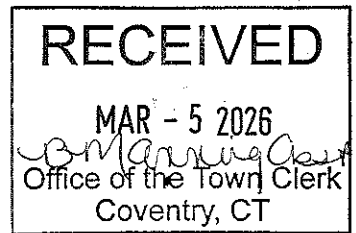


UNOFFICIAL MINUTES
Town Council Steering Committee Special Meeting
March 2, 2025 6:00 PM
Town Hall Annex



1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Jonathan Hand at 6:00 PM

Members Present: Jonathan Hand-Chairperson, Matthew Kyer, Mark Wheaton, and Lisa Thomas (Ex-Officio Member & Council Chairwoman).

Also Present: James Drumm-Town Manager and Alex Taylor-Special Projects Coordinator.

Absent: None

2. Acceptance Of Minutes, January 27, 2026:

Kyer moved to accept the minutes of January 27, 2026, Hand seconds.

Discussion/Changes:

- Pg. 6, Agenda Item 6, 3rd to last paragraph, 2nd sentence, change "Han" to "Hand".

Vote: Unanimously in favor.

3. Reports:

3.A. Chairperson: None

3.B. Committee Members: None

3.C. Monthly Board and Commission Reports:

Vacancy Report:

Kyer asked Drumm if he was aware of any vacancies that need to be addressed more than others. Drumm explained that all Boards and Commissions have been able to make quorum. He noted that the Pension and Retirement Committee has been able to make quorum with the addition of members but could still use more.

4. Resignations/Not Wishing to be Reappointed:

4.A. Ad-hoc protected spaces stewardship committee: Beausoleil:

Hand thanked Beausoleil for his long and dedicated service. He added that he is aware Beausoleil has expressed interest in continuing to volunteer with trail maintenance.

4.B. Veterans Memorial and Events Commission: Brand:

Hand thanked Brand for his long service on this Commission.

5. Appointments:

5.A. Energy Conservation/Alternative Energy Committee: Castillo:

Motion: I move to recommend to the full Town Council to appoint Julie Castillo to the Energy Conservation/Alternative Energy Committee for a term to expire 3/1/2029.

By: Kyer

Second: Wheaton

Motion: I move to recommend to the full Town Council to appoint Simon Hecht as an alternate member to the Parks & Recreation Commission.

By: Kyer

Second: Wheaton

Discussion: Wheaton asked if party affiliations were checked. It was confirmed that this appointment recommendation was OK based on other party affiliations on the Commission.

Thomas spoke on Hecht's involvement and experience, and explained he is involved with Coventry Little League and expressed interest in being more involved with the community and park planning. She encouraged him to submit a statement of interest when there was an opening.

Thomas explained that she wants to have something for all the other people who put in their names (Orcutt, Garcia, and Drumm) for the Parks and Rec Commission vacancy. She spoke on the qualifications and experience of the other candidates and felt they could put their skills in other commissions like the Conservation Commission, as they need more members, or any others that have vacancies should they still wish to serve the community.

Hand added that Hecht has a good overlap of parks and rec service in the community already, bringing relative experience to the table making him a good fit.

Vote: Unanimously in favor.

5.D. Veterans Memorial and Events Commission - Zetterstrom:

Motion: I move to recommend to the full Town Council to appoint Carl Zetterstrom to the Veterans Memorial and Events Commission for a new term to expire 1/1/2028.

By: Kyer

Second: Wheaton

Discussion: Hand commented that Zetterstrom is the Post Commander for the American Legion.

Vote: Unanimously in favor.

6. Consideration/possible action: Establishment of School Building Committee to evaluate current and future facility needs for Coventry Public Schools:

Drumm reminded that at the last meeting it was requested for the staff to put together a draft charge for this committee should it be established. He explained that it is attached to the agenda for review along with the charge for the current School Building Committee.

Hand read an excerpt from a letter sent from Dr. Petrone about the BOE's request:

"The Coventry Board of Education respectfully requests that the Town Council appoint a School Building Committee with regard to the planned program of increasing educational space for the Coventry schools, with the focus on PreK-5, and appoint at least three members of the Board of Education to the School Building Committee."

Motion: I move to consider, with the possibility of taking action, the establishment of a School Building Committee to evaluate current and future facility needs for Coventry Public Schools.

By: Kyer

Second: Wheaton

Discussion: Hand reviewed the charge to the School Energy and Building Efficiency Building Committee, which was charged back in 2014, and noted that their charge covers a lot of areas.

Kyer asked Drumm and Taylor to explain any overlap of the 2 charges, and what areas in the existing School Building Charge would not apply to the charge of the new committee. Drumm explained that the project management aspect would remain the same, if a project happens to be one of the results, as well as the structure of the charge/committee. He added that the committee was scaled back to 7 members, which is still large, and noted that even with a board of 7 members having 3 BOE members serve may be too many.

Taylor explained that he kept the structure similar, as the committees would be doing similar evaluation work and project oversight. Taylor continued that he reviewed the charges of other School Building Committees from other towns, and their structure was similar. He added that the School Energy and Building Efficiency Building Committee was charged with energy related in their charge as there were grant opportunities for energy related projects.

Notable changes are:

- Increase board size to 7 members, to include those with building, engineering, construction experience, and stakeholders.
- Inclusion of CT General Statutes language that was not in place at the establishment of the School Energy and Building Efficiency Building Committee.
- Inclusion of language that requires all contracts to be brought before the Town Council in all phases of the evaluation and project.

