

MEMO

To: Town Council
CC: Town Employees
From: Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager
Date: July 8, 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 am happy to report that, following Ms. Sharon Biggie's recent departure for a new position at the Naval War College in Rhode Island, a temporary Executive Assistant is in place in the Office of the Town Manager. Her name is Jennifer Morris, and she is a fifth grade teacher at Stafford Public Schools. The Town launched the competitive recruitment effort for the next permanent Executive Assistant this past week, and the job ad is being placed in a wide range of resources to maximize exposure to prospective candidates. Job posting information can be found [here](#).
- UConn officials have informed the Town that John Armstrong is being reinstated as the head of Off-Campus Student Services under the new title of Associate Dean. Additionally, UConn is also moving forward with filling the previously announced new position of Assistant Dean for Off-Campus Student Services. Before it was unexpectedly dissolved in summer 2023, UConn's Off-Campus and Commuter Student Services Department, under the outstanding leadership of Mr. Armstrong (then Director), was an incredible resource for the Town of Mansfield up until the program's sudden/unexpected dissolution in August 2023. Through the actions of John and his team, the quality of life for our residents dramatically improved over a roughly 15-year period. We are very excited to learn that Mr. Armstrong will again be overseeing this incredibly important function in collaboration with the Town of Mansfield and the leadership of our Resident Trooper Program Office. This will enable us to keep making progress in improving and maintaining public safety and the quality of life for our residents who reside in neighborhoods containing a large concentration of housing units historically rented to UConn students. Efforts are being made to have Mr. Armstrong and other appropriate parties attend the Council's regular business meeting on July 22.
- The Downtown Storrs Parking Garage will be closed on Friday, July 12 and Saturday, July 13 due to maintenance work. The Town of Mansfield is resealing the floors, and no vehicles can be in the parking garage during this process. Suggested parking alternatives are: the Dog Lane Lot, on-street parking in the downtown, and the parking spaces at Town Hall adjacent to the Community Center along the E.O. Smith tennis courts and the Skate Park. Members of the public can also consider carpooling, walking or biking to work, or riding [WRTD](#) or [CTtransit](#) buses. The Town will not conduct parking enforcement on these dates. However, private lot owners may still enforce their parking rules. We appreciate the public's patience and understanding as the Town works to take care of its infrastructure.
- The Council will receive an update relative to the planned large-scale solar field to be constructed at the Town's capped landfill. The update will include a summary of proposed amendments to the annual lease payment to be provided by the solar developer (Verogy) that has been requested based on updated financial information.

- The Mansfield Downtown Partnership (MDP) annual meeting took place on Thursday, June 27, beginning at 5:30 PM at Huskies Restaurant & Bar. Cynthia van Zelm, former MDP Executive Director, was honored for her exceptional leadership over a 22-year tenure.
- In support of positioning the Town of Mansfield, a campaign is underway to promote Mansfield as a great destination for all ages to visit and enjoy, offering unique experiences in the summertime. Arrangements are being made to preview with Town Council the :30 spot which features the Adventure Park at Storrs, the UConn Dairy Bar, the Ballard Puppetry Museum and Betsy Paterson Square, and the Mansfield Drive-In. The Hartford-based NBC station will also visit Mansfield to record a lifestyle feature on other local attractions such as trails and parks, outdoor dining spots, Storrs Farmers Market, Summertime Saturday Puppet Shows, and the Mansfield Marketplace. The campaign will be supported with social media, and other select print ads.
- Staff is working to prepare the Town's website for a design update this month. In cooperation with the existing website provider, Information Technology and Communications staff refined the design to make it more contemporary and user-friendly, and to utilize the valuable "real estate" on the Home page more effectively. After the new website becomes public, there will be continuing refinements through the summer to ensure changes in the design are working properly.
- At the invitation of Lieutenant Hayward, Commander of CT State Police (CSP) Troop C based in Tolland, the Town Manager participated in the selection process relative to the appointment of the next Supervisor (Sergeant) for Mansfield Resident Trooper Program Office. Candidate interviews took place on July 3. Each of the candidates interviewed demonstrated considerable knowledge and valuable professional experience. A selection has been made, but CSP is not quite ready for a public announcement. At this time, we anticipate that the new Resident Trooper Supervisor will be announced in the near future and that the individual will attend the Town Council's regular business meeting on July 22.
- The search for the next Facilities Management Director continues and interviews with finalists are taking place this week. This is a very important leadership position for both the Town of Mansfield and Mansfield Public Schools. An overview of the position can be accessed here: <https://www.mansfieldct.gov/353/Job-Opportunities>
- The newly established Deputy Chief of Operations position with Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services (programmed for funding in the FY2024/25 budget) was recently posted and will remain open into early-August to ensure ample opportunity for a deep pool of qualified applicants. Candidate interviews will be scheduled in August and we are realistically looking at a September timeline to have the position filled. The complete job description can be accessed here: <https://www.applitrack.com/mansfieldct/onlineapp/1BrowseFile.aspx?id=39362>
- As the Council was previously informed, in late-June two conditional offers of employment were extended to full-time Firefighter/EMT candidates. The goal was to have both candidates begin work on July 15. Unfortunately, after initially accepting the Town's conditional employment offer, one of the two selected finalists changed their mind and as such we still have one of the two vacancies to fill. We are optimistic we will be able to fill this vacancy by selecting another qualified candidate from the most recent certified list. Once this final vacancy is filled, it will bring our total number of full-time Firefighter/EMT's to twenty-two (22), which was the targeted staffing level outlined by Town and department management to the Council throughout the FY 2024/25 budget development process.
- *Northwest Mansfield Vision and Strategy Plan:* Work continues on the plan, and progress can be followed at www.mansfieldtomorrow.org/nw-neighborhood-plan. The public presentation of the plan has been delayed until September based on the needs of the lead consultant, FHI.
- *The Future of High-Density Housing-New Regulations Proposed:* As the Council is aware, staff in the Planning and Development Department have initiated an effort to ensure the public is informed about the new proposed regulations on high-density housing in Mansfield and how feedback can be provided. An informal virtual question and answer session was organized for the public on June 13. The presentation was recorded and is available for viewing at www.MansfieldCT.gov/Video. The Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) subsequently opened the corresponding public hearing

