

MEMO

To: Town Council
CC: Town Employees
From: Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager
Date: March 11, 2024
Subject: **Town Manager's Report**

Below, please find my report concerning various items of interest to the Town Council, staff, and the community:

- As the Council is aware, public concerns about the condition of the unpaved section of Coventry Road have been increasing due to the road's lack of resilience to significant rain or snow melt events. At the request of the Town Manager, the Department of Public Works completed an analysis of road surfacing options relative to Coventry Road and five different options were presented during the Council's February 26 meeting. At the conclusion of the discussion during the February 26 meeting, the Council signaled an inclination to ultimately proceed an option that entailed paving the entire unpaved section of Coventry Road, but doing so in a manner that would entail minimal alteration to the existing problematic base with the exception of installing geotextile material before asphalt was applied. It was understood that staff would further analyze approaches for funding this work and present additional information to Council in the near future to finalize decision-making. Subsequent to the Council's February 26 meeting, the Town began hearing from additional residents expressing opposition to paving the unpaved section of Coventry Road and advocating for the Town pursuing/investing in approaches to significantly improve road surface conditions to address the expressed public safety concerns without ultimately paving the unpaved section of Coventry Road in the immediate future. This could include reconstructing the gravel road from the bottom up to establish a base that is more resistant to the effects of inclement weather and subsurface water that results from the challenging local site characteristics. The Department of Public Works will share its perspectives on the efficacy of this option during the Council's March 11 meeting.
- The Department of Public Works and a Town-hired contractor will be holding an informational meeting on March 13, 2024 at 6:00 pm in the Council Chamber of the Audrey P. Beck Building at 4 South Eagleville Road, Mansfield, Connecticut. The Town of Mansfield is seeking comments and feedback on the preliminary design of the Maple Road Reconstruction and Complete Streets Project that is proposing realignment and widening of portions of Maple Road as well as the addition of a multi-use trail on the western side of the roadway between South Eagleville Road and Spring Hill Road and on both sides of Spring Hill Road from Maple Road to Clover Mill Road. The department sent letters to all residents/abutters of the project.
- At the March 11 Finance Committee staff will be opening lines of communication with members relative to priority uses of the Town's remaining unobligated American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, which total roughly \$1.77 million of the original approximately \$7.54 million. Pending concurrence from the Finance Committee, this matter will subsequently be presented to the full Council. The Council will ultimately need to select specific projects for the purpose of obligating remaining funds before the end of 2024 or, as staff have previously mentioned, potentially funding certain capital improvement projects we are ready to move on – thus freeing up CNR funds for other things that we would have otherwise used ARPA to fund. It will be important for the Council to

authorize projects that are ready so that the funds can be properly encumbered by the December 31, 2024 deadline for obligation.

