confidence in him, and I ask you to vote in support of placing Councilman Jendzejec in the presidency.

Mr. Laboissonniere – I just need to clarify that as council leadership, I was discussing the majority of council leadership, not just one person.

Vincent DuBriel – Looked up Charter regarding town manager and town solicitor. 5.03. Duties of the Town Manager. Can only do duties for the town, can't hold other positions. I'm for District 3, and our President is an honorable man. We want this council to unite, and let's keep the president who has been working and helping out this town on fiscal matters that concern all of us. I want to say support the president, unite and get together.

Nicholas Gorham – I have nothing to add to what Mr. Laboissonniere said. Thought he said it very well. But I just wanted to point out that other people should be allowed to speak.

Mr. Hyde – A precedent was set, and I will allow anyone to speak. The floor is open.

Solicitor Sullivan – There is a motion and a second on the floor.

Mr. Hyde – If there is no more to be said, do as you will.

Mr. Laboissonniere – I choose to abstain from voting. I don't believe this is a vote that I want to be any part of.

Roll call vote – Gregory Laboissonniere – Abstain
Ted Jendzejec – Yes
Frank Hyde – No
Richard Sanetti – Yes
Justin Pomfret – Yes

Solicitor Sullivan: Motion carries 3-1.

President Jendzejec: Any more business on the election of officers?
Hearing none I'll take a motion to adjourn.

Motion made by Richard Sanetti seconded by Justin Pomfret to adjourn meeting. All voted Aye.

Councilman Sanetti I have statement I would like to read to the public.

It has been my pleasure to serve this community. I have poured my heart and soul into everything I do for the people I represent. Coventry has all the ingredients it needs to be very successful and a model for how to turn a community around. I stand by every vote I have made on behalf of the well being of its citizens. I have presented this town council and this community with my solution to the tax crises it faces. That is why I came here. The TIF model has been presented to this council and a resolution unanimously passed supporting the formation of a TIF commission was the first step.

I urge this community and it's leaders to stand behind the Centre of New England to see TIF through to its completion because therein lies the real solutions.

Acting Manager Dick Sullivan, you have brought a level of honor, integrity and dignity to the Town Manager's position, and I am very proud to have met you.

As this council moves forward I urge them to not lose sight of the real reason we are here...to serve the people and not a party and I wish them all the best.

At this time I present President Jendzejec and the Town Clerk with my resignation and I bid all those present here all the best that life has to offer....good night.

Meeting adjourned 7:50 p.m.

Cheryl A. George
Town Clerk