

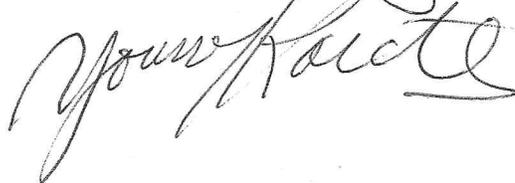
In support of funding an environmental study of the former bus garage on Fern Road

We are here to support the budget item to provide funding for an environmental-pollution study of the former bus garage on Fern Road. This could lead to action to ameliorate the pollution on this site and allow the town to safely take possession of this site. If the town takes possession of the site then the citizens of Mansfield will again be able to have tax revenues from it. Or if the site is not buildable, it could be made into a small passive park. This would greatly improve our neighborhood. We have asked Town Council to address this eyesore for years and urge you to take this important step.

Youssef and Ann Kouatly

98 Fern Road

April 15, 2015

April 15, 2014

I expect our town manager and our Board of education to put forward a responsible budget, not one with a 2.5 % increase. The cost of doing business, living, raising a family and retiring in the state of Connecticut has become too costly for many. In the past two decades 300,000 more people have moved out of Connecticut than have moved in. Small businesses have declined more than 2 % in the last 10 years; our state's economic growth is ranked the worst in the nation. Why? The spending and taxation are out of control. Let's not add fuel to the fire. Our town manager explains the increase is because the costs of goods and services have gone up. This is true, but where does it end? Our town leaders need to be good stewards of the tax payer's money. We have a contracting economy, contracting population and a reduction of school aged children; we can have a contracting budget here and now. We need to be proactive and prepare for these continuing trends. We must prepare for more cuts in UConn Pilot funds. We need a zero tax increase this year.

Brian Coleman

Centre St.

My name is John Hodgson. I am a school counselor and varsity ice hockey coach at E.O. Smith High School and a resident of 491 Wormwood Hill Road in Mansfield.

During the April 2 Budget Workshop, Ms. Moran of the council pointed out that there had been discussion last year about an outdoor Wilderness program that the town runs for some of our "at-risk" youths, and she inquired about that program. The Human Services director responded and confirmed that the Challenge Program isn't in the budget this year.

I am here to put a face on the Challenge Program, and share some concerns about its demise. As for my connection, I have been helping to lead the Challenge program for the past 16 years. But, my own tenure is dwarfed by that of Chuck Leavens, our veteran "at-risk" counselor at E.O. Smith (and a former Mansfield Youth Services Counselor). In fact, Chuck founded the program, and has been running it continuously for *37 years*. Since its inception, Challenge has been a town program funded through youth services.

To give a brief description, The Challenge Program is highlighted by a one week outdoor experience that primarily serves at-risk Mansfield youth, and has a therapeutic purpose at its core. Each year, Middle School and youth services personnel have identified 16 Mansfield students for involvement in the program-- 8 who have just finished 8th grade, and 8 who have finished 7th, 8 boys and 8 girls. Due to the nature of the program, we have purposely refrained from advertising or promoting it, and it has therefore remained relatively discrete. This allows town professionals to identify and subtly serve the neediest of our children.

After identifying and introducing the program to participants, an introductory evening is held for them and their families. Following a canoe clinic at Bicentennial Pond and the last day of school, the trip begins in Southwest Massachusetts with a four day, three night, 25-mile backpack along the Appalachian Trail and over four mountains. The kids carry in all of their food, clothes, and gear, and sleep under tarps that they "set up" themselves. The staff does the same. I must also say, as we meet many Georgia to Maine "through hikers" each year, they invariably marvel at the wonder of our program as our group of 20-22 trudges onward. We then move to a secluded group camping site, and spend two days canoeing on the Housatonic River, and a final day doing a rock-climbing workshop at St. John's Ledges in Kent. At the end of the rock climbing, students embark on the traditional 2-mile Challenge Run (some end up walking, but

that's okay!). At the finish line, there is a ceremony for a Challenge completed, and each kid is presented with a Challenge t-shirt, donated each year by the Lions Club).

