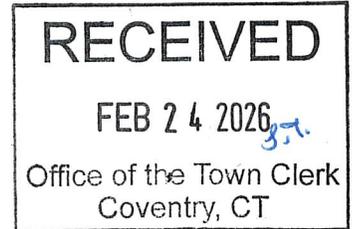


OFFICIAL MINUTES
Coventry Town Council Meeting
February 2, 2026 7:00 PM
Town Hall Annex



1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

The Meeting was called to order by Council Chairwoman Lisa Thomas at 7:00 PM

Members Present: Lisa Thomas-Chairwoman, Peter Larson-Vice Chairman, Matthew Kyer-Secretary, Jon Hand, Robyn Gallagher (remote), Mark Wheaton, and Julie Blanchard.

Also Present: James Drumm-Town Manager, and Kelly Lawer-Collector of Revenue (remote).

2. Pledge of Allegiance:

Town Council members stood to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Audience Of Citizens: (30 Minutes - 5 minutes maximum per citizen):

Tim Timberman, 1194 Main Street:

Timberman shared a request he put in writing (and sent via email) to the Town Council, for the Council to allocate \$2,000 from the EDC funds for the Arts on Main event. Timberman further explained that the event operates mainly off of donations, and the Coventry Arts Guild allocates \$1,000 to the event as well. He explained that he felt the town should invest in this well-attended, family-friendly event. He reminded that the premise of the Main Street Partnership and infrastructure is to make Coventry Village comfortable and accessible.

Timberman also shared that the Winter Poetry Festival was a success thanks to attendees and town staff, regardless of a minor heating issue that required relocation from Mill Brook Place to Patriots Park Lodge.

Thomas read the following statement:

Before we launch into our agenda, I ask that we all take a moment of silence in honor of those who have been murdered by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. We are seeing heartbreaking images across our nation, most recently in Minnesota. I believe the ICE actions we are witnessing daily are relentlessly cruel and inhumane abuses of authority, depriving individuals of their lives and their right to due process. We should all be deeply concerned about the fate of our country; of our cherished democracy. As your elected leader, it is my responsibility to make sure that all of you, whether you were born on this soil, immigrated here, or fled here, feel safe, respected and protected. It is my responsibility to do for you what was done for my family when they fled Nazi horrors in Poland. In CT, the Trust Act protects civil liberties and ensures that state and local police are not deputized to carry out immigration enforcement that violates those civil rights. I take this very seriously and I know that our police officers do as well. We are neighbors. We are friends. We are family. Please join me now in a moment of silence.

4. Acceptance Of Minutes, January 20, 2026:

Motion: I move to accept the January 20, 2026, Town Council Meeting Minutes with Thomas's suggested edits:

By: Hand

Second: Kyer

Discussion/Edits:

- Pg. 1, Agenda Item 3, Under Katie Martin’s statement, 4th line up from bottom, change “town but” to “town and”.
- Pg. 6, Agenda Item 6.F.1, 4th bullet, 2nd line, change, “market is” to “market are”.
- Pg. 7, Agenda Item 6.F.1, 1st bullet, 2nd to last sentence, change “He continued that after lengthy back and forth, and last-minute additions, the town has finally just received a final clean version that all parties agree to and can be signed off on.” to “He continued that after lengthy back and forth, and last-minute additions, the town has finally just received a final clean version that he believes all parties can sign.”

For: Kyer, Hand, Gallagher, Thomas, Larson, Wheaton, and Blanchard.

Against:

Abstain:

5. Consent Agenda:

All items listed with an asterisk (*) will be acted on by one motion. There will be no separate discussion on these items unless a Council member so requests, in which case, the item will be removed from the consent agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the agenda.

Motion: I move to accept the consent agenda.

By: Hand

Second: Kyer

Discussion: None.

