

UNOFFICIAL MINUTES
Town Council Steering Committee Meeting
January 27, 2026 7:00 PM
Town Hall Conference Room B

1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Jonathan Hand at 7:01 PM.

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

Absent: None

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

2. Acceptance of Minutes, December 22, 2025:

Kyer moved to accept the minutes of December 22, 2025, Wheaton seconds.

Discussion/Changes:

- Pg. 4, Under 4.M., change “Rick DePaola” to “Rick Nowsch”.

Vote: Unanimously in favor.

3. Reports:

3.A. Chairperson:

Hand reported that he reached out to a few people for statement of interest forms, as discussed at the last Steering meeting. A few are on tonight’s agenda for appointment, so he is happy to see that the outreach was successful.

3.B. Committee Members:

None

3.C. Monthly Board and Commission Reports:

No discussion on the Vacancy or Expiration Reports.

Board Member Report:

Wheaton asked for more information regarding the Flood and Erosion Control Board, as it lists that all current Town Councilors serve on that board. Hand noted that it may be beneficial with the stormwater management things coming up but commented that it is something that comes with being a Town Councilor. Drumm added that it will be reviewed with the other boards and commissions. Thomas explained that it is required by CT General State Statutes to have, however the board rarely meets due to lack of business. Thomas also shared that information about it can be found in CT G.S. Section 25-84 through 25-94.

Wheaton also asked about the Coventry Softball Field Study Committee, as he thought they would have been disbanded once the fields were complete. Thomas commented that the town was waiting until all pieces of the STEAP grant and Bond Commission work were completed before they were discharged. Drumm gave a status update that everything is just about finished with the fields, outside of some plantings. He believes they are ready to be discharged but will verify this with other town staff.

- **Bennett**
- **Cooper**

There was confusion surrounding this Board, as there are a total of 9 seats, but only 2 are reflected as filled on the Board Member Report. The vacant positions are not listed on the vacancy report. Hand read some information from the town website about this Board. Kyer requested this be tabled until there is more information available.

The Steering Committee had consensus to continue agenda item 5.B.

5.C. Parks & Recreation Commission Alt. to Full: Considine:

The Steering Committee had an in-depth discussion on moving Considine’s Statement of Interest in with the other pool of applicants under the Parks and Recreation Commission appointments under agenda item 5.D.

As there were only 2 Parks and Rec Commission vacancies, there were disagreements on the process for all the candidates looking to serve as full members of the Parks and Rec Commission. Hand felt that appointing alternate members to full members when seats become available has been past practice if they are interested in full membership, as they have put in the time to serve. Any candidates not appointed to the Parks and Rec Commission can be notified of the open alternate position. Thomas disagreed with this approach.

Kyer shared an interest in tabling agenda items 5.C. and 5.D for the following reasons:

1. It would allow Parks and Rec Director, and staff to the Parks and Rec Commission, Lesly Munshower or Hand to contact the candidates in the list below to see if there is any interest in serving in an alternate capacity or as full member only.
2. It allows for the agenda items to be revised to include Considine in the list of candidates and clarify candidate interest in full or alternate membership.
3. It allows for Considine to rephrase wording on her Statement of Interest form, as Wheaton had concerns with her use of “adult entertainment”.

He reminded that tabling this for a month will not impact their business as they still have enough members to make a quorum, nor will it affect those who are already serving, as their service continues.

The Steering Committee had consensus to continue Agenda Items 5.C. and 5.D.

5.D. Parks & Recreation Commission:

- **Drumm**
- **Garcia**
- **Orcutt**
- **Rodgers (currently serving)**
- **Hecht**

The Steering Committee had consensus to continue Agenda Items 5.C. and 5.D.

5.E. Pension & Retirement Committee:

- **Elsesser**
- **Murphy**

Hand commented that both Elsesser and Murphy are members currently serving on the Pension and Retirement Committee.

- Roadside maintenance
- Operation of a variety of diagnostic instruments and tools

Wheaton shared concerns that the position may be difficult to fill with all the requirements requested in the description. He suggested that if the position becomes difficult to fill, then it may benefit from removing the CDL requirement, or strike the mechanic portion in order to get a CDL.

Drumm explained that everyone working for the DPW currently has a CDL. This way, the employees are able to perform dual duties. Drumm continued that the main requirement would be the mechanic, and they could work out the CDL. However, they recently posted a position and received applications, which 9 of them had their CDL.

