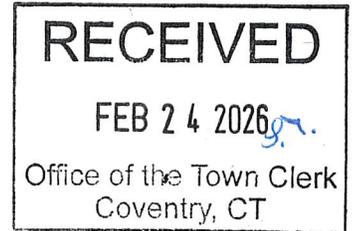


**UNOFFICIAL MINUTES**  
**Coventry Town Council Meeting**  
**February 17, 2026 7:00 PM**  
**Town Hall Annex**



**1. Call To Order, Roll Call:**

The Meeting was called to order by Council Chairwoman Lisa Thomas at 7:05 PM

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

Members Absent: None

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

**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):**

John French, 392 Pucker Street:

French spoke on the following matters:

- A statement made by Town Councilwoman Thomas, where she stated individuals were murdered by ICE agents. French continued that there are ongoing investigations and didn't understand how she thought that was the case.
- A news article was published about this month's COST meeting, where municipal leaders and lawmakers were gathered to discuss rising costs, budget pressures and other challenges facing CT's small towns. The article stated that one of the local politicians used this as a platform to discuss her fears of exercising her 1<sup>st</sup> amendment rights, issuing a public safety alarm designed to grab attention first and ask questions later. Additionally, it was mentioned that Coventry's Town Council Chair described heightened anxieties among residents following recent immigration enforcement options. French stated that Coventry is not an immigration enforcement hotspot, with the town's demographics consisting of only a small percentage of foreign-born individuals. He continued that modern politics are not about accuracy, but more so about grabbing attention and spreading panic.
- French shared his position on Thomas's use of the phrase "murdered by Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agents". He stated that this is an unfortunate event that resulted in the loss of 2 lives. He continued that without the Governor of Minnesota and local Mayor encouraging public and dangerous demonstrations, these individuals would be alive today. French stated that our town leader wants to cause anxiety that ICE is coming into our community and snatching people up, which he expressed sounds a lot like political fear. He continued that when a Town Council Chair is elected, they serve all people. He felt that the only things important to Thomas is the Democrat Party and making Hartford happy, which shows a lack of leadership. He concluded that Coventry deserves better.

**3.A. Public Comment session regarding Town of Coventry membership in the Connecticut Municipal Development Authority:**

No citizens were present for the Public Comment.

**4. Public Hearing: Amendment and Update of Parks and Recreation Commission Ordinance:**



- Speaking of emergency management, I am very excited by the partnership between Coventry Public Schools and our emergency response teams to create Coventry's first ever First Responder Academy. This is an excellent way to help students explore policing, firefighting, emergency medical training, and other careers. And perhaps encourage some to join one of our own departments.
- Please note that the Town of Coventry web site has a new feature. The page opens with a pop-up you can click on for information about budget development and meetings for fiscal year 2026/27. Please visit it frequently. The first important date is the public hearing on March 5, when the Town Manager and the Superintendent of Schools will present their budget recommendations. The hearing is also the first opportunity for residents to ask questions and make suggestions. It starts at 7:00 p.m. in the high school lecture hall. It will stream live on public access channel 194 and on the schools' YouTube channel. Lots more details are at the link in the pop-up, including a video Alex Taylor created to explain the budget process. My thanks to Laura Stone for developing the pop-up window.
- This month my conversations hours are on Thursday, February 26. 10:00-11:00 a.m. at the Senior Center. And 6:30 p.m. at the Booth and Dimock library.
- On Thursday, March 5, our CROG Legislative Committee will host a legislative breakfast at the Legislative Office Building from 9-11 a.m. to share with state elected leaders our legislative agenda. As Chair of the Committee, I will be there and invite each Councilor to attend if schedules allow. Our state rep and senator will receive an invite.
- Council Vice Chair Peter Larson and I will have our monthly update meeting with the Town Manager on February 26. If any Councilors have questions or suggestions, they would like us to raise, please email them to me before the 26th.

