

MEMO

To: Town Council
CC: Town Employees
From: Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager
Date: March 25, 2024
Subject: **Town Manager's Report**

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

- I will be presenting the Town Manager's comprehensive FY 2024/25 operating and capital budget recommendations to the Town Council during its March 25, 2024 business meeting. The proposed budget aims to maintain and enhance the exceptional level of municipal services we offer the public while requesting additional funding to increase staffing capacity in the areas of public safety and public works, as well as infrastructure projects. We are projecting that increases in non-tax revenues will help fund these additional investments while still enabling a slight reduction in the mill rate. 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 1.1% increase in the Mansfield-specific contribution/allotment due to a slight decline in enrollment) have also made it possible to contemplate a mill rate reduction in FY 2024/25.
- Mayor Toni Moran and the Town Manager were invited to join Mansfield Middle School (MMS) students and district leaders for a roundtable discussion last Monday, March 18 hosted by Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz, Department of Children and Families (DCF) Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly, and State Department of Education (SDE) Deputy Commissioner Sinthia Sone-Moyano. MMS students were featured in the conversation about examining social connection in schools in light of the data about the "epidemic of loneliness" among people of all ages. The roundtable highlighted the culture and programs at MMS that emphasize the Whole Child, anti-bullying efforts, the effects of social media on young people, SDE and DCF programs, and more. State Representatives Gregg Haddad and Patrick Boyd, Board of Education Chair Kathleen Ward, Superintendent Peter Dart, MMS Principal Larry Barlow, Director of Student Support Services Dr. Shamim Patwa, and School Counselor Eileen Melody also participated in the conversation which was covered by media.
- The Town Manager attended the latest quarterly luncheon of the CT Town and City Management Association (CTCMA), which featured a presentation made by CTDOT Deputy Commissioner Laoise King regarding current/upcoming infrastructure funding opportunities and state initiatives underway to address public safety on state/local roadways.
- The Town Manager will attend the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CROG) Policy Board meeting scheduled for Wednesday, March 27.
- The Department of Public Works and a Town-hired contractor held an informational meeting on March 13, 2024 in the Council Chamber to obtain comments and feedback on the preliminary design of the Maple Road Reconstruction and Complete Streets Project. More specifically, this project 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. Prior to the public informational meeting, the department sent letters to all residents/abutters of the project and the session was well-attended by members of the public.

- The bipartisan Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, that was signed into law approximately two weeks ago 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. 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 will need to secure from other sources (i.e., state and federal grants) beyond the \$1 million that is funded in the Consolidated Appropriations Act. The Town is preparing to request additional funding for this project via the latest round of “community projects” being solicited by Congressman Courtney and U.S. Senators Blumenthal and Murphy.
- I am happy to report that the Community Investment Fund (CIF) Board voted during its March 12 business meeting to officially recommend that a \$250,000 grant be awarded to the Town of Mansfield for the continuation of the municipal facilities master planning project, which will include additional community engagement and conceptual design services. Now that the project has been favorably voted on by the CIF Board, the Governor will call a meeting of the State Bond Commission within 60 days of the Board meeting to take final action on all CIF projects that were recommended this round. This program, which is highly competitive, is offered by the state of Connecticut and is being administered by the Department of Economic and Community Development. 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. Grant funds would be paired with the existing \$225,000 previously authorized for a combined total of \$475,000 in funding to perform this work. The efforts of State Representative Haddad, in coordination with State Representative Boyd and State Senator Flexer, to support this important project are greatly appreciated.
- *Northwest Mansfield Vision and Strategy Plan-* On March 18, 2024, FHI Studio provided an update on the plan to the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC). The Town Manager and members of the Town Council also participated in the discussion. FHI Studio’s project manager, Rory Jacobson, provided an overview of community engagement thus far and presented a draft vision statement and goals. The Community Engagement Summary has been posted at www.mansfieldtomorrow.org/nw-neighborhood-plan. A draft plan will be presented in early-May and there will be ample opportunity for public feedback.