Voting:

For: Kyer, Hand, Gallagher, Thomas, Larson, Wheaton, and Blanchard

Against:

Abstain:

6. Reports:

6.A. Council Chairwoman: Lisa Thomas:

Thomas read the following report:

- Thomas shared that her letter to Gov. Lamont about the Bond Commission Request is attached to the agenda, so Councilors are aware that it went out. (A link has been included below).
- On January 22, Peter Larson and I had our monthly update meeting with Town Manager Jim Drumm. Key points we discussed include:
 - Citizens Budget Guide
 - Jim and Alex are taking lead on this
 - Will be ready for March 5th public hearing
 - Posted online; copies available at public hearing, town meeting, library, town hall clerk’s office; copies to PTO Presidents to share at meetings
 - Strategic Planning goals
 - Plan to hold brainstorming sessions with key staff in April

- Purpose is to “dump” ideas and then organize and cross reference them; find connections from one to the other
 - Finance Committee will partner with infrastructure goal
 - Steering Committee will partner with economic dev’t & housing goal
- Citizens Government Academy
 - Plan to get these workshops up and running by June/July
 - Connect launch with America 250 celebration and emphasize civic engagement
- Jim will be negotiating 4 union contracts this spring
- Jim Drumm and I attended the CT Council of Small Towns meeting last week. Gov. Lamont, Lt. Governor Bysiewicz, Atty. General William Tong, and Comptroller Sean Scanlon all spoke. They discussed CT’s strong fiscal health but tempered their comments with the significant and growing financial impacts of federal cuts to everything from education to healthcare to infrastructure and climate resilience. There was also a moderated panel discussion with Majority leaders Sen. Looney and Rep. Ritter, and Minority leaders Harding and Candelora.
- I attended a CRCOG sponsored 4-hour social media workshop for elected officials last week. The focus was on the most effective forms of social media for messaging about town needs, as well as maintaining civil discourse in that media. I learned a lot and look forward to using that new knowledge.
- I also joined a webinar on PA 25-1, also referred to as the “Housing Bill”. This was an overview provided by staff from CCM, Councils of Government, and COST. Several of our staff also joined, including Director of Planning and Development Jana Roberson, ZEO Heidi Leach, and Town Engineer Todd Penney. It is a complex bill that we will be dissecting and digesting for a while. It includes several incentives that we will look to pursue as we develop our strategic plans for infrastructure and housing. Copies of the slide deck and a link to the webinar recording will be sent to all Councilors. A written summary guide will be shared by CCM and the COGs soon.
- Lastly, I attended the Coventry Arts Guild Poetry Festival on Saturday night. It was a wonderful night with talented poets including Manchester Poet Laureate Nadia Sims and Coventry poet John Stanizi. There were also musical interludes from local musicians including the Zelltones and Our friends Jim and Ruth from Song A Day. I want to offer congratulations and appreciation to the Arts Guild for this outstanding night, and especially to Linda Blakeslee who was the main organizer of the event.

6.A.1. Bond Commission Request to Gov. Lamont: Thomas Letter to Gov. Lamont

6.B. Council Members:

Gallagher reported:

- She attended the CT Wolfpack game, where musicians from GHR, CNH, and CHS either sang or played and did an excellent job.
- On Friday, January 30th, she attended Career Day at CNH, which is a wonderful event they put together every 3 years where volunteers come to talk to the kids. She noted that while in attendance, she saw a lot of familiar faces from the community.
- She shared appreciation to the DPW for the great job they did during the recent snowstorm.

6.C. Steering Committee: Jonathan Hand, Chairperson:

For: Kyer, Hand, Gallagher, Thomas, Larson, Wheaton, and Blanchard

Against:

Abstain:

6.C.1.d. Pension & Retirement Committee: Elsesser:

Motion: I move to appoint Richard Martin to the Human Rights Commission for a term to expire 1/1/2029, as recommended by Steering.

By: Hand

Second: Kyer

Discussion: Hand thanked Elsesser for serving in this volunteer capacity for the community.

Voting:

For: Kyer, Hand, Gallagher, Thomas, Larson, Wheaton, and Blanchard

Against:

Abstain:

6.C.1.e. Pension & Retirement Committee: Murphy:

Motion: I move to appoint Justin Murphy to the Pension and Retirement Committee for a term to expire 1/1/2029, as recommended by Steering.

By: Hand

Second: Kyer

Discussion: Hand thanked Murphy for his continued service.

Voting:

For: Kyer, Hand, Gallagher, Thomas, Larson, Wheaton, and Blanchard

Against:

Abstain:

6.C.1.f. Special Constable: Chipman:

Motion: I move to appoint John Chipman as the Special Constable for a term to expire 2/5/2028, as recommended by Steering.