Wheaton also shared concerns with the last bullet under the ‘Work Environment’ Section, as it refers to exposure to toxins and poisonous substances. Taylor explained he typically hasn’t seen this on job description as he hasn’t updated many from public works. He explained that he is relying on Bill Watkins’s expertise, and this language was in the job description previously.

Wheaton suggested altering the wording to say, “substances used in the maintenance of heavy equipment...”. Han added that the previous job description stated that exposure was “possible” not “occasionally” as the current description states.

Kyer suggested changing “The employee is occasionally exposed to extreme cold or heat, greases and oils, toxins, poisonous substances, dust, chemicals, electricity, electro-magnetic radiation, and other hazardous materials” to “Exposure to extreme cold or heat, greases and oils, toxins, poisonous substances, dust, chemicals, electricity, electro-magnetic radiation, and other hazardous materials is possible.”. The other Steering members agreed to that change.

Drumm noted that if this is voted to go to the Council, he can double check with the union in the meantime to make sure they don’t have a problem with this minor tweak.

Motion: I move that we recommend to the full Council to adopt the revised job description for Mechanic 1.

By: Kyer

Second: Wheaton

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimously in favor.

7. Consideration/possible action: Excess Tax Payments Ordinance:

Drumm explained that the Tax Collector and Finance Director brought this forward to let the Council know that an ordinance is required to do certain things, some of which the town is already doing. If Coventry would like to continue operating under these policies/practices, ordinances will need to be put into place. Taylor has put together drafts for Steering to review.

It was proposed that an ordinance be adopted to allow for the retention of excess payments and waiving of amounts due below \$5 is recommended. If adopted, it will bring the Town into compliance with state statute while avoiding high costs associated with reimbursements sometimes as low as several cents.

The Tax Collector, Kelly Lawer, attended via Zoom to discuss this in more detail with the Steering Committee. She explained that both these practices have been in place for over a decade. She explained that it is only fair

He continued that if the Town Council wishes to move forward, his next steps are to reach out to these communities for a better understanding, see how it has impacted these communities.

Kyer asked for more information about how many towns are doing this. He explained that it would make a big difference to the community on whether it's 25% or 3% of CT that has this type of ordinance. Kyer also asked for information about avoiding the procession of charging for emergency help. Regardless, he feels it worthwhile to have town staff pursue further information.

Hand agreed that he would like more information and felt the Steering Committee would benefit from having conversations with Fire Chief Bud Meyers at their next meeting as he may have more information to share from his position as President of the Fire Chiefs Association.

Wheaton shared that he has conflicted thoughts about the ordinance. He agrees that if someone gets a service, they should pay for it. However, the fire service is a public good that people have already paid for in part, and this is asking them to pay twice. Additionally, he commented that it feels like kicking someone when they are down. However, he also agreed that the matter is worth looking into more. Wheaton pointed out that there are some conflicting areas in the documents, where 1 says the insurer and the other says responsible party. He continued that if the plan is to bill insurance companies, then none of the documents should state "responsible party". Taylor agreed that this was an area of concern.

Hand reminded that this is a practice that is already involved with EMS calls, as the EMS department bills an individual's medical insurance. This would extend that practice for incidents involving a fire department response. He added that during a fire tragedy, insurance companies are receiving a lot of bills to cover the costs associated with the fire. He stated that our Fire Department should be seeking funds from the insurance companies for their response to help offset department costs and operations. He agrees with looking into this further.

Kyer added in Meyers's letter, he explained that this would cover collecting fees for a response from the Fire Department to incidents that happen in town involving non-residents who are not paying taxes in Coventry.

Wheaton shared concerns about where the line is drawn philosophically, and does this mean the Police Department will start charging for responses too. It was clarified that this only involves the Fire and EMS Department and will only charge for things specifically covered by insurance policies.

It was also clarified that the documents reviewed state that the bills will only go to the insurance company, not the property owner.

Drumm explained that the next steps are for town staff to do more research on ordinances for this that are currently in place statewide and to have Fire Chief Meyers come to a future meeting to answer questions raised.

The Steering Committee had consensus to continue this agenda item.

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

It was discussed that there are many steps in this process before Steering can recommend the full Council to establish a School Building Committee.

