

## **Staff Meeting, January 4, 2023**

Present: John Elsesser, Jim McLoughlin, Eric Trott, JP Preisner, Bill Watkins, Tim Brennan, Amanda Backhaus, Eric Peterson, Carrie Zahner, Annemarie Sundgren, Lesley Munshower

### **Department Updates:**

Land Use/Development – Eric Trott:

- Rt. 44/Dickinson property at corner of Swamp and Rt. 44 is a target for potential development. Some design activities are underway and we will provide specifics at an appropriate time.
- We got our 6-month extension for our aquatic invasive grant for Eagleville Lake to develop an invasive species management plan.
- Coventry Lake: in 2021 we submitted some details for reimbursement, and are still waiting on the contract for 2022. We will be looking to file for treatment for Hydrilla in 2023.
- Hop River Trail Coalition continues to work together and we have a meeting tomorrow afternoon that Mindy will be attending where they will be adopting bylaws, finalizing 501C3, adopting town representatives, and moving forward with the DEEP grant to do mile market signage on the trail.
- CT's Countryside: we continue to work with John our intern and continue to work as a team to facilitate a number of different projects including an Earth Day event on April 23, our 4-Town Summit on January 30 at the Lodge, and a budget memo that is going out to Town Administrators. We've had discussions with Nichols College and Tim Liptrap, who has offered to help us develop a website and we will be working with one of his classes to help facilitate that. We are also working to develop marketing brochures and have an MPA meeting with the head of the department regarding our work with Josh.
- Future restaurants in the Village: we are meeting with owners of Burger Fry Pie which is at the location where Daisy's used to be next to the Post Office Plaza. This has been a long time coming and hopefully we will get some movement on that issue and get some permitting moving. Also the owners of Woke have also submitted permitting and the Building Office is working with them for any necessary fine-tuning.
- The Farmers' Market is having a meeting tomorrow to begin planning for 2023. We have our two co-market managers onboard and Aaron at CT Landmarks has forwarded a proposed lease agreement. We are losing Ray Oliver of the Fire Police who has been a great help with traffic control. We will need to sit down with the fire department to discuss future plans. If we have to move toward a private contractor we will need to make those arrangements as early as possible.
- Staffing: Heidi is out for another week, maybe two, so Jace, our number two ZEO candidate, is filling in to help cover the office. He is doing a great job for us. We are going to be saying goodbye to our zoning consultant Robin from Tighe Consulting. She will be doing a little bit of extra work for us on zoning enforcement and some fine-tuning of Viewpoint upgrades before she wraps up her work.
- If you know anyone who does minutes, our recording secretary has resigned. Jace has been helping with that too, but we need permanent staff. This affects PZC and ZBA meetings.

Tax Office – Carrie Zahner:

- Ida and Carrie attended a Tolland/Windham County Association meeting on December 7.

- We sent out 55 sewer assessment back tax statements.
- We have also been focusing on the top delinquents. We mentioned last time that we are looking to do another tax sale. We also sent out 25 statements to the top 26-50 who likely would not be in this tax sale but could be in the next one if they don't get current. We've had a lot of response from that.
- Supplemental bills went out last week. There were 1,896 of them and we've been getting a lot of response and phone calls.
- Eleven real estate pro rate bills were sent. We think JP has a few more for us and that will finish up the real estate pro rates.

#### Assessor's Office – JP Preisner:

- We are getting a lot of transferred calls from the tax collector's office with questions about the supplemental tax bills, as expected.
- We are working hard on finalizing the October 1, 2022 Grand List, which is due at the end of the month.
- We are making some time to work on the budget.
- In finalizing the Grand List, JP is also compiling any GIS-related changes that need to be made. A spreadsheet will be going to New England GEO Systems. We will be planning a kick-off meeting for next month to come up with some dates to allow us all to work together on what we are all aware of in terms of changes that need to be made as a priority in the ongoing project. Todd has made some ongoing changes too, and we want to make sure we are able to capture those.

#### Parks and Recreation – Lesley Munshower:

- Thanks to DPW, Monica and crew, for painting the interior of Mill Brook over the winter break. It definitely gets beat up with the moving of furniture, tables and chairs. It's looking fresh for our rental groups.
- The front two buildings at Creaser Park are scheduled to be demoed by Earth Dynamics, who was the lowest bidder. Those will be cleaned out in the next couple of weeks. There are a few things being stored there for Community Gardens and Conservation. Lesley will be working with Mindy and Community Garden folks to get that cleaned out.
- We received a bid for the Senior Center deck ramp repair, and the small art shed in Patriots Park. We thought the bids came in pretty high and will be looking for some other bids. Lesley will meet with John to discuss the art shed/potential sailing building.
- Basketball is ongoing.
- We are also working on the budget. We noticed in the last week that we have a pickup in rentals, and we are getting an influx of calls for facility tours for events in February and March.
- We've had some turnover in our Before and After School program with high school kids starting winter sports and a change in semester schedules for our college staff, so we are looking to hire two or three staff. We have posted that on social media and emailed it out. If you know folks who live in the area, high school and college age students, we are looking for morning care, 7-8:30, and after-care, 3-6.
- We handed out our remainder of COVID test kits to our families just after Thanksgiving, anticipating an influx of cases over the holidays. We have a few in reserve for our staff. They will be expiring soon so we will be looking to give those out. Those kits are very helpful with the

increase in flu and RSV cases as well as COVID. The people at the Senior Center might appreciate them as well. If your department has some that you don't need, you can send them our way and we will make sure they get out to the community.