- This past week, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to pass the bipartisan Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, which included multiple member-directed funding requests submitted by Congressman Courtney. Among the community projects Congressman Courtney was able to secure funding for in the legislation was \$1 million toward the 10-ft wide multi-use trail that Town officials have been advocating to construct along the portion of CT-195/Storrs Road extending from the Four Corners to Tower Loop Road. As the pace of new development continues to accelerate in this part of town, the critical importance of the trail from a public safety standpoint continues to rise. Now that the appropriations package has been passed by the House, the Senate will take action on the legislation and we will continue to monitor the status of the bill. As a reminder, the total anticipated cost of designing and constructing the proposed trail is approximately \$3.5 million, leaving an estimated \$2.5 million in additional funds that the Town would need to secure from other sources (i.e., state and federal grants) beyond the \$1 million that is funded in the Consolidated Appropriations Act.
- As the Council was briefed on in 2023, the Town of Mansfield is eligible to apply for a Community Investment Fund (CIF) grant. This program is offered by the state of Connecticut and is being administered by the Department of Economic and Community Development. Under this program, which is highly competitive, the town may apply for a planning grant and request up to \$250,000 to plan “for capital projects including activities such as community engagement processes, feasibility studies, development of project plan and construction budget.” The Town continues to proceed with a facilities master planning process that has identified multiple areas of significant need. These include significant deficiencies and constraints associated with the Town’s existing senior center, municipal building, public safety facilities, and public works facilities. The Town has made considerable investment and progress in its facilities master planning process, including community engagement related to the project which is underway. At this time, \$225,000 in Council-approved funding (combination of the Town’s ARPA allocation and CIP funding) is available for appropriation/use during the third phase (Phase III) of the project, which would include additional community engagement services, commissioning of more advanced conceptual design work, cost estimation services, and community outreach/education prior to a possible associated bond referendum. In December 2023, the Council authorized submittal of a CIF grant application in the amount of \$250,000 for master planning work associated with the municipal services campus. These funds would be paired with the existing \$225,000 previously authorized for a combined total of \$475,000 in funding to perform this work. State Representative Haddad subsequently offered to help advocate for the Town’s CIF grant request in coordination with State Representative Boyd and State Senator Flexer. We are very happy to report that Rep. Haddad has received word from his legislator colleagues that the Town is expected to be awarded the requested grant, and the CIF Board has included reference to the project in the materials posted online for its March 12, 2024 meeting.
- This past week the Town Manager, Director of Planning and Development, and Executive Director of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership participated in a recurring monthly “staff-to-staff” meeting with senior UConn officials, including Nathan Fuerst (Vice President for Student Life and Enrollment), Robert Corbett (Interim Associate Vice President for University Planning, Design and Construction), and Pamir Alpay (Vice President for Research, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship). With Dr. Alpay present, the lion’s share of this month’s meeting involved a discussion about future development and expansion plans relative to the Innovation Partnership Building (IPB) and the UConn Tech Park more broadly. Given the additional workforce that UConn Tech Park expansion would generate, local planning efforts need to appropriately integrate these plans in order to ensure that residential housing and commercial (re)development aligns accordingly. Additional topics discussed included “The HUB” project (Wilmorite’s proposed new private dormitory on King Hill/N. Eagleville Road that would contain approximately 1,400 beds) and UConn end-of-year planning for Spring 2024.
- As the Council is aware, during its February 26, 2024 meeting, executives from Wilmorite (developer who has proposed building “The HUB” multi-family housing project on King Hill Road/N. Eagleville

Road) met with the Council during an executive session to discuss the project's financing as well as projected tax revenue scenarios. Valuable information was shared between the parties and Town staff and the Town Attorney have subsequently continued communication with representatives from Wilmorite with respect to interpreting how pertinent existing state statutes would possibly be applied to property tax abatements on qualifying multi-family housing projects.