Kyer noted that he would like to get more information, like the background of past School Building Committees, prior to even reviewing a draft charge.

Thomas commented that since the scope of this Committee would be a large facilities study, they may want more than 5 members like the current School Building Committee has. She also felt that the work that this Committee does should fit within the Town Council goals of looking at town facilities across the board. Thomas discussed the 'wants' for the makeup of the Committee and asked that representation for certain skills and knowledge be considered (i.e. contractors, Finance Director), as this is important to the community. She requested that staff come back with a recommendation of what the Committee should look like, based on past knowledge and challenges. Kyer agreed and commented that this is the type of information he is looking for. Kyer added that all they have right now is a request for the BOE that 3 BOE members serve in the Committee, but that is only a suggestion at this point. Drumm shared that 3 BOE members on a 5-member board is a bit excessive, but if the Committee was larger than it would be less so.

Wheaton discussed who he feels should have representation on this Committee and asked for input from other Councilors. The following Committee was suggested:

- Board of Ed
- Town Council
- Someone who understands state grants and reimbursement processes
- People (1-2) who understand buildings/facilities, and construction
- Someone who understands contracting (for large projects that include design, engineering, electrical, etc.)
Knowledge of school buildings is a plus
- Educator(s)
- Someone with utilities knowledge (sewer, water, power, etc.)

Thomas suggested that the scope be considered, and do they want the committee to just do a study, which would have a certain lifespan. If this committee only completed the study, then a Building Committee would need to be formed after. She explained that Steering will need to consider filling 2 committees or moving forward with establishing 1 that is a facility study and building committee. Thomas stated that a benefit of having it be a Study and Building Committee, is that they keep the qualified and experienced individuals on the committee, instead of risking losing them if they had to fill 2 committees. However, it was stressed that the individuals are made aware of the commitment, as this committee will have a life (of the committee) term, which could span years due to the long-term nature of the study and potential projects.

Wheaton wanted to take a step back and ask, what the outcome of the committee would be, and what the Council is trying to do.

Kyer shared that some of the attachments to the last Council agenda highlighted this. Some of those highlights include:

- Cost Savings
 - Large factor
 - HVAC mandates are coming, requiring HVAC solutions for the other schools (CGS, GHR, and CNH)
 - CGS has significant issues, and it is undecided whether the school/BOE should incur large HVAC costs on a building in such condition
 - Efficiencies in administration costs and transportation costs not having to move between the schools.
- Potential to move Pre-K from CHS/CNH Complex to a Pre-K-5 campus

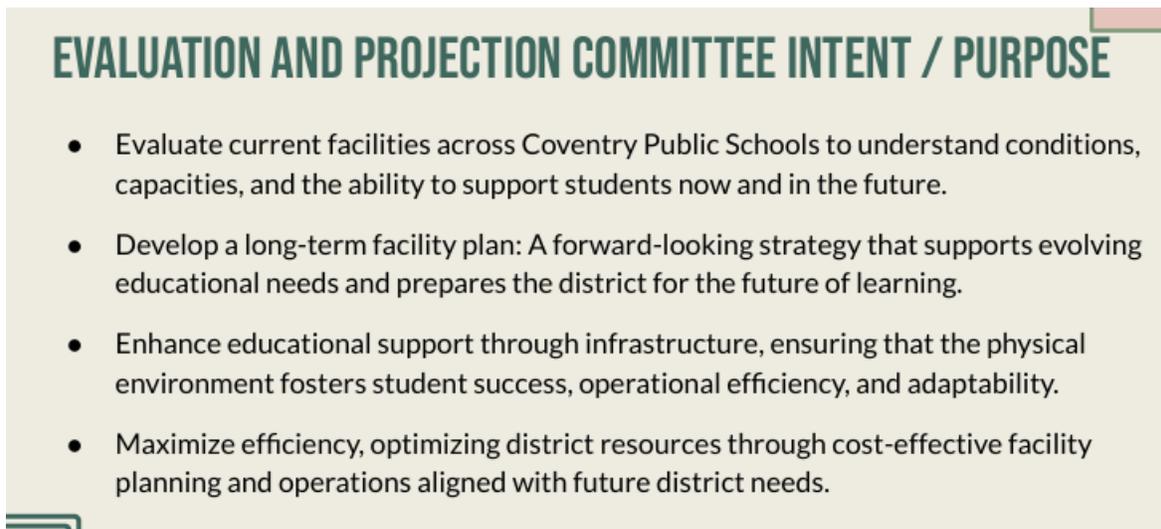
Thomas stated that there were discussions years ago about turning the GHR school into a Pre-K-5 campus, but that was just an idea. Kyer stated that the new committee can consider this and all other options available.