process on June 17. Staff provided a presentation of the regulations and the PZC received public comment. A presentation by Jennifer Kaufman, Director of Planning and Development, was made to the Town Council at its regular meeting on June 24. More specifically, the PZC opened two public hearings at its June 17 meeting related to regulation amendments pertaining to multi-family housing. The first public hearing concerns the repeal of certain sections of the zoning regulations including:

- Sec. 190-17-Residential Districts-Use Table-Remove Remove Design Multiple Residences (DMR)
- Sec.190-18-Dimensional Requirements- Remove DMR
- Sec. 190-25 Provisions for Multi-family and Group Dwelling Development-Remove in Entirety
- Sec. 190-23A Affordable Housing Requirements-Remove Introductory Provisions and Add Revised Intent
- Sec. 190-23E(3) Remove Fee in Lieu as an Alternative Means of Meeting Affordable and Workforce Housing Requirements
- Sec. 190-29-Special Provisions for the Pleasant Valley Residence/Agriculture (PVRA), Remove Bulk and Density Requirements in Sec 190-29E (1) and (2)

The second public hearing concerns the consideration of the Planned Housing Design District, relating to developments of more than six (6) units, as well as the process by which they are reviewed and approved by the Commission. After public comments related to both public hearings, the PZC continued the hearings to its July 15th meeting at 6:00 PM. Public comment is again welcome on July 15th. All formally submitted comments regarding the proposed new regulation must be received by the PZC prior to the close of the public hearing in order to be included in the deliberative process. In addition, the Commission is considering holding a workshop on July 18 to discuss the proposed amendments to the regulations.

- The exciting new/innovative work of Mansfield Public Library continues to receive much attention as reflected in the following recent publications:
 - [Mansfield Public Library Receives Funding to Add Toys to its Lending Library](#)
 - [Mansfield Library Adding Toys to Offerings](#)
 - [Digital Navigator Article in Connecticut Town & City](#)
- As the Council was previously informed, the Department of Human Services, in collaboration with the Human Services Advisory Committee recently finalized the annual request for competitive grant funding application that will be made available to eligible local social service agencies and nonprofits. The application period went live as of June 25 and requests are due back by August 1. HSAC is scheduled to review the applications during its first meeting following conclusion of the summer break. As a reminder, the adopted FY 2024/25 budget includes a total of \$70,000 that will be divided accordingly.
- The Back to School Program and Supply Drive administered by the Department of Human Services has started, and families are able to apply for assistance through August 8. Additionally, donations toward the program are being accepted through August 15.
- In late-June, the Town received approval for a School Readiness grant in the amount of \$267,750, which is an increase over last year's grant and enable an additional six children (age 3 to 4) in the community to participate in a preschool age program. This would bring the total to 31 for this year.
- Mansfield Public School leaders and Board of Education Members invite parents, staff, and community members to join in reading *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. This timely book, written by psychologist Jonathan Haidt, explores youth mental health in the era of smartphones, social media, and big tech—and outlines a plan for a healthier, freer childhood. A copy can be borrowed through the Mansfield Public Library Circulation Desk, and the book is available as an E-Book through Overdrive. In collaboration with Mansfield Public Library, a community book discussion is being held on August 22 (Thursday) beginning at 6:00 pm at the library. A light dinner will be provided.

