

## MEMO

**To:** Town Council  
**CC:** Town Employees  
**From:** Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager  
**Date:** April 22, 2024  
**Subject:** **Town Manager's Report**

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

- The Town Council's annual budget review season is drawing to a close for FY2024/25. A budget workshop focusing on "flagged items" will take place immediately prior to the Council's regular meeting this evening and the Council is scheduled to take final action in adopting a budget on April 25 (Thursday). The detailed budget review calendar can be reviewed [here](#). 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 have also made it possible to plan for a 1.0 mill (3.2%) reduction in the mill rate for FY 2024/25.
- After 22 years of dedicated and admirable service, Cynthia van Zelm will be leaving her role as Executive Director of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership. She the very first professional paid staff member of the Partnership. Ms. van Zelm was instrumental in the planning, development, and implementation of the Downtown Storrs project. Her tenacious advocacy assisted Town leadership in securing more than \$26M in state and federal funds for the buildout of the various public infrastructure components of Downtown Storrs. Downtown Storrs has created a vibrant and transformational space for our community's benefit. Cynthia's work leaves a legacy that will benefit our community for generations to come. I want to thank Cynthia for her vision, hard work, and commitment to our community. I wish her well in her next chapter. She will be greatly missed.
- During the Town Council's April 22, regular business meeting, Cynthia van Zelm, outgoing Executive Director of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership, Inc., will provide the Council with an update on the programs, operations, and initiatives of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership with an eye toward the future.
- Steve Ferrigno (Chair) and Kristin Dilaj (Vice Chair) of the Economic Development Commission (EDC) will provide the Council with an update on work completed by Town's Economic Development Commission since the Commission's presentation to the Council in April 2023, as well as speak to its current work plan, and its activities going forward.
- Sergeant Merrill recently informed the Town Manager that, after approximately two years of service to the Town of Mansfield, he will be stepping down from his role as the Supervisor of the Mansfield Resident Trooper Office (RTO) to accept a promotion to Lieutenant. Sergeant Merrill's promotion will be effective at the end of the month. Sergeant King, who served as the Supervisor for the Mansfield RTO immediately prior to Sergeant Merrill, will assume responsibilities for managing the RTO until such time as a permanent successor is named by CT State Police leadership.

- Following the Town Council's vote to authorize this action, the Town submitted a funding application for a Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant earlier this month. The Town's SAFER grant application specifically requests funding to cover the wages and benefits for two additional full-time firefighter/EMTs. Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services presently operates with full-time personnel working one of four 24-hr shifts (meaning a given member works a 24-hour shift, is off for 72 hours barring the need to call a member back, and then the 24-hr/72-hr cycle repeats itself). The Town Manager's proposed FY 2024/25 operating budget recommends adding two (2) full-time firefighter/EMTs. If the Town Manager's proposal is adopted, and if a SAFER grant is awarded, the total number of full-time positions would increase to 24 (adding one new FT firefighter to each of the four duty groups/shifts), which would double full-time staffing for Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services within just over a decade.
- Earlier this month, the Town submitted a request for additional funding for \$2.5 million through the latest round of "community projects" being solicited by U.S. Senators Blumenthal and Murphy. This would facilitate building 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 Council was previously informed, the bipartisan Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, that was recently signed into law, 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 multi-use trail. As the pace of new development continues to accelerate in this part of town, the critical importance of the trail continues to rise to ensure public safety. However, given that the total anticipated cost of designing and constructing the proposed trail is approximately \$3.5 million, it will be essential for the Town to secure at least \$2.5 million in additional funds in order to make this project come to fruition. We anticipate it will be several months before any updates on the status of this supplemental federal funding request are available.
- *Northwest Mansfield Vision and Strategy Plan*- The Community Engagement Summary has been posted at [www.mansfieldtomorrow.org/nw-neighborhood-plan](http://www.mansfieldtomorrow.org/nw-neighborhood-plan). A draft plan will be presented in May and there will be many opportunities for public feedback.
- *Development Activity*- Staff continues to update the [Development Activity](#) portion of the Planning and Development website.
- *2025 Mansfield Tomorrow Plan*- The request for proposals (RFP) for the 2025 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) is expected to be released this week. The 2025 *Mansfield Tomorrow* plan will include robust community engagement process and will incorporate and build upon the goals, strategies, and actions from the NW Mansfield Vision and Strategy Plan, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and the Facilities Master Plan, among other relevant planning documents.
- The Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) continues to work with Tyche Planning and Policy Group on substantive updates to the zoning regulations relative to future multi-family housing projects. The PZC is refining a new approach to the multi-family applications, which includes a Planned Housing Development District. This proposed regulation would require applicant to follow the following procedure:
  - Pre-Application Staff Review
  - Conceptual Development Review
  - Master Development Plan Zone Change Application
  - Public Hearing
  - Site Plan Application no public hearing
  - Commission Decision
- The consultant, 110%, Inc., that the Town retained to help develop a comprehensive Mansfield Parks and Recreation (MPR) Master Plan and Financial Sustainability Strategy, will be meeting with senior staff early next week to review the latest/updated version of the draft plan. We anticipate that, following the consultant's efforts to incorporate final input from staff, the master plan and financial sustainability strategy will be completed within the next couple of weeks. The plan will be ready for

presentation to the Town Council during the month of May (on a roughly parallel path with the adoption of the FY 2024/25 budget and updated 5-year Capital Improvement Plan).