Kyer stressed that options be evaluated, and the research be presented to the Town Council as to what each option would look like and their recommendation, which is not stated in the current charge. Wheaton agreed and asked that more Town Council involvement be outlined in the charge as it is not indicated until section 10 of the charge. He requested that meetings with the Town Council be more than quarterly and requirements of Town Council involvement be added after section 4. Drumm added that Board of Education involvement needs to be added as well, to get their input before moving forward. Thomas agreed with consistent communication, and suggested item 10 be moved up in the charge. She reminded that the committee would be required to have a representative of the Town Council as a member, and they can be requested to come to a Town Council meeting to provide updates. It was stressed that the Town Council should be given more routine updates, prior to there being a contract.

Hand suggested that Taylor add language that states the Town Council be presented with options, and reasoning on why a specific reason is recommended.

Hand recognized the BOE Chair, Jen Beausoleil, who was in the audience. Kyer was curious about the reasoning for why 3 Board of Ed members were requested to be on the committee. Beausoleil commented that the CHS addition project that was done in the 1990s is more comparable to what the new School Building Committee would be doing, rather than the current School Energy and Building Efficiency Building Committee.

Beausoleil also suggested having someone who can talk to the Steering Committee about the state statutes related to a building committee's responsibilities, since it has been a while since this type of committee was established. She continued that it is her understanding that when a building committee is established that there is a primary focus to solve a problem or need and then presents a recommendation for funding. She explained that it is not typical that the group would do research and then present options to the municipality to determine what should be funded. She further explained that the DAS, State Department of Ed, and other municipalities who have done this recently may have more insight into this process.

Beausoleil explained that when a Board of Ed asks for a building committee, there are options available, one of which being the Board of Ed is asked to be the building committee as a whole. Beausoleil noted that Coventry has done this in the past. However, since the scope of work for the Pre K –5 focus was large, the BOE felt they did not have the capacity to take this on and is the reasoning behind requesting 3 BOE members having seats on the new board. Ultimately, the number of BOE members to serve on the committee is up to the Town Council.

Beausoleil also shared that the Pre K-5 focus is based on evaluations of the current facilities and their needs, as well as upcoming mandates that would be costly for these outdated facilities. Thomas asked if there was something Beausoleil suggests for the charge as it relates to Pre K-5 or just reminding where the BOE needs to go. Beausoleil explained that the HVAC project and its requirements made it the focus, especially as there is a timeline. She continued that the BOE expects CHS to pass but believes CGS and GHR will fail the HVAC inspections. With the cost to replace the HVAC, the Town Council should look into getting the best reimbursement from the state and evaluating options. She explained that if a municipality has a school building project planned, then the HVAC testing can be delayed.

Beausoleil was thanked for the information she shared. The Steering Committee had consensus to continue this item until a future meeting,

7. Discussion: Ordinance for Fire Prevention and Protection Cost Recovery:

Fire Chief Bud Meyers and Captain Milan were in attendance to share information with the Steering Committee.

Meyers explained that Fire Departments began charging for their services, back in the 1970's, with the belief that cost recovery was paid through taxes. Courts determined that taxes paid for preparation, not recovery, and there is legislation that allows municipalities to seek cost recovery from the insurance companies. Meyers noted that there are several towns around Coventry who have an ordinance to do this. However, it has been a slow process to follow the legislation, with interest spiking in 2005 and 2021.

Meyers explained that what is happening for fire related incidents is the same thing that insurance companies do for EMS services, where the insurance companies are claiming funds from taxpayers to insure them in not paying out on ambulance fees. This way, ambulance companies and commercials were receiving the fees, but fire-based departments were not. This resulted in the taxpayers getting hit twice.

Meyers continued that with budgets getting harder and tighter, something he can do is attempt to bring in more revenue. Meyers also explained that adopting an ordinance for cost recovery would allow the Town Council to determine the things the department would or would not charge for. He stated that the fees aren't set in the ordinance and that he can continue to work with the Town Manager on things the department would bring to the Town Council.

Wheaton commented that it was his understanding that the fees for services would be assessed to the insurance companies, not the individual. This was confirmed as correct. However, Wheaton felt the language in the ordinance conflicts that intent. He suggested removing the use of the term “responsible party”. Chief Meyers explained that the department has to initiate payment and has no control over whether the insurance company shifts the bill to the individual. He explained that it is “soft billing” and if that happens to be the case, the ordinance does not require that the department go after the funds from the individual. He explained that this is the same way the EMS department operates billing. Drumm emphasized that if a citizen is liable for payment, then the insurance company is required to pay under their policy.

Wheaton also suggested adding an item to Section D of the draft ordinance, for ‘Special Events’, as the section lists all the variations that may trigger a billing response.

The Steering Committee had consensus to continue Agenda Item 7, and the rest of the agenda to a future meeting.

8. Consideration/Possible Action: Discharge of the Human Services Advisory Committee:

Continued to a future meeting.

9. Consideration/Possible Action: Discharge of the Softball Field Study Committee:

Continued to a future meeting.

10. Consideration/possible action: Expanded Veterans Residential Property Tax Exemptions (Not ready for action):

Continued to a future meeting.

11. Adjournment:

Kyer moves to adjourn at 6:55 PM, Wheaton seconds. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote at 6:55 PM.

Submitted by,

Nicole Archambault

Nicole Archambault

Steering Committee Minutes Clerk

PLEASE NOTE: These minutes are not official until approved by the Steering Committee at the next Steering Committee meeting. Please see the next Steering Committee meeting minutes for approval or changes to these minutes.