

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
December 9, 2013

WORK SESSION – 6:00 PM

A. Joint Discussion of the Coventry Town Council and the Coventry School Committee to discuss the three year budget forecast as required by Ordinance 3-06-249

School Committee Chairperson Kathy Patenaude opened work session. In attendance from the School Committee were Kathy Patenaude, Judy Liner, David Florio and Ann Dickson.

Finance Director Robert Thibeault and Tax Assessor Patricia Picard presented the town's three year budget forecast. Ms. Picard discussed current values and levy, and estimates that the new statistical revaluation will show a loss of approximately \$280,000,000. She predicts that in FY 2016-17 values will grow. Manager Hoover added that to keep the same levy, you have to increase the rate. You are not really increasing taxes, but the tax rate, because values go down. President Cote clarified that basically the taxes paid in 2013/2014 will be the same for 2014/2015, even though the rate goes up.

Superintendent Michael Almeida and Robin Pelletier, School Finance Director, presented the School Department's three year budget presentation with a discussion of preliminary 2014/2015 budget projections. (See full presentation in council folder)

Dr. Almeida stressed that this is only a preliminary budget discussion, as it will continue to be developed for future meetings. Tonight's meeting is required by state law and we are presenting projections not knowing full well what will come forward.

He talked about the three year projection of expenses, focusing on FY 15, where the school is projecting a \$67 million budget, which is an increase of \$2.2 million, a 3.5% increase. This is actually a \$1.6 million request after you back out the state aid.

He outlined budget changes that directly relate to the \$1.6 million request, that include staff salary increases, certified step increases, a salary increase of 3.5% for school related personnel along with increase in pension, step increases, health care and dental increases, uncertainty regarding the affordable care act (Obamacare), certified staff pension increase of 1.15%, special education out of district tuition increase, transportation increase. There are expected reductions in supplies and also \$100,000 reduction due to attrition

President Cote felt that it was clear when the contract was negotiated that there would be no increase to salary for three years. Yet, your projection shows a \$ 503,000 increase for certified staff salary. Ms. Pelletier added that the projection in state aid would fund those increases. Ms. Pelletier advised that the model she used projected \$700,000 as the annual increase over the contract, but we actually received \$608,000. On top of that, there is fluctuation in our state aid to operations, based on the number of students that we have who are attending other schools.

Dr. Almeida went on to say that in projecting FY 14/15, if enrollment drops, you get less money. We have had a number of students that needed services, out of district tuition, transportation and then you figure in the pension increase of \$204,912, the affordable care act, and the loss in state aid, that is where the gap comes out \$1.6 million. That is why this conversation is very preliminary. President Cote agreed that he doesn't expect the final request to be \$1.6 million.

Councilwoman Carlson noted an increase from FY 14 to FY 15 in tuition. Dr. Almeida attributed that to special education costs and added that we are exploring how to bring these children back into their home district for services they need. He went on to describe challenges in the district, especially going to all day kindergarten and common core supplies and resources. We continue to review and identify some initiatives that we need to have in our schools and are working with our new special education director who is preparing a presentation to the School Committee.

Dr. Almeida went over historical data with regard to federal funding which has decreased over \$2 million in the last five years, state aid which is currently at about the same level is was in 2007/08 and it has been on us to fill the void. Also included was Coventry's municipal fiscal support, with an annual average increase of \$180,000. We have absorbed a tremendous amount and continue to do so by cutting staff and cutting costs. Again, this is not a request at this point, just a projection.

President Cote thanked him and his staff for the presentation, acknowledging that there is a lot more work to do before the final budget request, but I think between all of us we will come up with the best numbers we can to put before the taxpayers.

School Committee member Judy Liner advised council that they can educate themselves on common core by going to the website.

Chairperson Patenaude adjourned work session. All School Committee members voted Aye.

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING – 7:00 PM

Present: President Gary Cote, Vice-President Kerry McGee, Councilman Jendzejec, Councilwoman Carlson, Gregory Laboissonniere

Town Manager Thomas Hoover, Town Solicitor Frederick Tobin

Pledge of Allegiance led by Town Sergeant
Moment of Silence
Review of Emergency Evacuation Plan

President's Comments

President Cote wished everyone a Merry Christmas and asked that the less fortunate are remembered during the holiday season.

Approval of Town Council minutes November 18, 2013

Motion made by Vice President McGee seconded by Councilwoman Carlson to approve minutes. All voted aye.

SCHOOL DEPARTMENT REPORT

School Committee member Ann Dickson reported on the strategic plan and remarked that a Wireless Classroom Initiative grant of approximately \$325,000 has been awarded to Coventry. This will provide reliable internet and bandwidth to all classrooms in the Coventry school system. Also, the District Technology Committee is in the process of developing a technology integration plan, dependent on the Wireless Classroom initiative. The Superintendent will present the technology plan within the next couple of months.