Wheaton stated that Dr. Petrone’s memo seemed narrow by stating that they want to improve educational space, but it seems the goal is to improve educational outcomes and save money while doing it. Thomas stated that it will be clarified in the charge, but what should be included is examination of all the pieces of the puzzle.

Hand shared the following excerpt from Dr. Petrone’s letter, which he feels establishes the goal that Wheaton was questioning:

“Establishment of a school building committee is a critical step in evaluating current and future facility needs. Engaging in long-range planning and ensuring that any proposed solutions are thoughtful, fiscally responsible, and aligned with the educational needs of our students and communities.”

Thomas also shared the bullet points from the 3rd slide of the slide deck attached to the Town Council agenda that explained the intent and purpose of the committee.



EVALUATION AND PROJECTION COMMITTEE INTENT / PURPOSE

- Evaluate current facilities across Coventry Public Schools to understand conditions, capacities, and the ability to support students now and in the future.
- Develop a long-term facility plan: A forward-looking strategy that supports evolving educational needs and prepares the district for the future of learning.
- Enhance educational support through infrastructure, ensuring that the physical environment fosters student success, operational efficiency, and adaptability.
- Maximize efficiency, optimizing district resources through cost-effective facility planning and operations aligned with future district needs.

Thomas also shared that there is a slide that explains the 9 goals for learning spaces that would be considered by the committee as well.

Kyer shared an example that CGS was developed in 1955, and back then it probably made sense for a classroom to have 4 electrical outlets. However, with technology utilized in the classroom today, 4 outlets are not nearly enough. He also shared that when he started teaching 30 years ago, computer labs were just being put into schools. Now, they aren’t necessary as each student has their own device.

The Steering Committee had consensus to direct town staff to do research and provide a framework for the Steering Committee to build from.

10. Consideration/Possible Action: Expanded Veterans Residential Property Tax Exemptions (Not Ready For Action):

With this item not ready for action, there was no further discussion.

11. Adjournment:

Kyer moved to adjourn at 9:39 PM Wheaton seconds. The meeting adjourned at 9:39 PM by unanimous vote.

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.

Statement of Interest Forms (added after agenda was posted):

To be reappointed new term to expire 12/31/2026

Statement of Interest In Serving on a Town Board or Commission

STATEMENT OF INTEREST IN SERVING ON A TOWN BOARD OR COMMISSION

Date 1/23/2026

Use this form to apply online to serve on a Town Board or Commission. This helps the Town Council get to know those being considered for appointment. Candidates are reviewed at the monthly meeting of the Town Council Steering Committee and recommended for appointment at the following full Town Council meeting.

First Name	Eric
Last Name	Thomas
Address	255 Geraldine Drive
City	Coventry
State	CT
Zip	06238
Telephone (Day):	8609307515
Telephone (Evening):	Field not completed.
Email address:	waterthames59@gmail.com
Board or Commission name:	CRCOG Regional Planning Commission
Current member?	Yes
Where did you hear of this opening?	Currently serving
If other please specify	Field not completed.
How long have you lived in Coventry?	37 years
Are you a registered voter in Coventry? (Must be a resident elector to serve)	Yes
What is your party affiliation?	Democratic
Other party (please specify)	Field not completed.

Briefly explain why you are interested in serving on this Board or Commission and what you would like to accomplish.

I have enjoyed participating in these regional planning meetings and workshops, representing Coventry's planning interests. I would like to continue this role to support Coventry land use planning in a regional context, and provide regular updates to Land Use staff and the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Please outline other education or experience which would be helpful to the Board or Commission to which you are applying:

Field not completed.

Conflict of Interest Statement:

In order to promote impartiality of decisions and fairness in the treatment of those having business with the Town of Coventry through its Boards and Commissions, any conflict of interest must be eliminated. Members of any Board or Commission having direct or indirect financial or personal interest in any contract, transaction or decision of that Board or Commission, or any officer or agent of the Town of Coventry, shall disclose that interest to said Board or Commission and disqualify themselves from any awarding, assignment or discussion of any contract, transaction, or decision regarding their personal interests.