Human Services – Annemarie Sundgren:

- A heartfelt thank you to everyone who assisted us in bringing joy to our community this Christmas season. We really had great success with our Orchard Hill meal delivery, and the Adopt-a-Family program.
- We are shifting to energy. We have seen an influx of calls. We're taking energy calls on a daily basis right now. We do Access Energy intake appointments here. We refer everyone to Access in order for them to be eligible for any additional monies that might be available to them, such as our Emergency Fund, which is Clergy Fuel. We just received a very large \$15,000 donation from Rockville Bank Foundation to our Clergy Fuel Fund. That will help tremendously since getting into our reserves there. Keep in mind that a minimum fill these days with the cost of oil can be anywhere between \$500-\$800, so that is what we do with those funds. They have to have had a benefit from Access in order to access the energy through the town. If they don't qualify for Access it really has to be an emergent situation with either elderly or infants in the home before the Town will accept that application for assistance. The reason is there are other places for energy assistance. Operation Fuel is something we have not partnered with, but they do take applications online. Recently you may have heard that the Governor authorized a crisis award of an additional \$430 as an emergency payment for folks. The energy program this year through Access reduced its benefits even though it expanded its guidelines for accessibility. A lot of people who typically relied on Access and got three fills last year, got one fill this year. They are asking questions like how do I fill my tank for a second time. The answer is, you budget your money, which is what we've been telling folks. We've been doing a lot of in-person intakes with people who we haven't seen in the past due to this energy and oil crisis. We are hoping that large donation from Rockville Bank helps to offset us for this season.
- We are focusing our attention to hiring a new assistant at the Senior Center. We have two interviews today.
- Our outreach worker from Community Renewal Team, Stephen Lambert, dropped into our office and we are planning to set up a time for him to come to the Senior Center to talk about support services for veteran families. We will publish the information once we have a date.
- We had fantastic responses to our Veterans Coffee Hour, so we plan to continue that.
- The Senior Center will be receiving its key fob system this month, using the same vendor as Town Hall, so that should all be tied in together. We will let you know once that project has a completion date.
- We will be setting up our 2023 Red Cross blood drives. The first one will be in February and we will publish that date once it is confirmed.
- We have had a real uptick in mental health calls. We have set up a meeting with Ashley Foster through United Services to make sure we have our bases covered if needed for referrals, and tying us in with the Police Department on an MOU that they already have in existence.
- We also have a second meeting with our opioid settlement funding with multiple towns, about 10-12 participants, hoping for to discuss strategies for how to use that money and possible collaboration.

Finance Office – Amanda Backhaus/Stephanie Beauchamp:

- FY 22 Audit was successfully filed before the 12/31 deadline. I have submitted for the Certificate of Achievement on Financial Reporting again from the GFOA.
- Operating Budgets are due January 13.
- Once Operating Budgets are completed, there will be second phase to the budget prep this year which is having each department update their online budget book pages. I am happy to meet with individual departments to work with ClearGov if needed.
- ER annual HSA contributions were made this week.
- Reminder allowable HSA & 457 contributions for 2023 have increased. If interested in increasing your contributions, please stop by the finance office.

Police Department – Eric Peterson:

- Briefly discussed the calls for service were a little high during the holidays.
- New Officer, Corey Wesoloskie, will be starting with our PD on Feb. 1. He comes with 24 years of experience as a Manchester Police Officer.
- Will be recruiting for another officer with the anticipation of Kevin Vail retiring in the late spring. Late Feb./early March we will be conducting an entry level police officer search. I spoke to the department heads and requested they put the word out if anyone is looking to become a police officer to reach out to me. Talked a bit about the struggles statewide to recruit new officers. We will do a search and see what we get for applicants.

Fire/EMS Department – Jim McLoughlin:

- Possible opportunity to relocate the generator from Sta318 to CGS to power the IT needs of the FD when we lose power to the station.
- The new Engine Tanker arrived yesterday from Wisconsin and is in Rocky Hill for a post transport inspection.
- Ray Oliver, Fire Police Captain is moving to FL. The Chief officers met last night to discuss his replacement.
- Our department training coordinator has stepped down as of 1.1.23. The department is posting the position and has come up with a 2 month schedule for the interim.
- Planning fire training at the buildings in Creaser Park scheduled for demolition.
- Working on the Ops Budget submission.
- The dept responded to 1502 calls in 2022, an increase of 162 calls over last year's total with less volunteer personnel.
- December recap: Christmas in the Village, Wreaths across America, stuff a truck, fill the boot, light parade, PJ Day and awards presentation at the council meeting.
- Letter sent to the property owner at 122 Cooper Ln offering to make access upgrades to the Fire Pond.
- Researching a school based curriculum program to offer high school students interested in Fire-EMS as a career or volunteer opportunity.

Public Works – Bill Watkins:

- Storm cleanup is underway.
- We are doing roadside mower training

- South Street gravel pit cleanup continues.
- We will be doing a large-scale tree removal project over five days on Wrights Mill and Nathan Hale Drive.
- The Lead Mechanic vacancy has been filled. We are posting for Mechanic II.
- Our new custodian is on board.
- We will be starting a new initiative for recycling at Town Hall – with receptacles for each office. Details to come.
- We are doing a walkthrough on Daly Road today.
- Bill is working on a State grant horizontal curve sign project.
- The fire department will be taking the opportunity to do training on the two buildings at Creaser Park prior to demolition.