- *Development Activity:* Staff continues to update the [Development Activity](#) portion of the Planning and Development website.
- *Changes to Mansfield’s Wetlands Regulations:* This past winter, in its ongoing effort to protect Mansfield’s Natural Resources, the Inland Wetland Agency (IWA) revised its regulations concerning development immediately surrounding wetlands. Mansfield now requires that existing buffers of

natural vegetation around wetlands and watercourses be maintained out to a distance of 50 feet. To conduct activities in these buffers for purposes other than invasive species control, agriculture, or public safety is now deemed a “significant impact” under the regulations. This “raises the bar” by requiring an applicant who is removing such a buffer to appear before the Agency to demonstrate that there is no “prudent or feasible” way to avoid reducing the wetlands buffer for a proposed project. In enacting these changes, the Mansfield IWA aims to ensure that critical habitat is protected while also ensuring that property owners continue to enjoy the right to maintain property.

- “*Advance*” Voting Options for the Presidential Preference Primary: Absentee ballots are now available from the Office of the Town Clerk for the April 2, 2024 Presidential Preference Primary. Early voting is also available in the Council Chambers at the Town Hall only on:
 - March 26, 2024- 10:00a.m. to 6:00p.m.
 - March 27, 2024- 10:00a.m. to 6:00p.m.
 - March 28, 2024- 10:00a.m. to 6:00p.m.
 - March 30, 2024- 10:00a.m. to 6:00p.m.

Residents may vote in person on April 2 at their designated polling places from 6:00a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

- *Cultural District Opportunity*: The Town of Mansfield, in partnership with the Cultural Coalition, and under the leadership of Mansfield’s Economic Development Commission (EDC) concluded a three-session community engagement process to gather input about potentially establishing a State designated Cultural District in Mansfield. Per the Cultural Coalition, a Cultural District is “...a specific area of a city or town identified by the municipality that has a number of cultural facilities, activities and/or assets – both for profit and nonprofit. A walkable, compact area is easy for visitors to recognize. It is a center of cultural activities – artistic and economic. It is a place in your city/town where community members congregate, and visitors may enjoy those places that make a community special.”

The Town Manager has met with MDP staff, representatives from the Town’s Economic Development Commission, and the Cultural Coalition to discuss next steps after a very positive response from the sessions about the prospect of a Mansfield Cultural District that includes Downtown Storrs and the UConn campus. The sessions also highlighted the many cultural assets in other parts of Mansfield which can also be showcased. The goal is to bring a proposed ordinance to develop a Cultural District to the Town Council later this spring

- *Public Art ARPA Grants*: Partnership and Town staff are working with three artists to develop a public art trail adjacent to Route 89 in Mansfield Center. The Town Council authorized funding for an Arts Recovery Fund Program as part of the ARPA funds the Town received. Last year, a Request for Concepts was released for public art proposals with three artists chosen by a staff team and local artists with review by the Town’s Arts Advisory Committee of the three preferred concepts. Work has begun with the artists to develop final proposals. A sculpture garden will be installed in front of the white fence at the Mansfield Public Library, signs depicting the flora and fauna of Mansfield will line the sidewalk from Southeast Park to the Library, and a mural is in the early stages of being developed. The goal is for the art to be installed by this summer.
- *Implementation of Wayfinding Signage Plan*: The first phase of implementation of the Wayfinding Signage Plan is underway. After a competitive bidding process, Forge was chosen to develop the new wayfinding signs for Mansfield parks and Downtown Storrs. The Town’s sign designer, Merje, is assisting with construction administration. The signs are currently in the shop drawing phase. The goal is for the signage to be in place by late-summer.
- Department head searches/recruitments:
 - Finalist interviews for the vacant Fire Chief position are complete and, following conclusion of additional vetting, a conditional offer has been extended to the preferred candidate.
 - Finalists have been identified for the Human Services Director position. Finalists will be visiting Mansfield the week of April 15th.