I must tell you this is a VERY abbreviated version of the trip. Trying to describe an outstanding 37 year old program and share concerns about its future is tough to do in 5-10 minutes. Without going on here, I can tell you that it is truly extraordinary to watch these kids-- many who don't otherwise have anything close to this opportunity-- interact and develop confidence over the course of one week. They endure the challenge of heavy back packs, sore feet, midnight downpours, and long walks. They learn to canoe, and to trust themselves and motivate others climbing in a safe environment. We also utilize countless opportunities for individual and group reflection as we go through the week. Invariably, students reach the end of the trail much more confident and self-assured than they were when they started. In a very real way, Challenge shows them what they are capable of. They also become part of a caring, supportive group. Parents continually speak glowingly of the effect the experience has long after the trip on kids who really need it. Our safety record is excellent, as well.

Challenge also has a palpable, lasting effect as our students go through their adolescent years. At any given time, we have approximately 64 Mansfield students at E.O. Smith, many of whom would be considered "at-risk," with whom we share a special connection. It allows us to build authentic relationships. I cannot tell you how many times we have benefited from the "Challenge Connection" in our work with students at the high school as they navigate some of the issues of their adolescence.

As for the finances, the program has been budgeted at about \$10,000 per year. We are frugal, and value the financing we have. We use the same simple tarps year after year. We repair and employ the same, basic, years old backpacks and sleeping bags each summer. The budget pays for the professional and support staff that numbers from 5-7 total through the course of the trip. I believe our salary is fair and hard-earned, not extravagant. The budget also pays to feed the kids a basic menu of Challenge staples such as tuna noodle casserole, cereal, and lunchtime trail mix—nothing fancy. It pays for the rental of half of our canoes, and for Alex the climbing guide to get up at 3:00 a.m. and drive from Providence and run a great program for us year after year. As for Chuck Leavens himself, he is underpaid, and he doesn't care. The logistics of this venture are incredibly detailed and time consuming—and he runs a remarkably smooth program each year.

It was disconcerting to learn from the budget workshop of April 2 that financing for Challenge has been cut completely out NOT due to budget cuts, but largely in the form of a re-allocation. It is also disconcerting that this re-allocation is for programs that are clearly as yet undefined.

It was by accident that the Challenge Program came up in the conversation. Town Councilman Steve Kegler noticed an "other supplies" line in the 2014-15 Youth Services budget, and asked what it was. He pointed out that the "other supplies" line had "jumped" from \$2600 in last year's budget to \$12,650 in the current budget, a difference of \$10,500. Again, the annual Challenge budget has typically been \$10,000.

Ms. Schneider then confirmed that the department was "hoping" in the next year to do some "positive youth development," and she went on to describe some general "ideas", involving art supplies and potential library activities, for year-round programs that are clearly undeveloped at the present time. And, it was here that Ms. Moran inquired about the Wilderness program and asked about serving at-risk children.

I want to make clear that it is not my intention to put Ms. Schneider "on the spot" here. Obviously, she is new to her post-- and I don't fully know what condition she inherited it in. Likewise, her stated purpose of stretching resources to meet the needs of more kids year round is understandable and admirable. And, I don't for a moment question her good intentions. But, the dialog that took place in the workshop is the best communication that we in the Challenge Program have to go on as we try to understand the forces that are simply "wiping out" this well-established, effective program.

On the surface it would appear to make sense to run some set of year round programs that benefit more kids over a program for sixteen kids that meets for one week. But, it seems even more clear that when there is a proven program for at risk kids in place, with a 37-year history, run by the same well-known force for kids who started the program all of those years ago--and with the same level of energy and dedication-- we should at the very least be prepared to understand and evaluate that program before simply cutting it and "re-allocating" all of its funding for potential programs that are clearly to this point only in an "idea" phase.

