

Manager's project update: January 18, 2022 meeting

Below please find a brief summary and update of on-going projects.

Highlights:

We have held a community test kit and mask distribution and a second one is planned for this week. We are rolling out a business mask and test kit program now. Our town team has done a great job in a tense atmosphere.

We are seeking prices for a well replacement on Plains Road due to salt contamination.

The foundation for the pavilion at Laidlaw is installed and we await the building kit to arrive. It will be done in time for the spring season.

A tentative agreement in principle has been reached between Coventry Microgrid LLC and Tritec, and a signed agreement is anticipated soon. Both parties' attorneys are working out the final language. CT DEEP will allow an extension of key benchmarks. The Town partners will need to reach an agreement by the end of the first quarter of 2022.

COVID has roared back and we are tightening our policies, collecting data on our employees' status, and helping the State distribute test kits. Youth sports and after school programs have been impacted. Many town employees have been in and out with occasional office closures.

We had a first demo of the Pavement Management study. I have asked the consultant to prepare a demo for the Council on Feb. 7th. It may be wise to at least consider a bonding question for roads with the budget. The demo will show how close we are to letting certain roads go from prevention mode to replacement mode. We also have several culverts needing replacement.

We were shortlisted for the State Trails grant, but that list still is oversubscribed, so we have been asked to reduce the state grant by at least 30%. We believe if we focus on repairing the drainage and reduce the amount of trail resurfacing we can still provide the connectivity which helped us score well. We have resubmitted and will hope for a positive outcome.

We now have all required authorizations from the State for the \$1.5 million Orchard Hills renovation project. Our team is trying to get the bids out as soon as possible.

ARP arts/culture grant requests are in process, and supplemental information has been requested of applicants. The review panel's recommendations should be ready for the

February Finance meeting to review and submit to the Council for their second meeting in February.

We received 3 quality submissions for grant-funded consulting services to assist the PZC on a State-mandated affordable housing study. We interviewed, and the panel selected SLR, which has a unique way of seeking community input. We have negotiated a final contract and work is underway.

Police received a Justice Assistance Grant for \$25,000 and the proposed uses were submitted by the 12/31 deadline.

Public Works/Engineering

LOTICIP grants: The Swamp Rd./Rt. 44 project is underway. Spazzarini Construction removed the house and started site clearing and road base work. During the winter months the overhead utilities will be relocated, allowing a quick start in spring. Materials will be ordered over the winter.

Todd Penney continues to work toward getting the plans and specs for the Community Connectivity grant for sidewalks on Main from Hemlock Point Lane to approximately Cheney Lane. This has slipped to a summer 2022 construction project. We are acquiring easements now. A historic survey has been completed and we have received clearance to proceed by the State Historic Preservation Office. The State has removed several trees on Main Street which were proposed for removal as part of our sidewalk project. This will decrease our project cost and allow a few more feet of sidewalk.

Preliminary design is complete for both the softball project and transfer station. Construction specifications are nearing completion with bidding planned for February and construction start in early spring.

At Creaser Park we have abandoned plans to fix the cabins. We are likely demolishing them instead. A meeting with DEEP was held on all park issues also including tree removal, future pond work, and options for nine more holes of disc golf. It was a productive first meeting with the need for additional input. Staff is working on alternative plans including crowd sourcing construction of a greenhouse with some Sustainable CT matching funds.

We are still waiting for authorization to select an engineer for the LOTICIP grant for the intersection of Swamp and South, including the South Street curves, and a dip in Swamp Road. Construction is hoped for the summer of 2023. The Council has funded a portion of the design fees. We have split the project into two phases: preliminary and bidding/construction to fund over two fiscal years. It is expected to be a significant amount since this is a \$3,000,000 grant. CRCOG is suggesting we have a public information meeting

at this stage. Due to lack of Town staff time we have extended Jacobson Engineering's contract to hold a public involvement meeting in February to keep this project moving.

Plans for the South Street road reconstruction and sidewalks near the Homestead have been submitted to the State for final review. All easements and paperwork have been filed. We believe bidding will be in the next few months for a spring start.

To repair the turf issue at the Miller Richardson football field, we were awarded a STEAP grant based on Anchor Engineering's report. We have State permits and have Anchor Engineering's bid specs, and CT DEEP permission to bid. The bid specs were fine-tuned to construct a practice softball facility in the rear left corner. It is now out to bid with for spring start.

The State preliminary design of the Hop River Road Bridge has reached the 90% design stage. The project has slipped to 2023 construction and the price increased. At this point it looks like we are \$91,000 short on our share of the match.