- The written examination for Firefighter/EMTs was recently completed, and interviews are being held later this week. We are working towards completing this recruitment and creating a certified list. Once completed we will be able to utilize the certified list to fill the full-time and part-time vacancies.
- Management will begin negotiating successor collective bargaining agreements with the two bargaining units represented by the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) in late-spring. Staff is planning to hold a non-noticed meeting with the Town Council following its May 13th meeting to discuss strategy and negotiations related to bargaining with these groups.
- The Department of Public Works started the Town Hall parking lot expansion project associated with the new pickle ball facility (largely private funded) that is being constructed adjacent to the Mansfield Community Center. Thus far, Town crews have completed excavation and base installation. New pavement will be applied when the asphalt plant opens later this spring. Department personnel also backfilled around the new pickle ball courts prior to upcoming fencing installation.
- *Mansfield Elementary School Project- Resolution of Pending Claims:* We believe that legal negotiations with Newfield Construction (general contractor) relative to outstanding claims associated with the Mansfield Elementary School construction project are nearing resolution and that the Town Council may be in a position to ratify the terms of a proposed negotiated settlement as early as the meeting of March 25. If both parties are not able to ratify the current tentative agreement, 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 Elementary School- Radon Mitigation:* On February 28th, 2024, individuals and families with children attending Mansfield Elementary School were notified by Superintendent Dart that recent radon tests indicated that 15 rooms in the school were above action levels. After the installation of fans to vent radon gas, the rooms were re-tested by Air Chek, Inc. An independent report issued on March 21, 2024, which was included with the letter, showed that all 15 rooms are now below the action levels of 4.0 picocuries per liter (pCi/L) and meet state safety standards. Per Connecticut General Statute § 10-220(d)(2), schools are required to annually inspect and evaluate indoor air quality, that includes radon levels. Additional information about radon and the state's school testing program efforts can be found here: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DPH/Radon-Program/schools-pamphlet-legal-rev-2023.pdf>

- *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.
- Significant progress was achieved on the ARPA-funded HVAC improvements to the Mansfield Public library when the exterior AC unit was delivered and installation commenced this past Friday, March 22. This project will be instrumental in rectifying problems/challenges the facility has experienced with respect to maintaining proper air balance and good humidity in the high humidity months.
- 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 next monthly appearance on WILI-AM with Wayne Norman will take place on April 5.
- The Mansfield Downtown Partnership recently finalized its summer 2024 events schedule, which is separately enclosed.





2024 PARTNERSHIP EVENTS

SUMMER STROLL

Thursday, May 30
All around Downtown Storrs
Free & open to everyone
downtownstorrs.org/summerstroll

SUMMERTIME SATURDAY PUPPET SHOWS

Presented with the Ballard Institute & Museum of Puppetry
July - Dates, Times TBA
On Betsy Paterson Square
Free & open to everyone

SUMMER CONCERTS on the SQUARE

Thursdays in June & July*
On Betsy Paterson Square
Free & open to everyone
mansfieldmusic.org
**No concert on July 4*

CELEBRATE MANSFIELD FESTIVAL

Saturday, September 28
All around Downtown Storrs
Free & open to everyone
downtownstorrsfestival.org

CELEBRATE PRIDE

Presented with Town of Mansfield
Friday, June 7
On Betsy Paterson Square
Free & open to everyone
mansfieldct.gov/pride

TRICK-OR-TREAT

Saturday, October 26
All around Downtown Storrs
Free & open to everyone
downtownstorrs.org/halloween

JOHN E. JACKMAN TOUR de MANSFIELD

Saturday, June 8
Begins & ends at Mansfield Community Center
Registration required
Registration fee for riders 18+
mansfieldct.gov/biketour

WINTER WELCOME

Saturday, December 7
All around Downtown Storrs
Free & open to everyone
downtownstorrs.org/winterwelcome

Find more downtown fun on our event calendar at:

downtownstorrs.org

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