By: Hand

Second: Blanchard

Discussion: Thomas noted that Chipman is the Community Service Officer and Animal Control Officer for the CPD. As the Special Constable, it allows him to issue citations and tickets when needed.

Voting:

For: Kyer, Hand, Gallagher, Thomas, Larson, Wheaton, and Blanchard

Against:

Abstain:

6.C.1.g. Water Pollution Control Authority: Twerdy:

Motion: I move to appoint Matthew Twerdy to the Water Pollution Control Authority for a term to expire 11/7/2027, as recommended by Steering.

By: Hand

Second: Kyer

Discussion: Hand thanked Twerdy for his long and continued service. Larson commented that every candidate appointed tonight is a previously appointed member who has expressed interest in continuing to serve. He added appreciation for the individuals who commit many years of their time for the community.

Voting:

For: Kyer, Hand, Gallagher, Thomas, Larson, Wheaton, and Blanchard

Against:

Abstain:

6.D. *Finance Committee: Robyn Gallagher, Chairperson:

6.E. *COVRA

6.F. Town Manager: James D. Drumm:

6.F.1. Projects/Issues Update:

Town Manager Drumm shared the following highlights:

- Charter Revision Commission-They are moving along and recently interviewed the Registrars and Town Clerk at their last meeting. They currently have interviews scheduled with the Finance Director and Collector of Revenue for their Feb. 19th meeting. Their next meeting will take place on Feb. 4th at 6:30 PM for continued discussions.
- Assessor- John Preisner has given his resignation, which was effective Friday, Jan. 30th, 2026. Paige Walton, of the Town of Waterford, is currently serving as the interim Assessor. Advertisements will be sent to CCM, COST, and the CT Association of Assessing Officers, as well as being posted on the Town Manager's Facebook page. Applications have a March 4th deadline to be received.
- Town Hall Radio Tower Contract- Town staff has just received the final draft, and it is being reviewed and verified. It will be ready to be discussed at the next Town Council meeting during Executive Session, if the Council desires.
- Plains Road Water Extension Project-Currently awaiting DPH approval. The DPH has 90 days to review, and only 30 days have passed. This has pushed out the timeline for bids, but that should not have much of an impact as construction will not start until the spring. Staff are ready to move forward as soon as clearance is received from the DPH.
- WPCA Plant Upgrade-Still in an environmental review with CEPA, that is expected to be completed by summer. Once CEPA is completed, it will go to DEEP for their review, which is expected to take until January 2027. The project is expected to be \$30M, with 20% funded by a DEEP grant. They will provide us with a low-interest loan (2%) for the remainder of the cost, over a period of 20 years. Other funding sources will be explored for this project. The state has made Coventry a priority as it is one of the last plants left to go through this process. Drumm commented that he expects there to be more funding through doing a plant upgrade, than connecting to the plant in Willimantic.

- Cross St./South St. Water Line-Connecticut Water has received a grant from the DPH to construct an 8-inch water line from Coventry Village to Lakeview Terrace. This project used to be paired with the water tower project, but the DPH determined that the 2 projects did not complement each other and separated them. This new line will go past GHR, with the option for them to connect, but it is not required. CT Water will be meeting with the BOE to discuss the benefits of connecting GHR to the water line.
- Nips Funds Projects- 6 Projects were approved at a previous Finance Committee meeting, and some progress has been made:
 - A shed is on order to house the oil tank, but the oil tank itself has not been ordered.
 - Funds have been set aside for waste oil disposal.
 - The MetroStor food waste container is on order for the Transfer Station.
 - Storm Drain Markers are on order.
 - Anti-Freeze containment unit is on order.
 - Additional Part-Time Transfer Station hours/operators have not been implemented yet.

Questions/Comments:

Plains Rd.- Wheaton questioned how the residents impacted by the well issues are getting by. Drumm informed that the town delivers water to them, and has been for years, for drinking, cooking, etc. However, the water used for showers is still affected by the salt contamination.

Cross St./South St. Water Line- Hand questioned if an 8-inch line would support the current volume of the school. Drumm confirmed that it would, as the schools and residential properties have different peak times. Thomas asked if residential properties along Cross Street and South Street could connect, if allowed. Drumm confirmed that any house that has a well along the line will have the option to tie in. He added that he is considering connecting Patriots Park Lodge and the Community Center as there are continuous issues with sand in the pipes.