We are looking at several culvert replacements for the next Local Bridge grant round in spring of 2022. We are ready for grant submissions for these two expensive culverts on Bunker Hill and Parker Bridge Road, both of which are in our CIP budget. This grant, if we are awarded one or both, would pay 50% of construction. These two projects are now complicated by a pending Andover bridge replacement. We need to coordinate the three projects to assure access to houses and proper traffic detours. We also have to fully replace the Broadway culvert which will not be eligible for State funds. We will need money for design, and this will likely need to be added to a future bonding package.

The DEEP Microgrid project (\$4,000,000 grant) is in a holding pattern while Tritec and Coventry Microgrid negotiate a buyout. We understand the parties have reached an agreement in principle and hope to have a signed agreement soon. A DEEP deadline has been verbally extended due to this progress. Tritec will then fund the required Eversource interconnect plan and cost estimate for the transfer switch. The Office of Consumer Counsel will need to review pricing to Orchard Hills residents when available. We will need to restart negotiations for pricing and contract terms and will work on this through several task groups and all boards. It is scheduled that this will be completed by the end of April. Optimistically construction could start this summer.

We have hired B & L (formerly Anchor) to design a new transfer station next to the DPW facility using ARP funds. It will have concepts for future needs which may not be built now. We have approved a concept plan which we are now asking for cost estimates, tasks the town could do, and a possible phasing schedule.

Bill Watkins submitted a DERA grant application for a replacement diesel truck with one that pollutes less. We expect to hear in a couple months.

We have tested and interviewed several persons for a vacant DPW Maintainer I position and have made a conditional offer subject to completion of physical and drug test. Hopefully a start by February.

Public Safety: Police: I have asked former Chief Palmer to help with the initial stages of a Police Chief recruitment. Officer Jose “Joe” Pansini has started. He has two years of experience with the New London Police. We are still recruiting for one more officer to get to full staffing, and are trying to reserve a slot in the July Police Academy. Our new cruiser is in and being outfitted. We have decided to wait for a new Chief to be appointed to make the Sergeant appointments. With Jeff Spadjinke’s appointment as Acting Chief this leaves us with only two other sergeants. The Detective slot has been filled by Officer Kelsey Carpenter. The Department was issued a grant for \$25,000 for a Justice Assistance Grant and submitted our purchase plan by the December 31 deadline.

Fire EMS: The replacement fire truck has been ordered and will take another six months to build. Building improvements at the Merrow Road substation are now underway. With the completion of the first stage of the voluntary OSHA evaluation - the review of our policies and facilities, we will move on to additional areas of fire safety. Our alternative ambulance replacement has been ordered and confirmed with a possible June delivery. Medicare is also offering a modest rate increase which we are requesting. It will help, but not solve, the deficit in that fund due to going to paid 24/7 staffing. An order has been submitted to replace older (expired) Air Pacs.

Finance: Munistat presented a borrowing and refinancing schedule to the Finance Committee for April to fund the school roof replacement, softball fields and Library. We are now fine-tuning pricing for ventilation at the high school and middle school, and signed contracts to start a cost benefit study of considering a “renovate as new” option. It is a time-consuming but good evaluative process, which will identify and cost out future school needs at the high and middle Schools. This approach may allow the State to fund some of the HVAC and AC projects as well as already programmed (but not funded) replacements for windows and minor ADA work. So far the State has agree to share in the cost of the new roof top air intake work as part of the high school roofing project, which may lead to increased State cost sharing and avoid cutting open a new roof at a later date. Applications for roof funding were just re-submitted, and should be approved this month.

We continue to work with the Finance Committee and Town Council on the complicated American Rescue Plan funding planning. The final rules by the Treasury department opened many more options to consider. The FY 20/21 audit was presented to Finance and was a clean opinion. Efforts at updating online assessing data and mapping are also underway. We are

working with CROG on finding the best and most cost effective means to accomplish this. The Supplemental Motor Vehicle list was completed with revenues exceeding budget estimates.

Development group: We are now proceeding with the local agreements required to allow an extension to the Bolton Lakes sewer system. WPCA submitted an ARP grant request which is pending. We are meeting with developers and finance groups interested in that area. Hytone Farm is seeking building permits for an approved anaerobic digester. PZC has adopted a moratorium on cannabis retail sales and has appointed a subcommittee to work on whether to allow one store, and if so, under what conditions. Richard Roberts, our PZC attorney, met with the commission to outline the process. The PZC also met with the designer of a potential dentist office considering building next to Dollar General, and approved new regulations which would allow the building to move forward and allow parking in the rear. They have purchased the parcel and will now seek formal wetlands permits. The four-town Economic Vitality group is meeting to work out a regional events calendar and submitted an ARP grant for economic development consulting. They are looking at creating a logo. We have selected SLR to draft an affordable housing plan as required by State law. The study is anticipated to be complete by late spring. Cassidy Hill Vineyards has hired an engineer to prepare plans requested by the planning commission to come into compliance.