- The Town's consultant, CivicBrand, who has served as the lead on the ongoing community engagement work associated with the municipal facilities master planning project recently finalized the community values based on public feedback, and they are now working with Town staff to develop a scoring system that can be applied to myriad potential future facility construction/improvement projects based on those values. Once the scoring system has been developed, CivicBrand will finish the draft report, which will be available for public comment. We will then incorporate any public feedback we receive into the final report and facilities scoring system.
- Historical Building Repair Project- Staff continues to work with the architectural firm assigned to the grant-funded Historical Society building renovation project. Bid specification documents are due from the firm. Once received, the Town will proceed to issue a request for proposals (RFP) for the renovations to our historic Town Hall Buildings located at 954 Storrs Road. Renovations are expected to occur during this construction season.
- Through a Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) regional bid, the Town selected the firm of Daniel Penn Associates to conduct our initial diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) organizational assessment survey that was included in the FY24 approved budget. Staff from the Town Manager's Office/HR has a project meeting with Daniel Penn later this week. The survey will be distributed to members of our larger leadership team (approximately 25 individuals) the week of May 20, and the project report is expected in mid-June.
- 2024 Legislative Session Updates-
  - *Appropriations*- In a somewhat unusual/unexpected move, the Appropriations Committee did not recommend making formal adjustments to the second year of the 2024-2025 biennial budget earlier this month. Legislative leaders have indicated that adjustments to the planned \$26 billion budget may still occur with additional resources being made available to provide increased assistance to higher education, non-profit service providers and mental health services, but these adjustments will not increase the overall spending levels. Details on how much increased aid to these priorities, or where the funding will come from, have not been determined at this time. Legislative leaders had previously indicated a desire to increase spending by about \$300-\$400 million, but were constrained by the fiscal guardrails that were renewed at the beginning of the 2023 legislative session. Additionally, while the budget guardrails have created a structural \$300 million surplus, sales tax revenues are projected to be \$250 million below what was anticipated and expenses are going to be higher than projected, which created some budget deficiencies that would have had to be addressed had a formal midterm budget been presented. Governor Lamont and Republican leaders have been clear in their opposition to any plans to adjust the current fiscal guardrails, which they credit as creating the current situation that has seen multiple years of state budget surpluses, the opportunity to pay down unfunded pension liabilities and reducing bonded indebtedness. The fiscal guardrails cannot be changed without a two-thirds vote of the legislature. The Appropriations Committee did approve numerous bills including [SB 356](#) AAC The Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Fund, which would increase the municipal allocation by \$91 million and [HB 5212](#) AAC Education Funding, which would make further recommendations on the allocation of the \$150 million in education enhancement funding adopted by the legislature.
  - *Finance*- Earlier this month, The CT Conference of Municipalities (CCM) testified during a Finance Committee public hearing in support of [HB 5515](#) AA Establishing the Municipal Employees Retirement Commission and Concerning the Municipal Employees' Retirement System. The proposal would establish the Municipal Employees Retirement Commission (Commission) and require the Comptroller to offer a defined contribution retirement plan. Currently, the voice of municipal employers is missing in the governance structure. The formation of the Commission in HB 5515 is intended to balance the interests of municipal

employers and municipal employees, and will provide a governance structure that is more reflective of CMERS members and its enrollees. It is anticipated the Commission will have the authority to develop and implement new plan design options for CMERS, which is critical to the long-term stability of CMERS. Without this ability to create new tiers within CMERS, member towns will continue to be burdened by escalating and unsustainable costs to fund their pension plans and non-member municipalities or municipal entities are unlikely to enroll their employees in CMERS. In addition, CCM is supportive of the language that requires the Comptroller to design a defined contribution plan. Many municipal employers already offer defined contribution plans and this complements the desire of municipalities to offer retirement plan designs that work for their respective town or city.