6.F.2. * Quarterly Reports: October - December 2025: Quarterly Report-Oct.-Dec. 2025

7. Unfinished Business: None

8. New Business:

8.A. 25/26-34: Presentation, CT Municipal Development Authority (CMDA) (7:15 PM):

David Kooris, Director of the CMDA, was present to discuss the CMDA’s mission and assistance that can be offered to Coventry with its plans for infrastructure and economic development.

Highlights from Kooris’s presentation:

- CMDA was established by state legislation, and fully funded and operational as of 2024.
- The goal of the CMDA is to help municipalities achieve their development, economic development and housing development near their “downtowns” and transit stations. Coventry Village, while small, qualifies as “downtown”.
- CMDA can provide infrastructure support and GAP financing to developers.
- To join the CMDA, there is a process:
 - Legislative body votes them in. There is no commitment, obligation, or cost at this point.
 - Discussions take place with administration and staff on eligible areas, the plan of conservation and development, and zoning regulations.

- Zoning regulations are either certified, or the CMDA provides suggestions to be reviewed by the PZC. It will be a local decision to approve or implement the CMDA suggestions, or not.
- Enter into agreement with executive administration to establish the development district.
- The development district cannot go into areas that are not for housing production or single-family neighborhoods.
- Municipalities can apply to the CMDA for infrastructure support in the development district, and developers can apply for gap financing for development.
- The CMDA was allocated \$90M from the state.
- The first municipalities opted to join a year ago, and development districts have been recently certified for 11 municipalities. The first projects are being approved for funding.
- The CMDA helps municipalities navigate the state's regulatory process. This includes discussions on how state regulations and programs interact with each other.

Questions:

Kyer asked about the towns that have already joined and those closest to Coventry. Kooris reiterated that 38 towns have joined, and closest to Coventry is Mansfield, Windham, and Manchester.

Gallagher asked if Kooris could give a brief description of the types of projects being reviewed and potentially funded. Kooris explained the projects vary from conversions of office space or vacant buildings into housing or mixed use, to new construction. It is about a 50/50 split of those that are exclusively for housing to those that are mixed use of housing with a commercial component. Kooris added that there have not been any infrastructure projects at this point, but there have been discussions with municipalities about wastewater treatment, stormwater treatment, flood risk reduction, and pedestrian crossings. He added that the funding is flexible in what it can be used for, but projects do need to meet certain qualifications.

Kooris explained that if a municipality gets to a point of an established development district, there is an interest rate reduction on clean water fund loans. Thomas explained that Coventry's development in the village is limited by the lack of sewer water capacity. She also highlighted that the town is looking into a water tower for water supply and fire suppression. She explained that there are a lot of agencies trying to pull pieces together for these things, but having the assistance of the CMDA would be helpful as well.

Kooris explained that many municipalities are dealing with similar challenges. He explained that a purpose of the CMDA is to explain to the state what they would get out of a partnership with the member municipalities through investing in infrastructure and development.

Thomas asked what the next steps are if the Town Council votes to join. Kooris explained that CMDA would then reach out to town administration, which will take time to get through the municipalities that are already in the queue. In the meantime, Coventry is welcome to send documents for the CMDA to review the Plan of Conservation and Development, special plans for Coventry Village, zoning regulations, etc. The review itself will take a few more months, then the CMDA will come back to the Town Council to provide feedback.

Drumm questioned if there are developers looking for these districts, and if the CMDA has their contacts. Kooris confirmed yes to both and stated that the CMDA will be able to "matchmake" to a certain degree if desired by the municipality. It was noted that this is a great tool for developers as it saves time knowing which districts are development ready and having the ability to apply for gap funding.

Jana Roberson, Director of Planning and Development, asked about joint municipal entities. Kooris explained that this was included in the original statute, with the requirement that 2 municipalities could work together if they had a combined population of 75,000 or more. When the statute was revised, the population requirement was removed, making it a moot point, and having no real benefit to applying as a joint municipal entity.