- As the Town Council is aware, a private nonprofit organization called Mansfield Discovery Depot (MDD) has for many years operated an early-childhood educational facility and associated programs that is physically based in a Town-owned building located at 50 Depot Road. MDD provides full-day educational programs for families in northeastern Connecticut, including the towns of Mansfield, Ashford, Coventry, Tolland, Willington and Windham. Accredited by NAEYC and licensed by the State of Connecticut, MDD is open year-round, offering infant and toddler care, and preschool classrooms. Through the State's Child Day Care program grant, the Town receives financial assistance for the provision of daycare services being offered by MDD. Under this program, the Town sub-contracts for daycare services with MDD. The Town and MDD have an operating agreement outlining the terms under which MDD provides licensed child daycare services to the Town at the Town's facility on 50 Depot Road. MDD has been providing service at its current location for thirty years. In November 2023, MDD approached Town staff and then later the Town Council to express an interest in applying for an Early Childhood Facilities Construction and Renovation Grant in the amount of \$500,000 through the state of Connecticut. One of the purposes of the grant is to increase capacity for infant and toddler childcare slots. With authorization granted by the Council during its November 27, 2023 meeting, MDD ultimately applied for a grant to build an addition onto the Daycare Facility. More specifically, the project entails constructing new classroom space to allow MDD to expand capacity by providing 16 additional infant slots at the Center. MDD leadership believes the proposed facility expansion is needed to meet the current and projected future needs of families in Mansfield and neighboring communities. MDD currently has 48 infant/toddler slots and 70 pre-school slots. If the grant is awarded and the addition constructed, MDD estimates that their total number of infant and toddler slots will increase from 48 to 64. Although a formal grant award announcement has not yet been made, the MDD Board of Directors has received preliminary indications that a grant for this purpose is forthcoming. The grant does not require any local matching funds. However, consideration should be given to the Town's future responsibilities for maintaining the additional space that would be constructed as part of the proposed addition. An initial budgetary estimate for the project is \$760,000, including contingency. If the grant is awarded, further discussion will need to occur regarding the gap in construction funding and future maintenance responsibilities of the Town prior to any acceptance and appropriation of the grant award.
- Earlier today the Town Attorney transmitted a written opinion memorandum to all members of the Town Council in regards to a question posed following the February 26, 2024 Council meeting regarding the constitutionality of the Town Council requesting that members of the public provide their name and address when speaking during a Council meeting.
- The Town Manager's proposed FY 2024/25 budget will be presented to the Town Council as part of its regular business meeting on March 25, 2024. As with every year, we continue to focus on finding ways to maintain or selectively/strategically enhance the quality of the service we provide or high-value projects we complete while finding ways to control cost and overall budget growth. Favorable budgets for our two public school districts (i.e., Mansfield Board of Education's recent adoption of a level budget for FY 2024/25 and Regional School District 19's proposed budget includes only a 1.11% increase in the Mansfield-specific contribution/allotment due to a slight decline in enrollment) are positive starts. While level funding for the municipal budget in FY 2024-25 may not be possible, these budgets, combination with the projected increases in State Aid (based on the Governor's recently released proposed budget will help the Town stabilize – and potentially even reduce – the mill rate.
- During its January 8 meeting, the Town Council deliberated on goals for FYs 2025 and 2026. Materials pertaining to the *Mansfield Tomorrow: Plan of Conservation and Development* and the

Council's FY 2025 & 2026 goals were reviewed by Council members in advance of the meeting. Based on the substantial and wide-ranging input provided during this session, staff developed proposed draft goals for the Council's consideration that were discussed as a planned agenda item at the Council's January 8 meeting and presented this updated language to the Council during its February 13, 2024 meeting. Given the late hour in which the subject was being introduced during the February 13 meeting, Council elected to form an ad hoc committee consisting of Mayor Moran and Councilors Bruder and Kueffner to complete final revisions to the draft goals and objectives and present the new language to the Council at a future meeting. The proposed final iteration of the Town Council FY 2025 & FY 2026 Goals and Objectives will be presented to the Council for its consideration during tonight's meeting. Council-adopted goals will ultimately be incorporated into the FY 2024/25 budget book.

- This past weekend, March 9th and 10th, Mansfield hosted a major regional event known as Eastern Connecticut Maple Fest organized by the Windham Region Chamber of Commerce. Organizers estimate that about 1,800 visitors attended the Festival, despite the cold, windy weather both days and rain on Saturday. Nearly 20 food trucks and more than 70 exhibitors provided foods and other items for sale, as well as games and activities for children. The Town and the Chamber will debrief on the event to discuss logistics and a plan for the coming year, but a major outdoor event in Downtown Storrs in March is a positive attraction from which many local organizations can benefit with the benefit of advance planning that was not possible this year.
- *Northwest Mansfield Vision and Strategy Plan*- On March 18, 2024, FHI Studio will provide an update on the plan to the Mansfield Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC). Staff and FHI Studio have been reviewing the community input and drafting vision, goals, and actions based on the community input received this past fall and winter. There will be a presentation to receive public input on the plan this spring. Progress on the plan is available at www.mansfieldtomorrow.org/nw-neighborhood-plan.
- *Zoning Regulatory Updates*- On March 4, 2024, PZC reviewed a new DRAFT and provided feedback on the new regulations for multi-family developments developed by Tyche Planning and Policy Group. There is still more work to do and there will be more opportunity for public comment, but this draft provides a framework from which to work.
- *Affordable Housing*- At the March 7, 2024 meeting of the Affordable Housing Committee, the Mansfield Nonprofit Housing Development Corporation (MNHDC) presented a high-level concept for the redevelopment of Holinko Estates. This concept includes adding more affordable units to the existing property and the renovation of the 35 existing units. The MNHDC will be coming to the April meeting of the Affordable Housing Committee with a more detailed proposal.
- Department head searches/recruitments:
 - Finalist interviews for the vacant Fire Chief position are complete and, following conclusion of additional vetting, a conditional offer is being prepared for the preferred candidate.
 - Applications for our vacant Human Services Director position continue to be received (<https://www.mansfieldct.gov/353/Job-Opportunities>) and first round interviews with qualified candidates are commencing later this week.
- We are in the process of conducting a recruitment for Firefighters/EMTs, both full- and part-time. We currently have one full-time vacancy. A written examination is occurring this week, and an oral panel will be conducted later this month. We look forward to building a certified list of qualified candidates from this process.
- *Mansfield Elementary School Project- Resolution of Pending Claims*: Legal negotiations with Newfield Construction (general contractor) relative to outstanding claims associated with the Mansfield Elementary School construction project have been progressing. The Town recently transmitted an updated proposal that we hope will bring about final resolution to the matter. If Newfield Construction does not accept the terms as laid out in the Town's proposal, we anticipate moving forward with alternative remedies as prescribed in the contract.