Electronic verification of accuracy and adherence to Conflict of Interest Statement:

Verified

Email not displaying correctly? [View it in your browser.](#)

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First Name	Simon
Last Name	Hecht
Address	59 Frederick Dr
City	Coventry
State	CT
Zip	06238
Telephone (Day):	2039152714
Telephone (Evening):	2039152714
Email address:	simonhecht77@gmail.com
Board or Commission name:	Parks and Recreation
Current member?	No
Where did you hear of this opening?	Recruited by Committee Member or Town Council
If other please specify	Field not completed.
How long have you lived in Coventry?	19 years
Are you a registered voter in Coventry? (Must be a resident elector to serve)	Yes
What is your party affiliation?	Democratic
Other party (please specify)	Field not completed.

Briefly explain why you are interested in serving on this Board or Commission and what you would like to accomplish.

I have been a resident of Coventry for the last 19 years, moving here with my wife after growing up and living in other parts of Connecticut. As she and I built our family, it was the town's parks that helped us gain a sense of community. Our kids used playgrounds in the parks or elementary schools, participated in youth soccer at Laidlaw Park, and developed their baseball skills at Miller Richardson Park. It was in these places that our kids and family have made life long friends, and seen how the residents in a small town come together.

When my kids were younger, I was part of the Coventry Soccer board, and was part of the Laidlaw park expansion and improvements. As they became older and more involved in baseball, I joined the Little League board and helped guide the Miller Richardson Park expansion.

I have seen first hand the impact that these improvements have had on the children and families in this town, and received many compliments from coaches visiting from other towns. As I have stepped down from directly supporting the Little League, I would like to continue to be involved in shaping the future of our town's parks, and continue to build a sense of pride for our residents.

Please outline other education or experience which would be helpful to the Board or Commission to which you are applying:

I have spent the last 15 years volunteering with the Coventry Little League organization, the last 5 of which as a board member. During this time I was involved in Miller Richardson Park's renovation design and the merger of Coventry's softball and baseball organizations into one combined little league.

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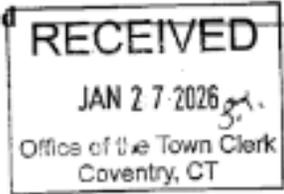
Electronic verification of accuracy and adherence to Conflict of Interest Statement

Verified

Email not displaying correctly? [View it in your browser.](#)

wishes to be reappointed new term to expire 1/1/2031

Appointed



STATEMENT OF INTEREST
IN SERVING ON A
TOWN BOARD OR COMMISSION

Use this form to apply online to serve on a Town Board of Commission. This helps the Town Council get to know those being considered for an appointment. Candidates are reviewed at the monthly meeting of the Town Council Steering Committee and recommended for appointment at the following full Town Council meeting.

Date: _____

Barbara Barry
PO Box 307
Coventry, CT 06238

Telephone (Day) 860-803-7163 (Evening) same

Email address: 307barbara@charter.net

Economic Development Commission
New Term to Expire on February 1, 2031

Current member?
 Yes No

Where did you hear of this opening?
 Currently Serving Channel 191 Website Word of mouth Town e-blast
 Recruited by Committee Member or Town Council Other: (specify) _____

How long have you lived in Coventry? 50 years

Are you a registered voter of Coventry? (Must be a resident elector to serve) Yes No

What is your political party affiliation? Democratic Republican Unaffiliated Other (specify): _____

Briefly explain why you are interested in serving on this Board or Commission and what you would like to accomplish.

Please outline other relevant education or experience which would be helpful to the Board or Commission you are requesting:

Conflict of Interest Statement

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By signing below, I certify that the information I have provided on this form is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge, that I desire appointment to a Board or Commission in Coventry, that I am willing to adhere to the conflict of interest policy stated above, and that I will abide by Council policies for volunteers as detailed in the Volunteer Handbook.

Date: 1/25/2026 Signature: Barbara Barry

TOWN COMMITTEE ENDORSEMENT: (optional)

The _____
recommends _____
for (re)appointment to _____
Official _____ Office _____

Rev. 1/28/2025