

UNOFFICIAL MINUTES
Town Council Finance Committee Meeting
January 12, 2026 7:00pm
Town Hall Conference Room B

1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Robyn Gallagher at 7:00 PM.

Members Present: Robyn Gallagher-Chairwoman, Julie Blanchard, Peter Larson, and Lisa Thomas - Council Chairwoman & Ex-Officio Member.

Absent: None

Also Present: James Drumm-Town Manager, and Cherie Trahan-Interim Finance Director.

2. Acceptance of Minutes: December 8, 2025:

Motion: I move to accept the December 8, 2025, Finance Committee Minutes.

By: Blanchard

Second: Larson

Discussion/Edits:

- Pg. 1, Under BOR Fiscal Committee Members, change “Emma Easton” to “Emma Eaton”.
- Pg. 2, 3rd paragraph, 4th line, change “She” to “she”.
- Pg. 2, last paragraph, 1st sentence, change “Beausoleil asked if the dates on timeline allow the BOE to vote on the insurance number would be based on the selection.” to “Beausoleil asked if the dates for the budget timeline would allow the BOE to vote on the insurance number after selection of a provider.”
- Pg. 4, 1st paragraph, 1st sentence, change “Petron” to “Petrone”.
- Pg. 4, Under 1.G., 1st paragraph, add “potential” before “misstatement”.
- Pg. 7, Under “The Finance Office”, last bullet, 2nd to last sentence, add “during” before “staff changes”.
- Pg. 9, Under “Ambulance”, 1st sentence, change “cabin chassis” to “cab and chassis”.
- Pg. 9, 8th paragraph, starting with “Drumm clarified...”, remove “the” after “survive”.

Voting: Unanimously in favor

3.Reports:

3.A. Committee Chair - Robyn Gallagher:

Gallagher wished everyone a Happy New Year and noted that work will begin on the town budget soon. She expressed that if citizens have certain issues that are important to them that it is important to get involved early on, rather than after the budget fails a first time.

She shared that Dr. Petrone gave his presentation on his proposed budget to the Board of Ed last Thursday. The annual meeting to see presentations from Dr. Petrone and Town Manager Jim Drumm on the proposed budgets is scheduled for March 5th, 2026, at 7 PM in the CHS Lecture Hall.

3.B. Committee Members: None

3.C. Monthly Financial Reports:

3.C.1. Overview: Cherie Trahan, Finance Director:

Trahan explained that she was unable to get the reports into the new formats that were requested, as she needs to look into more historical data. Since the new format was not able to be used, there is more detail in the monthly reports.

Trahan highlighted the following:

- General Fund:
 - There were issues with the Quality Data collections recording revenues in the general ledger. This has been fixed, but there is still a period of time (July and August) that the department has not caught up with and needs to record in the ledger.
 - Total property tax, interest, and lien fees collected from July-December 31st are \$25,075,183 (65.7%). Trahan believes this is about where collections should be.
 - Trahan is still working on getting the historical data to see how this compares to previous years.
 - Investment income is still unrecorded due to the amount of catch up that needs to be done, along with staff learning curves.
 - Expenditures are about 48% of the budgeted appropriation. Transfers (to Capital, EMS, etc.) still need to be booked. Trahan believes this is on target.
- Recreation:
 - Collections-\$368,000
 - Expenditures-\$281,0000
 - Fund balance increased from \$394,698 to \$481,438.
- COVRRRA:
 - Revenues (as recorded with the Collector of Revenue) are \$1,565,323.
 - Expenditures (excluding encumbrances) totaled \$702,751.
 - Fund balance increased from \$27,445 to \$890,017.
 - It was explained that the majority of revenues are received at the beginning of the year, and carry covering the expenses for the entire year.
- Sewer:
 - Collections-\$109,000
 - Expenditures-\$202,000
 - Fund balance has decreased, from \$690,846 to \$597,614, likely due to a timing issue with revenue collections.
 - Thomas questioned when collections from residents already hooked up are going to stop for the sewer assessment. Trahan was unsure but will look into it. Drumm commented that it has been phasing out over time.
- EMS:
 - Revenues-\$298,000. This does not account for the Town Council General Fund transfer.
 - Expenditures-\$407,000

- Fund balance decreased from \$200,000 to \$90,000. This is due to the timing of the ambulance recovery revenues.
- Gallagher discussed the expected revenues and expenditures and felt that the EMS fund is on track with where it should be.
- Gallagher also thanked Fire Chief Bud Meyers for the tremendous work he does keeping the fund on track.