**7.A.1. Healthcare Policy Recs:** [HealthcareCabinet2026](#)

**7.A.2. First Responder Student Academy:** [First Responder Student Academy Flyer](#)

**7.B. Council Members:**

Gallagher reported:

- Congrats to the CNHMS Girls Basketball Team on an undefeated season.
- Students from CNHMS and CHS participated in the UConn Jazz Festival and performed at the Valentine's Swing Concert. The performances were great at both events.
- The schools will be putting on a production of 'Annie', March 5-7<sup>th</sup> at 7PM in the CHS Veteran's Auditorium.

**7.C. Finance Committee: Robyn Gallagher, Chairperson:**

Gallagher shared that the Finance Committee met just prior to the Town Council meeting and had discussions primarily on 2 important issues:

- Town Health Insurance- The Finance Committee put forth a unanimous recommendation to the Town Council to go with Cigna Direct. The BOE has voted to go with Cigna Direct as well.
- Police Department Requests:
  - Chief Peterson requested updated software for their CAD (computer aided dispatch) system. The current system is becoming obsolete and requires large amounts of money to be operational. Chief Peterson would like to switch to a competitor, NextGen, which is used by 90% of CT Police Departments, as well as the CT State Police. It typically costs \$200,000, but Chief Peterson was able to negotiate a price of \$125,000 for a limited time, with an annual subscription fee of \$18,000. However,

the \$125,000 could be paid in 3 installments, with a down payment of \$75,000 due at the time of purchase, \$30,000 due July 1, 2027, and a final payment of \$20,000 in 2028. Gallagher explained the \$75,000 would need to be paid out of the current fiscal year, and the recommendation for the Town Council is to use \$30,000 currently in capital, along with 'up to' \$45,000 from CNREF (which currently has a balance of \$70,000). She further explained that the town's IT staff have advised against continuously throwing money at our current software. She noted that it is not on tonight's agenda as it was recently discussed but expects it to be on the next Town Council Agenda.

- Chief Peterson has also requested an additional sergeant for the department. This does not include hiring another body to fill this position, but rather promoting one of the highest standing officers currently employed. He requested that this be done in the current fiscal year, rather than waiting for a passed budget, as he has concerns with not always having a supervisor on duty. Currently there are 5 sergeant positions within the department, which is not enough to cover 24/7, along with vacations and days off. 6 sergeants within the department would allow for 2 supervisors per shift. Discussions were paused, and no recommendations were made, as this was continued to future agenda.

Gallagher explained that the remaining agenda items (including financial reports) were continued as well, in order to adjourn for the scheduled Town Council meeting.

#### **7.D. \*Steering Committee: Jonathan Hand, Chairperson**

##### **7.D.1. \* Steering Committee Minutes: 1/27/2026**

#### **7.E. \* COVRA**

#### **7.F. Town Manager: James Drumm:**

##### **7.F.1 Projects/Issues Update:**

Drumm highlighted the following updates:

- Charter Revision Commission- Commission work is still very active, and they plan to meet with the Finance Director and Collector of Revenue at their next meeting, February 19<sup>th</sup>.
- Assessor- The position is still vacant, and there is a deadline of March 4<sup>th</sup> for applications to be received. To date, no applications have been received, so efforts are being made to get the word out in many locations.
- Plains Rd. Waterline Project- Still in the waiting period with DPH to review the bid documents. Once their review is complete, the town will move forward with the bidding process.
- Sewer Water Plant Project- The \$30M project originally expected to receive a 20% grant, may have increased grant funding after working further with DEEP. Expected grant funding is now in the range of 23%-25%.
- Most other town projects have to wait until the snow melts.

#### **Questions/Comments:**

Plains Rd. Waterline: Kyer asked if there is any information that can be given to the residents about a possible timeline. Drumm explained there is a 90-day waiting period, and the town is less than 60-days in. If the DPH takes every day they are allowed, this will put the Town out to bid in early April, with a deadline of 30-days to receive bids, and the contract would be awarded in May. Drumm expected the project to span the Spring, and into Summer. He noted that once awarded it is a quick project, depending on the contractor's timeline and ability to mobilize. He explained that some things will take time, like tree removal, but other than that, it consists of digging a trench and putting the pipe together. Communications will be shared once more is known

from the contractor. Thomas reminded that there has been consistent and ongoing communication between town staff and the Plains Road residents.