- *Environment-* The Environment Committee proposed legislation this year to address PFAS contamination in Connecticut. [SB 292](#) AAC PFAS (1) prohibits the use of PFAS in certain products by January 1, 2027, and (2) provides both municipalities and school districts with grants or reimbursements to test for the presence of PFAS contamination in drinking water supplies and to remediate any contamination. CCM testified in support of a bill that made it through the Committee process and onto the Senate calendar.
- *Planning and Development-* The Committee met last week to vote out bills referred from other Committees, including [HB 5144](#) AAC The Assignment of Certain Liens. CCM has formally opposed this bill, which reduces the interest on any tax liens filed by a municipality that have been assigned by the municipality from 18% to 12% beginning in FY25. The logic behind the delinquent interest rate is to encourage on-time payment of taxes on which the financial health of municipalities depends, while compensating towns and cities for the financial loss that occurs from not having revenue paid in a timely manner. It is important to note that the 18% is simple interest or 1.5% per month, not compounding interest like a credit card. CCM has stated it opposes lowering the interest rate to 12% due to how this action could restrict a municipality's option to sell tax liens to recoup outstanding debt and ultimately fund their budget. The bill passed out of Committee and will head to the House floor.
- We are excited to announce that a candidate has been selected to fill the lone remaining full-time Firefighter/EMT vacancy, which will bring Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services to 20 full-time members. A certified list of qualified candidates has been created, of which we will have the option to fill future full-time and part-time vacancies (including the propose two additional FT Firefighter/EMTs that are included in the Town Manager's proposed FY2024/25 budget).
- We are making steady progress in our Human Services Director recruitment. An additional finalist will be visiting Mansfield later this week.
- *New Storywalks Added at Library and Community Center-* Visitors to the playgrounds at the Mansfield Public Library and the Mansfield Community Center will find two new Storywalks to help herald in the springtime. Thanks to a partnership with Altrusa of Northeastern Connecticut, *Sunflower House* by Eve Bunting can be found at MCC and *Zinnia's Flower Garden* by Monica Wellington is currently installed at MPL. New Storywalks will be added seasonally, providing many chances to combine reading and literacy with the many benefits of being active outdoors.
- *Public Library Community Survey-* Mansfield Public Library is launching a community survey tomorrow (April 23) to hear from residents regarding its programs, collections, and resources so that we continue to tailor our services to best meet the needs of the Mansfield community. The survey will be available online until Tuesday, May 7 (with paper copies available at the library) and, after the survey closes, we will do a drawing for an Amazon Fire 7 tablet!
- *New Toy Library-* A Toy Library will be the next addition to the materials that residents can borrow from the Mansfield Public Library. Thanks to generous funding from the Friends of the Mansfield Library and the nonprofit Traveling Toys, library cardholders will soon be able to borrow toys that support developmental milestones for children, including STEM learning and imaginative play, board games, engineering and circuitry sets, and video games geared towards teens. The Toy Library is

expected to launch in mid-September and will include such popular items as Magnatiles, stacking toys, Duplos, Nintendo Switch games, Snap Circuits, and more.

- *Region 19 Budget Referendum*– Regional School District #19 will hold their annual budget referendum on Tuesday, May 7, 2024. Absentee ballots are available now from the Town Clerk.
- The Connecticut Town Clerk’s Association (CTCA) held its biannual statewide conference with state agencies on April 18, 2024. Mansfield Clerks had the opportunity to hear from State Library staff, Secretary of the State (SOTS) Elections Officials, and the Freedom of Information Commission as well as network with other Connecticut Town Clerks.
- As a reminder, we anticipate that final work on the new pickle ball facility being constructed adjacent to the Mansfield Community Center will be complete prior to the Memorial Day weekend next month. Remaining work includes application of the finish top/performance coat (which has to be applied when overnight temperatures are conducive) and installation of fencing enclosure. The new facility should be open for use for most of the warmer weather season. The associated parking lot expansion project is now largely complete and is already receiving good use following the excavation and base installation that was performed in recent weeks. 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*: The negotiated settlement, which the Town Council voted to ratify at its April 8 meeting, between the Town of Mansfield and Newfield Construction (general contractor) has been fully executed by the parties. The settlement is relative to outstanding claims associated with the Mansfield Elementary School construction.
- *Mansfield Elementary School Project- Water Treatment*: The Town and its contracted engineering firm, Weston and Sampson are making final adjustments to the proposed water treatment design for Mansfield Elementary School based on additional rounds of substantive feedback and review provided by the CT Department of Public Health (DPH). It is referred to as an optimal corrosion control treatment (OCCT) system that will mitigate the slightly elevated levels of copper that continue to be present in the water sampled at MES. At this time, we anticipate that state approval of the updated/final design will occur this week. As soon as CT DPH approves the final design of an OCCT system, the Town and Mansfield Board of Education will proceed with implementation. The precise timeframe for installation will be tailored to minimize disruption to students and staff. Throughout this process, students, staff, and visitors have had access to safe drinking water within the building using either bottled water stations or filtered drinking fountains that are tested twice a month.
- Planning is well underway for Mansfield’s annual Memorial Day Parade. The parade will step off at 9:00 AM on Monday, May 27. Invitations have been distributed to volunteer organizations, school bands, and guests. Mansfield veterans are encouraged to participate in the parade. Please contact the Town Manager’s office for details.
- The April/May issue of the Town’s bimonthly electronic newsletter was published April 2 and can be accessed [here](#).
- The Town Manager’s next monthly appearance on WILI-AM on the Wayne Norman Show will take place on Friday, May 3.