Trahan discussed the different reports, revenue summaries, and expenditure summaries are attached to the agenda in different formats. She highlighted that there are expenditure summaries, 1 by department, 1 by object, and a monthly expenditure summary that lists the line items for each department. She noted that the monthly expenditure summary is a similar format to what is seen during budget.

Questions and Comments:

Blanchard questioned line item 1502-Probate Court which was over budget by \$2,000. She was curious if this was miscalculated. Drumm responded that the budgeted amount (\$9,900) was correct and what was expected. However, there is a state statute that states if a probate court makes improvements to their offices or needs equipment to keep records, they can assess the individual towns. Coventry had notified the probate court that there were historical records in the Town Hall vault. These records were transferred to the probate court who needed to purchase additional fire safe cabinets to store records from Coventry and other towns. The probate court did an assessment to cover the cabinet purchase, which required a \$2,000 assessment from Coventry.

Gallagher questioned the line item for office furniture in town offices, which was over by \$2,500. Trahan explained she was going to have to look into the details for this.

Gallagher also asked if workman's' comp is being recorded differently than it has been in the past, as there is 1 line item that is -\$167,000. Trahan agreed this is incorrect, as the workman's comp should have been broken out.

Blanchard questioned what the claims and losses were as the town has encumbered \$93,000. Trahan explained that this was for the police vehicles and was coded incorrectly as it should have been charged to the capital projects.

Trahan commented that she will make the adjustments mentioned to correct the reports.

Blanchard questioned the tax collection report that was included. Trahan explained that this was prepared by the Tax Collector who generates the reports on a quarterly basis. Included are taxes collected from July through September, and October through December. Blanchard noted that in the 1st quarter there were no supplemental motor vehicles listed, but in the 2nd quarter \$2,500 is listed. It was discussed that this could have been an individual who came in and paid their supplemental motor vehicle taxes early. Blanchard asked if the Finance Committee will get a similar report at the end of March for the 3rd quarter and expect to see a larger amount listed for supplemental motor vehicles, Trahan confirmed.

Larson questioned the \$20,000 expense for OSHA requirements. Drumm explained that OSHA inspected all town departments and issued 18 citations. Improvements were required, and the \$20,000 expense went to making those improvements. Coventry was also fined as well for the citations.

Thomas noted that Fire Chief Bud Meyers typically does a proactive survey of the department to take care of items before the formal inspection. Drumm noted that Coventry knew they were inspecting other municipalities in the area, so he tried to address things ahead of time. However, it had been about 7 years since OSHA's last inspection. He added that the inspections resulted in additional required staff training on certain things.

3.D. Capital non-recurring expenditures account status:

Gallagher shared that this came up during past Town Council meetings, where it was thought that there could be a potentially large balance in CNREF.

Trahan did some research to get an accurate balance. This required her to review spreadsheets with detailed appropriations from the past couple of years but were never included in the financial management system. She believes she has caught everything. There was approximately \$240,000 that had been appropriated that was unable to be viewed in the ledger. It included appropriations from approved projects including:

- South Street LOTCIP Project
- Senior Affordable Housing Study
- Miller Richardson Improvements
- '25-'26 General Fund Transfer
- Swamp Rd. and South St. Right of Way Acquisitions

Trahan will get a detailed list of all items appropriated from CNREF to the Finance Committee. The current balance in CNREF is \$69,949. Trahan also informed the 1% reserve fund has \$432,463.

3.E. Board of Education Reports - November 2025:

Trahan noted that she plans to send updated financial reports to the BOE soon in order to reconcile accounts.

Blanchard questioned the notice about additional camera needs in the schools and was curious if the BOE had received a grant. Drumm explained that the BOE has applied for a grant for the cameras but has yet to hear the outcome. However, the request looks like it is from 2023. Drumm explained he is unaware if it is the same request from 2023 included in the BOE report, or if there are new additional surveillance needs for 2025 as well.