7.F.2. \* Legal Notice, Manager's Budget Hearing, 3/5/2026:

**8. Unfinished Business:**

**8.A. 25/26-29: Consideration/Possible Action: Adoption of Resolution - Amendment and Update of Parks and Recreation Commission Ordinance:**

**Motion:** I move to approve Resolution 2026-02, Adopting Ordinance #266, A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF COVENTRY, CONNECTICUT, AMENDING THE TOWN OF COVENTRY CODE OF ORDINANCES CHAPTER 70 "PARKS AND RECREATION"; PROVIDING SEVERABILITY; REPEALING ORDINANCES IN CONFLICT; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

By: Larson

Second: Hand

Discussion: Thomas noted there is a memo attached to the agenda regarding the attorney's recommendation around a 'public gathering', including decreasing the number allowed in the ordinance under Section 70-88. Currently, 70-88 states that "Any public gathering should be in accordance with Section 66-37." However, Section 66-37, allows for public gatherings that attract "300 or more persons". The attorney stated they did not believe that the intention of Section 70-88 'Public Gatherings' would only be triggered by 300 or more people. The attorney's recommendation is to amend Section 66-37, which is outside of the Parks and Recreation ordinance, but would apply per the reference in Section 70-88 of the ordinance.

Drumm requested that staff review Section 66-37 first, before it goes to Steering for further review. Lesley Munshower shared that the special event number applies to both gatherings on town property and private property. However, it is for public events, not for private parties. Thomas clarified that Section 66-37 does not prohibit this amount of people but requires a permit so that the town is prepared for a public event of this size.

Wheaton explained the Farmer's Market is over 300 people any given weekend and was curious if this applied. Thomas clarified that since it is a town-run program, it's not considered a 'special event'. Drumm added that it would not apply to churches either if they are large enough to accommodate such a crowd.

It was reiterated that Drumm will bring this to Steering once staff completes their review.

Voting:

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

Against:

Abstain:

**9. New Business:**

**9.A. 25/26-40: Consideration/possible action: Resolution: Town of Coventry to Join the Connecticut Municipal Development Authority as a member municipality:**

**Motion:** I move to adopt Resolution 2026-03, A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF COVENTRY, CONNECTICUT, JOINING THE CONNECTICUT MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY AS A MEMBER MUNICIPALITY, AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

By: Gallagher

Second: Hand

Discussion: Blanchard commented that there was never any information about the cost. Thomas and Drumm shared that there is no cost to join, and Coventry does not get charged a fee to use their services. It was clarified that they are state funded to be free advisors to CT towns to promote development and housing.

Thomas also reminded that there is an “exit ramp” at every step of the process, and the information they receive during the process is invaluable. If a project is recommended, that comes with a cost, the town can look into available grants.

Hand stated that he is strongly in favor of joining the CMDA to take advantage of the free resources available to municipalities. Especially since they provide information whether Coventry decides to use them or not.

Gallagher shared that one of her concerns as a Town Councilor is how the town is going to handle infrastructure challenges, especially those in the village and those that include the sewer plant upgrade/development. She emphasized that she is all for things that provide the town and Council with resources, and potentially some money, for needed infrastructure improvements. Larson agreed, as everyone pays state taxes, that the Council should do what they can to get state dollars back into Coventry.

Thomas reminded that anything learned through the processes helps with the development of the town’s strategic plan, which is community driven.

Voting:

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

Against:

Abstain:

**9.B. 25/26-41: Consideration/possible action: Selection of health insurance program FY 27:**

**Motion:** I move that the Town Council select the Cigna Direct option as the next health insurance program, following the collapse of ECHIP.

By: Gallagher

Second: Kyer

Discussion: Wheaton followed up on 2 questions that were pending following the meeting with USI:

1. Are there reserves?

Drumm explained that there is a reserve, estimated to be about \$2.8M. However, it has to remain for any claims that come into the new year. The final amount remaining will be unknown until all claims have been submitted. Trahan commented that she believes the net amount to be \$1M.

Wheaton discussed that since the motion is to go to a self-funded Cigna Direct plan, we may need that \$1M if there are overages with claims. Gallagher stated that there is a pool, but she believes that in funding, they try to

cover all the anticipated health insurance costs for the following year. However, there have been times where they have allowed the reserves to dip.