Thomas clarified that should the Town Council decide to join, all final decisions are up to Coventry, and the town will not be forced to do anything. Kooris confirmed everything is at the discretion of the municipality. However, the CMDA will provide recommendations, and taking those recommendations would be a precondition to moving forward to the next step. At that point, every municipality had the option to continue moving forward or stepping back from the process.

8.B. 25/26-35: Consideration/possible action: Excess tax payment ordinance and call to public hearing:

Motion: I move to approve the wording of the proposed Excess Tax payment Ordinance and to call for a public hearing on this Ordinance for March 2, 2026, at 7:00 PM to be held in the Town Hall Annex.

By: Hand

Second: Kyer

Discussion: Drumm explained that this stemmed from a request from the Collector of Revenue, Kelly Lawer, as the actions of the ordinance have been a long-standing practice of the department. Due to the cost of billing and issuing refunds, any bill \$5.00 or less would be forgiven, and any refund \$5.00 or less would not be issued. He added that this has been allowed by CT State Statute since 1995. However, it is recommended to have an ordinance on the books, so the practice complies with state statutes.

Hand commented that this was discussed at Steering and emphasized it is a commonsense practice, that is already in place.

Drumm informed that the actual cost to collect a bill in the amount of \$5.00 or less is approximately \$20.

Voting:

For: Kyer, Hand, Gallagher, Thomas, Larson, Wheaton, and Blanchard

Against:

Abstain:

8.C. 25/26-36: Consideration/possible action: Modifications to job description, Mechanic I:

Motion: I move to approve the wording or the revised Mechanic I job description.

By: Hand

Second: Kyer

Discussion: Drumm explained there is a vacancy in the mechanic fleet, as there is only a Lead Mechanic and a Mechanic II. The Mechanic I job description was outdated, so Special Projects Coordinator Alex Taylor converted it to the new format and made some minor edits. The Steering Committee previously reviewed the revised job description and made additional edit suggestions.

Voting:

For: Kyer, Hand, Gallagher, Thomas, Larson, Wheaton, and Blanchard

Against:

Abstain:

8.D. 25/26-37: Consideration/possible action: Direct the Town Manager to draft a RESOLUTION REGARDING JOINING THE CONNECTICUT MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY AS A MEMBER MUNICIPALITY:

Motion: I move to direct the Town Manager to draft a RESOLUTION REGARDING JOINING THE CONNECTICUT MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY.

By: Hand

Second: Larson

Discussion: Blanchard requested clarification that this motion is to direct Drumm to have a draft resolution prepared, and then it will come back to the Town Council for further review and discussion on whether to move forward or not; which Thomas confirmed.

Larson stated that based on the earlier presentation, it sounds like there is a 1-year certification process for organizations who join as there are some that joined a while ago and just now hearing back about development in their municipality. Thomas explained that there are studies that need to be done, as well as a review of the planning and zoning regulation and the plan of conservation and development. Additionally, Hand mentioned the presenter discussed there is a "line" or queue for municipalities wishing to join, which leads to delays, along with the processes mentioned by Thomas. He reminded that documentation can be prepared during the waiting period to try and minimize these delays.

Wheaton questioned whether this should go to Steering since it is a draft resolution. Hand commented that it does not seem necessary as there are draft resolutions from other towns attached to the agenda that Coventry town staff needs to tweak so that it is relative to our town. Kyer reminded that there is another Town Council meeting before the next Steering meeting. He suggested that the draft be reviewed by the full Council at their next meeting. If everyone feels that it should be reviewed further after that meeting, then it could be sent to Steering. There was Council consensus with this suggestion.

Voting:

For: Kyer, Hand, Gallagher, Thomas, Larson, Wheaton, and Blanchard

Against:

Abstain:

8.E. 25/26-38: Presentation by Town Engineer and possible action: proposed LOTCIP grant project (7:30 PM):

Drumm explained that Town Engineer Todd Penney was unable to join but gave a presentation on his behalf about a proposed LOTCIP grant project:

- LOTCIP is a program funded through the DOT, through CRCOG, specifically for transportation purposes of capital improvement and differs from the LOCIP program, which is for local capital improvements.
- Projects are 100% funded by the state, outside of engineering and design expenses.

