

OFFICIAL MINUTES
Town Council Finance Committee Meeting
February 17, 2025, 6:00 pm
Town Hall Annex

1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

The Meeting was called to order by Chair Robyn Gallagher at 6:00 PM.

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

Absent: None

Also Present: James Drumm-Town Manager, Cherie Trahan-Finance Director, Alex Taylor-Special Projects Coordinator, and Eric Peterson-Chief of Police.

2.B. Acceptance Of Minutes: January 12, 2026:

Motion: I move to accept the January 12, 2026, Finance Committee Minutes.

By: Blanchard

Second: Larson

Discussion/Edits: None

Voting: Unanimously in favor

Motion: I move to move up Agenda Item 4 up on the agenda as the next item of business.

By: Larson

Second: Blanchard

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimously in favor

4. Discussion/possible action: review of health insurance plans and recommended course of action

Gallagher shared that the Town Council received an update from the BOE that they have decided to go with the Cigna Direct Plan as recommended by Dr. Petrone, Jim Drumm, Cherie Trahan, and Charmaine Bradshaw-Hill. However, there are still some unanswered questions that Gallagher would like addressed.

Drumm distributed a comparison sheet between the state plan, and the current plan the town has. The benefits would remain the same, but the only change would be the plan would be directly through Cigna, not ECHIP. Drumm noted that there was a significant increase in Cigna claims, which may cause their costs to increase.

Gallagher has questioned what will be left in the reserve after ECHIP ends. Trahan estimated the reserves to be around \$1M combined between the town and the BOE. Thomas shared that the BOE voted to assume a certain

amount of the remainder to reduce the estimate of what they need to put into their budget. Reducing their increase from 5.22% to 4.9%.

Blanchard explained that the BOE has stated the Town Council is behind them in self-funding. She was curious where this statement came from as she does not remember the Council deciding not to fund the account. She requested a history of the funding or lack thereof. Drumm explained that it goes back years, as the town had some employees with severe or chronic illnesses that heavily ate into their claims. During this time, the BOE did not have employees dealing with these types of illnesses/situations. Through ECHIP, the reserves for both the town and BOE were considered as 1 reserve. However, when the claims were tracked separately, it was determined the town was falling into a deficit. If the town decided to fund all the claims, it would end up overfunding the reserves. Since the BOE had less claims, they believe they should be the ones receiving the benefit of the group. Gallagher explained this is contradictory to being a part of a large pool which spreads risk over a larger group which is beneficial for insurance. She continued that it seems they want to benefit from being a part of a pool but do not want to be treated as part of a pool. She added that during a difficult budget year, it would not be right to over budget on health insurance when there is a healthy combined pool in reserve to make up for a perceived inequity recognized by those managing the fund.

Gallagher reminded that when going over Finance/Town Council goals, Blanchard has stated that she would like everything to be viewed under 1 tent. Blanchard agreed and wanted an explanation on why the BOE is saying these things. Drumm explained that from their point of view, money put in by their employees was not taken out. Larson stated that this is luck on their end. The Finance Committee agreed and stated that paying in what you take out is not the principal of paying for insurance; that is just paying for their own medical bills.

Trahan explained the best way to look at it, is to review the rate adjustment from ECHIP, and whatever the percentage increase is, both sides would put that rate change in. However, during budget seasons, when the town was looking to reduce increases for the taxpayers, a lower percentage was put into health insurance as the reserves were healthy. However, the BOE has consistently contributed the percentage increase. She further explained that claims will always fluctuate, but the town has not been contributing their full calculated amount. She stated it's still the same pot, and the appropriate thing to do is to draw down the reserves by X amount (ex. \$200,000), which would reduce rates for everyone, town and BOE.

Gallagher discussed the difference in size between town and BOE staff. The town has just about 60, whereas the BOE has over 250. She questioned if that portion is equivalent to what the BOE and town pay into ECHIP. Trahan explained that the rates are typically determined by what the expected claims are going to be.