- The evening of Wednesday, June 26, Mansfield and other communities across the region encountered a fast moving severe thunderstorm. In the early going, over 1,000 Eversource customers lost power. The storm knocked down trees or tree limbs creating 29 complete road blockages, 15 of which involved downed wires. Additionally, 27 other roads had one lane blocked due to dropped trees or branches while 3 other roads had one lane closed due to low hanging wires. Prior to morning rush hour, the Department of Public Works had cleared most of the roads that had no wires involved and by mid-morning the number of customers without power had been cut in half. By Friday (roughly 36 hours removed from the storm), power had been restored to nearly all households. The storm response demonstrates very successful coordination among local emergency management and public works crews, as well as pertinent state agencies and Eversource.
- The new pickle ball facility adjacent to the Mansfield Community Center will be opening later this month. Final work on the striping was performed in late-June, and the top coat has also full cured. The remaining interior fencing was also installed in recent weeks and the courts will be ready for use as soon as the nets are installed (the nets have been on backorder for several weeks and are due to be delivered on July 12). Handrails will soon be in place on the access ramp, and we anticipate that work will be completed just prior to scheduled delivery of the nets. Coordination with Eversource and timing for the electrical equipment for illumination is still pending, however, the courts may be put in use before the lighting is in place, which will extend play into the evening hours.
- *Public Works/Infrastructure Improvement Updates*
 - Public Works crews have been performing drainage improvements on Browns Road (from Chatham Drive to Crane Hill Road) and September Road, and all 24 planned new basins have now been completed. A contractor will reclaim (grind up the existing surface) beginning July 18th. Similarly, drainage work continues on Elizabeth Road with 6 of 8 catch basins being thus far completed, and one cross pipe still needing to be replaced in the near future.
 - VMS Construction has completed installation of the sanitary sewer from the existing terminus on Maple Road to the Eagleville Green Project providing the necessary sewer service. VMS is contracted with Connecticut Water to complete a water line replacement project in the coming months from Eastwood Road to Maple Road. Once this water work is complete final restoration of the roadway may begin.
 - Genovesi Construction has completed Phase 1 of the temporary water connection and temporary water management portion of the Hunting Lodge Road culvert project which allows for them to begin forming and pouring concrete footings that will support the new bridge. Frontier Communications, Eversource and Spectrum Communications completed relocation of the overhead utilities. This work provides the necessary room for installation of the precast sections of the bridge to be placed by crane. The project is moving on schedule for completion by the end of August.
 - All tasks have been completed outside the new DPW office trailer (such as walkways, curb, and blocking for the skirting). The Facilities Management and Information Technology Departments connected electricity, plumbing, phones, and data/internet service.
- *Mansfield Middle School Renovations-* Application of the new epoxy flooring that is part of more comprehensive renovations to the upper level of Mansfield Middle School (funded as part of the FY2023/24 capital budget) is approximately two-thirds complete.
- *Mansfield Elementary School Project- Water Treatment:* Final design plans and associated documentation related to the planned water treatment system for Mansfield Elementary School to address the persistent elevated copper levels was transmitted to the CT Department of Public Health (DPH) on June 25. Unfortunately, the timing of the Town's transmission of the documentation to the state happened to coincide with scheduled absences with key DPH personnel responsible for completing the review/approval. However, we have been informed that DPH is actively reviewing the submission this week and we anticipate that the remaining steps of the formal approval should move quickly at this point. All parties are aware that the proposed treatment system, once approved, must be installed as soon as possible this summer and tailored to minimize disruption to students and staff.

- *Justices of the Peace*: Anyone who is not a member of a major party and wishes to serve as a Justice of the Peace should contact the Town Clerk before August 1st for more information.
- *Summer Concerts on the Square*: Join us for live music on Betsy Paterson Square every Thursday through July from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM. The remaining concerts feature [Lovewhip](#) (dance/rock/funk from Boston); [Mr. P's Brit Pop Persuasion](#) (alt rock from Connecticut); and [Funky Dawgz Brass Band](#) (jazz/soul/funk originally from Storrs). Visit mansfieldmusic.org for full details, including videos and information on each band. Summer Concerts on the Square are free and open to everyone.
- *Summertime Saturday Puppet Shows*: Together with the Ballard Institute & Museum of Puppetry, the Partnership invites residents and friends of all ages to enjoy free puppet shows this summer! Join us for *Who Took the Cookies from the Cookie Jar?* by WonderSpark Puppets (Saturday, July 20), *Judy Saves the Day* by Sarah Nolan (Saturday, July 27), and *I Love Tacos* by Paper Heart Puppets (Saturday, August 3). All performances will take place at 11:00 AM on Betsy Paterson Square. In the case of inclement weather, the shows will be held indoors at the Ballard Institute. For more information, please visit downtownstorrs.org/puppetshows.
- The June/July edition of the Town's bimonthly electronic newsletter was published on June 4 and can be accessed [here](#).
- The Town Manager's most recent monthly appearance on WILI-AM on the Wayne Norman Show took place this past Wednesday, July 3, (rescheduled from Friday, July 5) and can be accessed [here](#).