- LOTCIP allows funding for 2 active projects at a time. The town is moving forward with the South Street/Swamp Road project, allowing Coventry to submit another LOTCIP application which is due 2/18.
- Funding limits are \$5M.
- Applicable roads must be old local roads considered to be state arterial roads. South Street meets these criteria, further down at the curve near Pucker Street to Flanders Road.
- Concerns in this area are the drop of the hill, and the curve. Engineering would look into reducing the hill elevation and softening the curve. This would include rebuilding shoulders, drainage improvements, and rebuilding stone walls.
- An additional benefit would be removing the “Y” intersection at Pucker Street, and making it a “T” intersection, which will be better for maintenance, plowing, and sightlines.

Questions:

Kyer asked if there have been a lot of car accidents in this area. Drumm explained he is not aware of any at the curve, but there have been some at the Pucker St. “Y” intersection. He added sometimes sheets of ice develop on the hill. With drainage improvements, the hope is to reduce the amount of ice that builds up.

Kyer asked if there are any other locations being considered. Drumm responded that the town is limited in what roads can be done, so they focused on the worst area of South Street. If this moves forward, there are a few more areas that can also receive LOTCIP funding but are not as bad as this one. The next priority would be Bunker Hill. He added that the town has been very successful with LOTCIP projects over the years, and the town is running out of eligible roads. Once they get to that point, the plan would be to petition the state to add additional roads for eligibility.

This South Street project is estimated around \$3.7M, with engineering costs of approximately \$375,000 which will need to be covered by the town.

Wheaton questioned if this would require obtaining property. Drumm answered no, and that typically the town does not try to take property but rather negotiate an easement. Drumm clarified the right of way area, of which there is plenty without encroaching on someone’s property.

Drumm commented that if the Town Council approved the application moving forward for submission, and the grant is awarded, engineering funds will not be needed for about a year. Drumm reminded that if the Town Council votes to apply, and the grant is awarded, they can still opt out of not accepting the grant/doing the project.

Motion: I move to approve the Town’s proposed LOTCIP grant project, the pledge for Town funding of design/engineering, and the grant application to be submitted to the Capital Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) and the CTDOT.

By; Kyer

Second: Hand

Discussion: Blanchard asked about the cost of design and engineering. Drumm reiterated it would be around \$375,000 with a \$30,000 shift either way.

Kyer shared concerns with the phrasing of “pledge” in the summary sheet, which makes it appear as a commitment to the engineering funding. Drumm reminded that the motion on the table does not obligate the town to these funds at this point, only to move forward with submitting the application. He reminded that if the grant is awarded, and the Council chooses to move forward, it is more of an understanding that the engineering expense would need to be covered.

Kyer also asked for clarification that, with this 3–5-year long-term project, the \$375,000 in engineering would not be a lump sum, but rather paid overtime. Drumm confirmed but explained there will likely be a large amount due at the start of the project. He added that in the past engineering costs have been added into a road bond established at the time, which is a possibility here as well.

Wheaton asked if the design work would be outsourced or could be done by Todd Penney. It was explained that Penney has little help, and this work would be outsourced to a consulting engineer, but Penney would be involved with the process.

Gallagher asked if Penney is still backed up with current projects. Drumm confirmed that Penney has a lot on his plate and has enough work to keep him busy for the next 4 to 5 years. However, he would still be involved with all aspects of engineering.

Gallagher also asked if any other options have been looked into to address the ice sheeting outside of restructuring the road. Drumm was unsure.

Voting:

For: Kyer, Hand, Gallagher, Thomas, Larson, Wheaton, and Blanchard

Against:

Abstain:

9. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:

9.A. * Board of Education: Minutes 1/8/26 & 1/13/26; Agenda - 1/22/26:

9.B. * DiMella: Action Requested on Discriminatory Refugee Arrests:

9.C. * Town Council 2026 Budget Meeting Dates (Finalized 1/20/2026):

9.D. * Workshop, May 16, 2026: Using Plants to Protect Water Quality

10. Adjournment:

Motion: I move that the Town Council adjourn the meeting at 8:54 PM.

By: Kyer

Second: Wheaton

The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 PM by unanimous vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicole Archambault

Nicole Archambault, Minutes Clerk

PLEASE NOTE: These are official minutes and have been approved by the Coventry Town Council at the February 2, 2026, Town Council meeting.