Gallagher suggested that this be part of budget discussions to review whether the total the town and BOE are contributing into ECHIP separately, corresponds to the respective populations within that pool. Thomas explained that during budget, they aren't working with ECHIP, so there needs to be an understanding moving forward. She continued that the BOE chair received an update there was \$2.8M in the reserve pool, and they are assuming there is \$800,000 available due to the perceived \$2M town deficit. She continued she is unsure how much of the \$800,000 they are planning to use to offset their budget. She explained that Mr. Drumm and Dr. Petrone need to have a conversation, as there is 1 budget for the town, so everyone should benefit from a decrease in the budget. Trahan explained that she understands they have discussed that their employees have a

right to share in the reduction as well, through lower rates. She stressed that this is not how this works; Drumm agreed. Trahan reminded that even if the budget is reduced by a certain amount, that reduction is not going back to the employees. They will still pay the same rate regardless.

Blanchard commented that after the meeting with the USI agent, it was requested to have a cost breakdown between employees paying for a direct plan with Cigna, and one with the state. Gallagher noted that this was on the comparison sheet attached to the agenda and discussed the benefits of the different accounts.

Thomas shared that it seems to make the most sense to stick with Cigna Direct for a year, while the Town Council and Unions can explore other options and get feedback. Gallagher agreed. It was reminded that employees will not see any changes in benefits. Larson also agreed this seems like the best plan given the lack of time, but encouraged other options be reviewed as soon as possible to prepare for a renewal or change come next year.

Motion: I move to recommend to the full Town Council to select the Cigna Direct health insurance plan.

By: Larson

Second: Gallagher

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimously in favor

Motion: I move to move up Agenda Item 5 up on the agenda as the next item of business.

By: Larson

Second: Blanchard

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimously in favor

5. Police Department Budget:

1. Software Upgrade:

Chief Peterson explained that the CAD system (AccuComm) the Police Department uses is the brains of their operation. It is used to log complaints, track everything, assign case numbers, write arrest reports, etc. He continued that over the last decade, police departments have been moving to a new software company, NextGen. Over 90% of the police departments in the state use them. He believes that AccuComm may not be around much longer, and the system they use is outdated leading to constant problems. He explained that the department has \$30,000 to keep it going. Drumm clarified that this amount was part of last year's capital and needed to be allocated to upgrade the system to meet state requirements. Chief Peterson also added that there is no guarantee that they won't need to put in additional funds next year, or even a few years down the road.

Chief Peterson explained that NextGen has lowered their price, and if the Coventry PD can switch to them soon, the cost will be \$60,000 less than doing it later down the road. He emphasized that this is a one-time deal. Chief

Peterson reminded that the PD pays \$21,000 in annual fees for AccuComm, and with NextGen, the annual fee will be \$18,000. The full cost of NextGen is \$200,000, but Chief Peterson was able to negotiate it down to \$125,000. The town's IT experts have advised against paying \$30,000 for an outdated program. Chief Peterson explained the cost would be paid over a period of 3 years, with a down payment of \$75,000 due at the time of purchase. The \$30,000 allocated for AccuComm could be used towards that expense. Additionally, the \$21,000 that would be due to AccuComm come July 1, could be used towards the 1st year cost of NextGen as well. This would require new funds of \$23,912 in order to purchase NextGen.

Gallagher discussed the best options for paying for NextGen with the 1.5% fund and CNREF and how to account for the costs within the budget. Thomas reminded that Chief Peterson also just saved the town over half a million dollars by securing another grant to replace other obsolete equipment, so she supports this purchase.

Larson questioned how long the current software would last. Chief Peterson explained that they are already at the end of the line with how much it costs to keep going. Additionally, they have had to reduce staff as their client base becomes smaller. Trahan added that AccuComm will need to put a lot of money into the business or they will eventually go out of business and the money Coventry spent on them will be lost. At that time, the deal on the table with NextGen will be gone.

Gallagher asked if there were any other companies in the business, and if this is something that should go out to bid. Chief Peterson explained there are few companies that offer this type of software, and none of them will be cheaper than NextGen. Trahan agreed that it is a specialized service. Chief Peterson didn't even know if there were 2 to 3 other companies that provide this software. He further clarified that NextGen services 226 police departments in the state, along with the state police. He continued that he has communicated with other departments who use NextGen, and they have nothing but good things to say.