Ms. Brooke Macomber was recognized by the Rhode Island Association of School Principals as the 2013 Rhode Island Assistant Principal of the Year. Kathryn Tancrelle, Hopkins Hill Elementary Principal, has been selected by the RI Association of School Principals as a finalist for First Year principal of the Year. Lastly, Western Coventry Elementary School, in a lottery, won a \$10,000 grant for technology. It was the only school chosen in all of Rhode Island; only ten grants were awarded in the country.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Discussion and resulting action on tax abatements and additions for August 2013

A motion was made by Vice-President McGee seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve Consent Agenda. All voted Aye.

LICENSES

1. Application for victualling license by Mystic Akshar, LLC dba LaQuinta Inn & Suites, 4 Universal Blvd.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Carlson seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve license subject to Board of Health approval and proof of a food manager certificate. All voted Aye.

2. Renewal of Campground licenses

a. Hickory Ridge

Since all town and state requirements have been met, a motion was made by Vice-

President McGee seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve license renewal. All voted Aye.

b. Bamford Lakeside Properties LLC dba Camp Ayoho

Since all town and state requirements have been met, a motion was made by Vice-President McGee seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve license renewal. All voted Aye.

c. Bamford Lakeside Properties LLC dba Water's Edge (fka Colwell's Campground)

A motion was made by Vice-President McGee seconded by Councilman Laboissonniere to open for discussion. All voted Aye.

Manager Hoover explained that this campground has had a new owner for about a year. He has gone through the inspection process; our zoning official and fire department have no concerns. He also meets requirements of the State, namely an approved Recreation facility license and permit for drinking water quality, neither of which expire until June of 2014. A number of inspections have been done by our zoning official and at this point the town is in a position to recommend approval of this license.

Councilwoman Carlson advised that she received a letter from the State of RI pertaining to landscaping, planting grass and the removal of a road in the campground. She asked if those items have been addressed yet.

Proprietor Brian Bamford, 33 Wood Cove Drive, stated that he agreed to block off the road and it has been blocked at both ends. In addition, and because of the time frame, the RI Department of Health inspector has suggested that the loam and seed is not put down until April, as it would only harden if we put it in now.

Councilwoman Carlson asked if the septic system is finished. Mr. Bamford replied that the last inspection will be coming up soon, all other inspections have been approved, and he will then have a certificate of completion. In addition, Mr. Bamford advised that the state does not require a septic system to be placed on that property at all as long as there is a self contained unit and you don't dump onto the ground. This septic system is costing \$75,000 and is above and beyond what is required per regulation of the State. I put in this particular system because I wanted a good system in there.

Councilwoman Carlson asked about the buffer issue. Mr. Bamford responded that the buffer is not a requirement by ordinance, it is something that was agreed to. Spruces and hemlocks were put in and 50 more arborvitae are on the way to complete the buffer. Manager Hoover added that a buffer is not required as this is not considered to be an expansion of the facility. Also, with regard to the septic, there is no requirement in our ordinance that the septic be provided as long as there is a way for removing the waste.

Councilwoman Carlson asked if there are any children who attend school from the campground. Mr. Bamford replied that he is not aware of that.

A motion was made by Vice-President McGee seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve license renewal. Vote taken: Aye (4); No (1 – Councilwoman Carlson votes no). Motion passes.

RESOLUTIONS

1. Discussion and resulting action on reappointing Town Manager Thomas Hoover, and Police Lieutenant Dennis Skorski, and appointing Finance Director Robert Thibeault to the Police Pension Board

A motion was made by Councilwoman Carlson seconded by Councilman Laboissonniere to approve appointments. All voted Aye.

2. Discussion and resulting action on appointing Finance Director Robert Thibeault to the Municipal Employees Pension Board

A motion was made by Councilwoman Carlson seconded by Councilman Laboissonniere to approve appointment. All voted Aye.

3. Discussion and resulting action on authorizing the Town Manager to execute a consent agreement with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management for the repair of Upper Pond Dam (Breezy Lake)

Manager Hoover gave overview of the situation, that the dam is in need of repair and DEM is requiring that several things be done to the dam, one being that we hire a specialist in dam engineering. A good portion of the work can be done in-house with our Department of Public Works. However, we need to have a design done which will involve some contractual work. Approval of this resolution just gives permission to sign the consent agreement, as we do own the dam.

A motion was made by Vice-President McGee seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve resolution. All voted Aye.

4. Discussion and resulting action regarding the reappropriation of the Coventry School Department Capital Budget

Superintendent Almeida explained that the chiller at the high school doesn't work. Since there is money in the capital budget left over from prior years, he is requesting a reallocation of those funds so that \$69,000 can be put toward the costs of the chiller repair.

A motion was made by Vice-President McGee seconded by Councilman Jendzejec to approve resolution. All voted Aye.