We have not received the grant paperwork for the joint Mansfield/Coventry Eagleville Fanwort project, but did just get the Hydrilla grant paperwork. The grant for the Nathan Hale and Bear Swamp trail was submitted and short listed. We revised our application to reduce the grant request by 30% which will allow the major components to be completed. If this revised application is approved the grant will pay for gravel, drainage and signage with in-kind service planned as our match.

Caprilands Estate is objecting to a short sale of Dr. Cook's house which reduced the amount of funds available to the estate. Any proceeds received will be governed by the State's Attorney General's office which liked the idea of setting up a trust to keep Adelma's legacy alive, and it is slowly moving forward.

We started negotiations for an extension of the Farmers' Market lease at the Hale Homestead with CT Landmarks.

HR issues:

We have conducted several negotiations sessions for all Town and School AFSCME groups for pension and now have revised cost estimates which will allow us to re-engage in January. We need to start negotiations with the Police and Public Works Union. Many new issues on COVID-19 leave, and OSHA regulations, are being digested and information continually monitored. We are gathering vaccination data and then will review next steps. We need some action from Conn OSHA before the Federal regulation would take effect assuming the Courts

do not override it. We are finalizing a Police Chief Recruitment plan which will include some community input. The Department will also be conducting a community survey in March as part of the reaccreditation process. The Sergeant promotion testing is complete with the process on hold for now until we have a new Chief. We interviewed for both a new Tax Collector and Building Official, and have made an offer for the Tax Collector and are holding second interviews next week for the building officials. An offer was been made and accepted for the DPW Maintainer I vacancy subject to a physical and drug test. We continue to discuss options for a replacement Cemetery Sexton.

Other projects:

The Walls Committee, Contractor, and Engineer walked through CHS to determine the best and most cost effective approach for each remaining wall which needs strengthening. We have signed an agreement with DiBlasi Engineering for this final design work which will include a construction cost estimate. Some additional funds for construction will be needed. CHS and GHR roof plans were updated, and with the additional funds from the November vote we are on track for a February/March bid. The HVAC approach for the high and middle schools has been agreed upon and the engineer has given the roof architect the locations of fresh air intakes to allow the work to be included in the roof plan bid. The full HVAC project is not yet ready for a referendum but we may be able to do the high school unit ventilators only with the existing funding if we include some ARP money. At some point the Building Committee would like an optional bonding question to consider air conditioning. Pricing for that option was presented at the committee's October meeting. We are proceeding with a "renovate as new" option which would cover additional items in our capital budget, and may fund HVAC including air with the State aid at 55%.

I just gathered some economic data for the developer of an intermediate medical center who may possibly be interested in locating in town. A local barber shop is hoping to open in Ackert Electric's building. Captain Hale Financial is open on RT 44. We continue to work with several businesses to get them in zoning, wetlands and building code compliance.

On the Library project we have preliminary plans and cost estimates and are still fine tuning to stay on budget. Finishing up design work on interior finishes, and other issues. Timing still looks like a February bidding and start of construction soon after.

We now have approval to use some CDBG re-spending funds to install touchless bathrooms and doors at the Senior Center and Community buildings at Orchard Hills. The project is just waiting for materials to arrive. We also were approved for ADA funds for our three museums in Town. I have met with the glass museum on a proposed scope. I have a proposal from an architect to oversee this work. We are verifying we can use the same CRCOG pre-bid contractor for these projects in addition to the other touchless project, and if so, it will simplify things. We will reach out to the other museums as time allows. We will pause a bit on these to allow a of couple housing rehab projects to be addressed. So likely in springtime.

We also worked to share federal arts funding with our local groups which had an end-of-December deadline. We have several applications, and staff needs additional information for a February Finance meeting and Council consideration at the second February meeting.

The EDC authorized an excellence in service award program for local employees which has started this week. It is in the newsletter on the back page with a QR code to gain access.

Human Services is reconvening their Advisory Committees and trying to reinvigorate the Human Rights Commission and staff the Community Conversations initiative. They are receiving generous food donations, and have geared up for energy assistance. They helped 34 families for Holiday and provided meals to all the residents at Orchard Hills. The juvenile review board is the busiest it ever has been. The Senior Center and transportation services are getting more active too.