- *Mansfield Elementary School Project- Water Treatment:* The Town has been working closely with Weston and Sampson (engineering firm) to design what is referred to as an optimal corrosion control treatment (OCCT) system to mitigate the slightly elevated levels of copper that continues to be present in the water sampled at MES. It should be noted that the raw source water drawn directly from the two drilled wells (Wells A and B) is potable and meets all requirements for drinking water. Because the raw water is not showing elevated copper levels, the elevated copper concentrations present in samples taken from fixtures inside the building signal that copper continues to leach from the building's copper piping. The CT Department of Public Health must first approve the design of an OCCT system before we can proceed with implementation; the plan was submitted to CT DPH some time ago and continues to be under review by the state. Weston and Sampson has been regularly checking in with CT DPH on the status of the agency's review/approval of the submitted plan. Once we have an approved plan, the Town and MBOE will proceed with implementation and the precise timeframe for installation will be tailored so as to avoid unnecessary disruption to students and staff. Finally, it is important to note that students, staff, and visitors have access to safe drinking water within the building using either bottled water stations or filtered drinking fountains which are tested twice a month.
- *Mansfield Middle School Roof Project-* We have received a certificate of occupancy from the Building and Housing Inspection Department for the Mansfield Middle School Roof. The MMS Roof Committee met last week, and is meeting again this week to release remaining payments to our vendors and consultants as this project approaches final completion and closeout.
- *Historic Building Repairs-* Staff met with representatives from the Historical Society last week regarding the upcoming grant-funded renovations to Old Town Hall and its adjacent administrative building. Staff and members of the Historical Society are meeting with the architects this week to further review the proposed scope of work associated with the project. We anticipate going out to bid shortly, and look forward to the renovations occurring during the upcoming construction season.
- The Town Manager attended a "Legislative Update" meeting of the Capitol Regional Council of Governments (CRCOG) that entailed CRCOG representatives conveying the organization's FY 2024 legislative agenda to House Speaker Ritter and other key state legislators.
- The Town Manager attended the latest meeting of the CT Conference of Municipalities' (CCM) Legislative Affairs Committee where the status of the organization's FY 2024 legislative priorities and pending legislation of potential concern to municipalities was discussed.
- The April/May issue of the Town's bimonthly electronic newsletter will be published on April 1. The February/March issue was published on February 2 and can be accessed [here](#).
- The Town Manager's most recent monthly appearance on WILI-AM with Wayne Norman took place on March 1 and can be accessed [here](#).
- The nomination period for the Taste of Mansfield Champion Awards is open now through March 22. The program works to recognize those individuals and businesses within the Mansfield community that advocate for local food and agriculture. Nomination can be submitted online through the [Taste of Mansfield website](#).