I would also argue that the lingering effects of Challenge's immersive program far exceed the one week time-frame. I have no doubt that a survey of the 600 Challenge

graduates and their families would confirm this. And, as I stated earlier, in any given year there are about 64 kids at E.O. Smith that we share the challenge connection with.

Sadly, it is too late for this year. But, Challenge funding should be re-instated NOW for 2014-15. If there are concerns about any facet of the program, they should be addressed with Chuck Leavens. Such has not happened. If the town wishes to review the program, it should. I think it will be amazed. Regardless, until the time when such a review is completed, Challenge and what it does for kids has earned the benefit of the doubt. If the town feels that it no longer has the resources—after 37 years—to fund the program, then it should at least get creative and truly reach out to other stakeholders to ensure that this program, which helps meet the charge of many town agencies that serve our youth, can continue. Such stakeholders might include the Mansfield Board of Ed, Region 19, and possibly Recreation. Perhaps there are state grants. Please understand that these kinds of details are beyond the purview of our staff, yet they are essential to the program. In my view, if there is anything that has been missing in recent years from Challenge, it is that the town has unintentionally lost touch with something great that it has, and has not provided the necessary support. The town should embrace this program. It is a gem, it is ours, and it impacts the lives of vulnerable kids.

April 15, 2014

Dear Town Council,

Tonight you will be considering whether to accept a federal grant, with oversight CT DOT for \$495,100 for the Safe routes program, to construct a sidewalk from RTE 195 to the Southeast School on RTE 89, roughly 7/10ths of one mile. I hope you consider the following before you vote for this grant.

- At the time of the study there were 264 students enrolled at South East Elementary school, with only 30 students within walking distance to the school. At this time no children walk or bike to the school. While obviously there are major safety concerns with RTE 89 how many parents would allow a child aged 4-9 years to walk to any school anywhere?
- RTE 89 is a dangerous highway, how much of a buffer would the walk provide? Vehicles travel at a high rate of speed and would pose a hazard to people on the walk, for instance, just this past October a State Police cruiser careened off the road into some trees well off the traveled road on the proposed Safe routes walk.
- RTE 89 is a windy dangerous road, especially the Mansfield portion; the major safety concerns lie in the highway, building a walk won't alleviate the problems completely.
- There are many logistical obstacles that will create challenges that may or may not be overcome such as, the wetlands at the corner of RTE 195 and RTE 89 as well as topography, traffic barriers, stonewalls and historical properties. The alternate route of Centre ST poses just as many obstacles, such as the narrowness of the road, stonewalls, and historical zones.
- Federal grants aren't without strings attached. If there is any school consolidation that leads to the closure of Southeast School, some or the entire grant may have to be paid back. This would raise the cost of any new school project substantially. It seems that school

consolidation is still close in the mind of our superintendent Fred Baruzzi.

- The total estimated cost of the project is \$585,000 which \$90,000 is to be paid by the Mansfield taxpayer; the upkeep in my opinion if done correctly will far exceed \$1000 annually.

At this time I don't see how the need justifies the cost to the federal and local taxpayer.

Sincerely,

Brian Coleman

Centre ST.



*Town of Mansfield
Proclamation in Honor of World Book Night*

Whereas, the citizens of Mansfield stand committed to promoting the pleasure of reading for all members of the community, from middle- and high school students to families and retirees – and to any and all who may not have ready access to printed books; and

Whereas, World Book Night, a national celebration of Shakespeare's 450th birthday on April 23, 2014, promotes reading in this community and 6,000 communities across America;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that I, Elizabeth C. Paterson, Mayor of Mansfield, Connecticut, on behalf of the Town Council and the citizens of Mansfield do hereby call on the citizens of Mansfield to endorse World Book Night and encourage our community to support the 2014 World Book Night volunteers in their endeavor to deliver free paperbacks on April 23, 2014 to those without means or regular access to printed books.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have set my hand and caused the seal of the Town of Mansfield to be affixed on this 15th day of April in the year 2014.

Elizabeth C. Paterson
Mayor, Town of Mansfield