5. Discussion and resulting action on authorizing the Town to finance air quality and energy efficiency improvements and other repairs and renovations to School buildings and other municipal buildings in the Town and all attended expenses, including but not limited to engineering costs, by the issuance of not more than \$5,000,000 bonds, notes and/or other evidences of indebtedness

Manager Hoover noted a correction on his memo to Council, that the plan is to issue a bond anticipation note in the amount of \$500,000, not \$5 million, for this work. The bond will be repaid with energy savings. But, there remains an emergency at the high school, the chiller doesn't work, and there is an estimated cost of \$500,000 for replacement. He added that this is a separate issue, outside of the school bonds, which will be repaid with energy savings. The bond anticipation note would be for no more than \$500,000, probably less.

A motion was made by Councilman Jendzejec seconded by Vice-President McGee to approval resolution. All voted aye.

6. Discussion and resulting action on authorizing the Town Manager or Town Council President to sign the closing documents for the purchase of the Woodland Sewer Line and Pump Station

Solicitor Tobin explained that since the closing for this purchase will most likely occur before the end of the month, he is requesting that authority be given to either the Town Manager or the Council President to sign the closing documents, so not to delay the closing.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Carlson seconded by Councilman Laboissonniere for approval. All voted Aye.

7. Discussion and resulting action on authorizing the Town Manager to enter into an Economic Development Incentive Agreement with WW III Development, Inc. as part of the purchase of the Reservoir Road Sewer Line

Solicitor Tobin discussed the purchase and sales agreement for the Reservoir Road sewer line and details of the economic development incentive agreement. In lieu of payment for the line, an agreement was made with regard to impact fees on four possible projects that WW III Development envisions for the future. In return, such developments will produce a higher tax base for the Town of Coventry. This line would also afford an opportunity for the high school to tie in along with future developments .

President Cote remarked that the purchase of these two lines is an economic benefit to the town of Coventry and will generate some revenue for the sewer fund.

Councilwoman Carlson inquired about sidewalks on Reservoir Road. Manager Hoover replied that he has a meeting Friday with RI Dept. of Transportation on that subject.

A motion was made by Councilman Jendzejec seconded by Councilwoman Carlson to approve resolution. All voted Aye.

ORDINANCE

1. Amending the Coventry Code of Ordinances Chapter 217 Taxation, Article IV Exemption for Veterans, Section 217-12, providing a one thousand (\$1,000) tax exemption on real property situated in the Town for any person owning and occupying said property who is an active member of the armed forces of the United States, as allowed under RIGL 44-3-4(j)

Councilwoman Carlson initiated this ordinance after receiving a call from the wife of an active duty serviceman, making her aware that active duty personnel were not receiving exemptions. She proposed this ordinance so that active members of the armed forces could also receive an exemption.

Solicitor Tobin advised that state law allows Coventry to adopt a \$1,000 exemption. This particular ordinance allows the Tax Assessor to put a \$1,000 exemption in place, but suggest that the wording be changed from "may" provide to "shall" provide.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Carlson seconded by Councilman Laboissonniere to change language from "may" to "shall". All voted Aye.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Carlson seconded by Councilman Laboissonniere to advertise for public hearing. All voted Aye.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ken Jackson, Harkney Hill Road, questioned the costs of the proposed dog park, why the town is purchasing the fence and would like to know the costs of the fence and labor involved. He also asked why town trucks, a backhoe and a flatbed were at the Harkney Hill/Phillips Hill Road ball field complex.

Manager Hoover replied that no purchases have been made at this point. The dog park fencing is going out to bid and nothing will be done without Council approval first. As far as trucks at the ball field, it is part of the preparation for the dog park, as the women's baseball diamond had to be moved to the Harkney Hill complex. The Town Council has been fully advised of this action.

Tammy Duxbury, 2 Orchid Trail, asked why the council is going out to bid when in the August 19 minutes the Council felt that they would not do the dog park. Why go to bid if there is no intention to fund the park.

Manager Hoover responded that on October 13, action was taken by the Council to construct the dog park. We don't know the costs yet, and it will be the decision of the Council as to whether to award the bid or not.

Councilman Jendzejec replied that there is an intention to construct a dog park and the Council will decide what to do after the bids come back. We are taking one step at a time.

Ms. Duxbury has listened to Mr. Forcier's concerns about the campground and does not understand what is considered an expansion in this town. There are two situations in town, and I consider 75 Airport Road an expansion. How can you have a campground add 15 sites and not call that an expansion? I think you need to take a look at what's going on with planning and zoning enforcement in this town.

Thomas Forcier spoke regarding campground expansion at Colwell's and asked how you can have 106 sites, then add 15 sites, and not call that expanding. He does not think this is being handled properly and would like an explanation as to why the town isn't looking into this. There are unhealthy conditions at Colwell's Campground. My well is polluted with ground water and nobody is doing anything about it.

A motion was made by Vice-President McGee seconded by Councilwoman Carlson to adjourn meeting. All voted aye.

Town Clerk