Wheaton commented that the plans in general were around \$8.5M, except for the state plan that was \$10.2M. Wheaton continued bringing up points from the joint discussion with USI where Gallagher compared the plans based on cost, including HSA contributions and \$1.3M in state runoff. This ultimately puts the total cost for the state plan in line with the costs of the self-funded plans. Gallagher agreed and reminded that the state plan would end up being slightly cheaper. Wheaton also shared that even though the plan would be cheaper, there were concerns that the state's premiums would rise over time.

## 2. What are the penalties for leaving the state program?

Wheaton was curious if the town selected a 3-year duration with the state insurance program, and after 1 ½ years, the premium is increased 25% for the next year. Drumm explained that the penalty is 5%. Wheaton was curious if it was 5% of \$8.5M. He stressed that if the penalty is low, then the risk of massive rate increases is also low.

Gallagher explained that the risk of leaving the state program is more than the 5% fee, as the town will lose the buildup of reserves as well, should they decide to leave. She emphasized that there needs to be money in the bank to pay the claims.

Gallagher informed that the Board of Ed has voted to go with Cigna Direct, so the reserves are being held. If the town opted to go with the state plan, and needed to decide to jump out, would there need to be additional reserves built up. Wheaton agreed that the town would need to create a reserve if the town bailed out of the state plan since it is not self-funded.

Thomas also shared that there is a time crunch in making a decision. She explained that they cannot shift plans at this time, without negotiating with the unions, which there is not enough time to do so. She commented that the discussion at the finance meeting regarding this concluded with the suggestion to take this year and stick with Cigna Direct, in the meanwhile use the time to better investigate all the questions and talk with the employees/unions to get feedback.

Gallagher commented that she wrongly assumed that with selecting the state plan, the town would see the benefit of not paying all the HSA payments. She explained that this should be kept in mind when negotiating with the unions as employees may insist on the benefit be provided elsewhere. Hand added that there may be more things covered under the state plan, that are not covered by self-funded plans, reducing out-of-pocket costs. He noted this may be helpful during negotiations as well.

Hand continued that the time crunch is unfortunate but added that a benefit is that the employees are already used to it, and coverage will remain the same. However, he strongly agrees with looking into this further for the future. Larson agreed with looking into this further for cost purposes to the town, but also how it affects the families that are on this plan.

Wheaton suggested that insurance be looked into earlier next year. Thomas agreed and suggested it be put onto the Finance Committee agenda as a standing item.

Voting:

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

Against:

Abstain:

**10. Miscellaneous/Correspondence:**

**10.A. \* Board of Education: Minutes, 1/22/26 & 1/29/26; Agenda: Joint Finance/Fiscal Committee meeting: 2/10/26; Agenda: Board of Education, 2/12/26:**

**10.B. \* Fire/EMS and Police Department monthly statistics:**

**10.C. \* Public Hearing, Town of Bolton, March 11, 2026: Amendments to Zoning Regulations Article XVIII Signage:**

**11. Executive Session:**

- Cell Tower Contract

**Motion:** I move that the Town Council enter into Executive Session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 1-200(6)(E)-discussion of any matter which would result in the disclosure of public records or the information therein contained described in sub-section (b) of Section 1-210 with the following people in attendance all members of the Town Council (Lisa Thomas, Peter Larson, Matthew Kyer, Jon Hand, Robyn Gallagher, Julie Blanchard, and Mark Wheaton), Town Manager James Drumm, and Special Projects Coordinator Alex Taylor.

By: Blanchard

Second: Wheaton

Voting:

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

Against:

Abstain:

The Town Council entered Executive Session at 8:05 PM.

The Town Council exited Executive Session at 8:23 PM.

**12. Adjournment**

**Motion:** I move that the Town Council adjourn the meeting at 8:24 PM.

By: Kyer

Second: Wheaton

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote 8:24 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Nicole Archambault*

Nicole Archambault, Minutes Clerk

**PLEASE NOTE: These minutes are not official until approved by the Coventry Town Council at the next Town Council meeting. Please see the next Town Council meeting minutes for approval or changes to these minutes.**