The Finance Committee discussed that the BOE is also looking to get window films and will likely include this request in a grant. However, Drumm explained he received a letter from Superintendent Petrone asking that the film be included in a Capital Security Bonding Budget. Drumm explained that he does not plan on doing this as the film was thought to be funded through grants or other BOE funding sources.

Gallagher stated that security film for the windows is expensive to be included in the CIP. It was suggested to wait and see what the outcome of grant funding applications are, and which items can be covered if funds are awarded.

3.F. Debt service schedule:

Gallagher reminded that this came up during Town Council meetings as Councilor Wheaton requested this information.

Trahan explained that the most recent information she has regarding the debt service schedule comes from the offering statement from the bond anticipation notes. She noted that the first schedule is a combined schedule of long-term debt for both the general fund and the sewer fund.

At the end of 2025, the existing debt amount for the year will be \$18,599,040. This does not include interest costs or total debt service. She reminded that this amount does not include the CHS HVAC debt, as only bond anticipation notes were issued at this time. The HVAC debt will be included in the debt service amount next year.

Drumm reminded that if the bond referendum is passed by voters, the items approved (except the firetruck) will go to bond this summer along with the HVAC bonds. The firetruck would not be bonded until it is received in approximately 3 years.

Gallagher questioned the \$800,000 between additional debt and the budgeted amount, as that seemed high. Drumm and Trahan reviewed the debt service schedule. Trahan was unable to figure out the difference but will be looking into it more.

Blanchard suggested adding a color-coded chart for debt service to be included in the budget in brief as a clear way for both the Town Council and town citizens to visualize and understand the current debt service as itemized projects and when items are planned to drop off. Trahan noted that the report she attached to the agenda is not a visual chart but does include the maturity date of the items.

Larson questioned how bond rates are determined and if they are variable or fixed. Trahan explained that the bonds go out to bid for banks to bid on them. However, they can be split if there is an investor who has multiple bidders. This may result in different rates for different coupons, but the rates are fixed. Larson questioned if you could refinance bonding projects if better rates become available. Trahan commented that you can refinance old notes, which is done occasionally. Gallagher commented that the town has to be careful doing so as there are severe limitations regarding paying off municipal bonds early. Trahan added that there are usually specific terms included in the bond agreement surrounding refinancing.

4. Audit Update:

Trahan shared that the audit work is still underway. She will be speaking with the auditors tomorrow, but the Finance Department still has a lot of details that need to be pulled for them, and questions to answer. Trahan added that there is 1 bank they have been working with over the past couple months, and still are, in order to reconcile.

The manager of the account started working on the financial statements, but the Finance Department has to do the background work. Trahan noted that some are trickier than others and require more digging. Trahan stated that she does not plan to be done before February. Once she is complete, the auditors need 3 weeks to review.

5. Budget Process Update:

Drumm explained that the town departments have already been working on this and are turning in their budgets for him to review. He noted that he had requested them by the 9th, but the departments are navigating new software.

He stated that the software change had begun during Amanda Backhaus's tenure. The previous Finance Director Julie Chapman continued it but encountered difficulties which required her to make entries manually. The new finance staff has encountered a learning curve switching from Admins to ClearGov. He noted that Trahan is familiar with ClearGov as she has used it before, but the software has been updated since she last used it. For these reasons, Drumm gave the departments extra time to submit their budgets. Trahan added that there was some extra work at the beginning to upload files, but since then things have been moving along smoothly.

Drumm noted that the software allows for a digital budget book to be created which should make things easier than it has been in the past. He is unsure if it will be easy enough to generate for this year, but the goal is to definitely have it for next year's budget.

Drumm shared that he was able to meet with the Fire/EMS Department on their budget, which had some adjustments from the previous year. He stated that Fire Chief Bud Meyers has requested an increase of 1.7% for the operating budget, which is rather conservative. However, the capital budget is much higher due to aging equipment in all departments. The Fire/EMS Department uses SUVs for certain calls, and one had the engine die, and the other is in bad shape with high mileage. Drumm noted that the town is seeing many vehicles drop off, with no plans to replace them. He shared that the 2nd ambulance went back into service about 2 weeks ago after \$40,000 worth of repairs this year, but it unfortunately had to be removed from service today as the engine continues to fail. Fire Chief Meyers plans to leave the ambulance out of service and operate with only 1 for the time being. To replace the 2 SUVs, it would cost \$160,000. Drumm noted it is a good investment as they get a lot of use.