Gallagher suggested that the best option would be to allocate \$45,000 from CNREF, which is the \$75,000 for the NextGen down payment, less the \$30,000 the PD already has to put towards the switch. The \$21,000 that would be due to AccuComm come July 1, could be put back into CNREF or allocated to another line, if the Police Department funding is passed at the budget referendum. Larson emphasized that switching to this system will save taxpayers money over time.

Motion: I move to recommend to the Town Council to allocate up to \$45,000 from CNREF to purchase the NextGen software program for the Coventry Police Department.

By: Blanchard

Second: Larson

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimously in favor.

2. Sergeant position

Chief Peterson explained when he first came on as Chief, there were only 2 sergeants, and now the department has 5. He continued that in this day and age, there needs to be a police supervisor on 24/7, which is too taxing

for 5 people. There are times when the department has to operate without a supervisor. He urged that the town should be protected from liabilities should there not be a supervisor working.

Chief Peterson informed that it has been busy for the department over the last year, and there have been times a supervisor should have been working, but one was not available. He shared some examples to show the benefits of having a supervisor and highlighted some scenarios where things could have gone wrong with the absence of one. Chief Peterson stressed that having 6 sergeants with the department could almost close the gap when a supervisor isn't working and is what he needs for 24/7 coverage.

The Finance Committee reviewed the pay difference between a patrol officer and a sergeant, which is good until July/August. Thomas clarified that this is not hiring a new person to the department but rather promoting an officer within the department. Chief Peterson explained that the person to be promoted would be the top step patrolman, and it would cost around \$1,300 for the 1st year, and by the 3rd year it will cost \$11,000 annually due to the 3 steps for a sergeant. Drumm reminded that this has been requested from Chief Peterson in the recent budget cycles and is not a new request. 2 years ago, 2 sergeants were requested, and the department was allowed 1. Last year, there were no sergeant promotions.

Thomas questioned the level of training a sergeant would have, especially in terms of de-escalating. Chief Peterson explained that all officers receive the same de-escalating training, but sergeants are required to undergo state-mandated training, which trains them in different strategies, and handling difficult situations like domestic disturbances, mentally ill individuals, etc. He also informed that every quarter, he holds a staff meeting with the sergeants, about his expectations and how he wants the department to run. He added that he holds them to a higher standard.

Gallagher questioned how often it occurs that there is not a sergeant working. Chief Peterson explained it's about 25% of the time, maybe a little less. He discussed that having 6 sergeants would allow him to have 2 sergeants per shift system, closing that gap and covering each other for vacation time and other things. Additionally, the 6 patrolmen would have the similar system, easily covering for each other with 2 per shift.

Gallagher also asked what type of liabilities would impact the town if something went wrong, and there was not a supervisor on. She was curious if there would be insurance savings, if the town could show there is always a supervisor on duty. Chief Peterson cautioned against going to the insurance companies with this information as they likely assume there is ample supervisory coverage.

Drumm added that when promoting an officer to sergeant, it is also harder for other departments to try and "steal" those officers away who have earned their sergeant stripes.

Gallagher shared that she is hesitant adding something into the budget mid-year that hasn't been run through the taxpayers and is different than allocating funds from CNREF. Chief Peterson stated that he would continue working with the Town Manager.

The Finance Committee had consensus to continue Agenda item 5, as well as Agenda items 3 and 6 to a future meeting.

3. Reports: *Continued to a future agenda.*

3.A. Committee Chair - Robyn Gallagher:

3.B. Committee Members:

3.C Monthly Financial Reports:

3.D. Board of Education Reports - December 2025:

3.E. Audit update:

3.F. Budget Process update:

3.G. General Fund accounting update:

3.H. HVAC Reimbursement

3.I. Status update on referendum information - bond counsel process:

3.J. Impact of Federal government funding cuts on State and Local Government:

6. Citizens Budget Guide: *Continued to a future agenda.*

7. Adjournment:

Blanchard motions to adjourn at 7:01 PM, Larson seconds. The meeting adjourned by unanimous vote at 7:01 PM.

Submitted by,

Nicole Archambault

Nicole Archambault

Finance Committee Minutes Clerk

PLEASE NOTE: These are official minutes and have been approved by the Finance Committee at the March 9, 2026, Finance Committee meeting.