Drumm explained that another department in need of new equipment and vehicles is public works. He expects both Public Works and Fire/EMS to put forth large requests this year. He reminded that the town needs to start addressing capital issues. He suggested pocketing money away each year so that the town does not need to commit to borrowing or buying outright.

Public Works alone, needs over \$3M worth of equipment, which the DPW scheduled out over a 10-year window. Drumm shared that the DPW has pickup trucks from 2006, some with holes in the floorboards. Drumm asked the DPW Director to list his priorities, and all were listed as priority 1's. Drumm explained that not everything could be replaced as a priority 1 this year as the items he requested for the upcoming budget total to \$2.3M. It was noted that if the streetsweeper passes through the referendum, then it will be removed from the CIP.

It was noted that the DPW finally received a new large dump truck that had been ordered 2 years ago and replaced a 20-year-old truck. There are several other older trucks that need to be replaced, and the DPW is requesting another large dump truck. Fortunately, they are no longer taking 2 years to come in and can be delivered in 7 months.

Gallagher stated that she hopes this year will be less chaotic. Thomas noted that it appears the grand list will be in on time as well, along with having a Finance Director.

Gallagher requested that a memo be presented with the budget that briefly explains why any line item is increasing more than 5% or more than \$10,000. Drumm noted that he has informed staff of this and explained that ClearGov allows for notes to be made next to line items.

Drumm shared that the WPCA has increased the sewer rates to over 7%, and all sewer line items will be going up. He noted this is being done in preparation for the potential sewer plant project but did not want it to come as a surprise to the Town Council.

Blanchard asked Trahan to explain the ClearGov software. Trahan explained that it is a budget module that has applications to do the primary budget, capital budget, operating budget, and a personnel budget. Trahan explained that she would like to get the personnel budget piece up and running along with the digital budget

book. She noted that the digital budget book is easy to go through, creates all the graphs, and stores budget history for comparisons.

The Finance Committee discussed new financial software, Munis, that would be beneficial for the department and is compatible with ClearGov. However, Gallagher felt the upfront cost to switch software is too high at this time and would likely be cut from the budget, especially as there are annual fees for support/membership.

Gallagher thanked Drumm and Trahan for the update. She commented that preliminary numbers are startlingly high, but she is not surprised as the town has been shortchanging capital for years.

6. Citizens Budget Guide:

Trahan provided 2 examples from Mansfield. Gallagher commented that one of the examples is similar to Coventry's budget in brief, but she feels the earlier one, from 2016, is better for a citizen's guide. Trahan agreed as it explains the different aspects of budget, how they differ, the budget process, and meeting dates.

Trahan explained that Mansfield originally mailed these out to all households. This became costly, so the town posted it on their website to save money.

Thomas suggested adding a section to the budget guide explaining how motor vehicles taxes work, as the calculations for this have recently changed. She also suggested that hard copies be made available at the annual town meeting, the library, the senior center, town hall offices (town clerk and tax collector), and school administration offices. It was noted that it will be online as well. Thomas requested a budget tab be added to the website, that is on the home page linking to where everything budget related is kept.

The Finance Committee also discussed having the Citizen's Academy be launched to have information shared from the different department heads on what the specific departments do and their needs. Trahan stressed that it is a good idea, but it is going to be a challenge for staff to find the time. Thomas stated that resources will need to be looked into, to help with videos, etc., but staff will need to provide the data.

Blanchard asked Drumm to have Laura Stone look at the agenda center, as the website seems wrong. She noted that when looking at previous versions of tonight's agenda in the agenda center, there are several versions listed. She shared concerns that this is taking up storage space.

Trahan noted she had the publisher's version of the Citizen's Budget Guide from Mansfield, that Special Projects Coordinator can use to tweak and draft something up for Coventry. Thomas noted that it shouldn't have this year's budget specific information, as that is what the budget in brief is for. She suggested that something be drafted that can be used year-round. Drumm and Trahan expressed that it is important to include specific dates for the meetings, which can be edited yearly.

