

MEMO

To: Town Council
CC: Town Employees
From: Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager
Date: October 15, 2024
Subject: **Town Manager's Report**

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

- Staff with Congressman Courtney contacted the Town Manager to request an opportunity for the Congressman to visit/tour The Standard at Four Corners project site. As the Council will recall, Congressman Courtney is supporting federal funding by way of congressional earmark to support the design and construction of a 10' wide multi-use trail that would run parallel to Storrs Road on the roughly 1-mile segment from the Four Corners to Tower Loop Road on the northern portion of the UConn campus. The Congressman is aware that The Standard and other large-scale multi-family housing projects moving forward in the Four Corners area will significantly increase the need for the multi-use trail and other capital projects designed to improve pedestrian safety in this area that is subject to increasing population densities in the coming years.
- We are very happy to report that – with ongoing support from our partners at the University of Connecticut (UConn) – we have fully satisfied all of the information technology upgrades that were required by the Secretary of the State in order to use the second floor of the UConn Bookstore as a second Early Voting Center. The needed connection was facilitated by Frontier. All pertinent parties from the Town of Mansfield and State of CT have completed the tests needed to ensure that everything is functioning properly in advance of the start of Early Voting next Monday, October 21.
- In recent days there has been a fair amount of reporting relative to the recent sale of the East Brook Mall property. More specifically, the property was sold to American Realty based in Baltimore, MD, for \$12 million, and it appears that the new owners have been publicly sharing intentions they have relative to redevelopment of the property. The East Brook Mall has long played an important role in meeting the retail and commercial needs of our community, and we are intrigued by reports that the new ownership group has an interest in pursuing significant investment in the property. This presents an opportunity to revitalize the mall and strengthen the town's economy while potentially meeting other consumer needs. At the same time, it is important to note that any proposed redevelopment, including the potential addition of apartment-style housing units as has been recently reported, would be subject to the Town's customary land use permitting process and building code approvals. This review includes requirements for the creation of affordable housing units. Town staff look forward to meeting with the new owners at an appropriate time to learn more about the vision that they have for this property.
- As the Council is aware, in late-August of this year, State Senator Looney (President Pro Tempore) and State Senator Duff (Majority Leader) issued a [public letter](#) to President Maric conveying their desire to see UConn substantially increase its enrollment on the Storrs and Stamford campuses. The Town has opened up lines of communication with members of our state legislative delegation (State Senator Flexer and State Reps. Haddad and Boyd) to get their input on most effective next steps to ensure that members of the State Senate leadership and other state officials have a clear understanding of the implications such growth in enrollment could have on the affordability and

availability of housing in Mansfield. If targets are set to further grow the student population on the UConn Storrs campus it will be important for the Town, UConn, elected officials, and other pertinent stakeholders to thoughtfully consider strategies that would enable the Town to proactively develop more affordable housing to meet anticipated future needs.

- According to information provided by senior UConn officials, as well as recent reporting, plans to construct a state-of-the-art driving facility on the “Depot Campus” are continuing to move forward. More specifically, the facility would serve as the testing ground for driverless cars and various other smart vehicle technologies. The UConn Board of Trustees approved the sale of 15 acres to the venture firm Promesa Capital LLC, at its [latest meeting](#) on Sept. 25. The sale price was \$1.5 million. The project that has been in the planning phase since its initial 2019 proposal. Although original plans outlined the acquisition of 105 acres, this parcel was later reduced due to negative implications on the surrounding wetland ecosystem. Additional information will be shared as it becomes available.
- As the Council is aware, this past month the Town Manager and Chief of Shared Services and Administration attended the 2024 ICMA annual conference held in Pittsburgh, PA. The conference emphasized several key themes relevant to local government leaders. A major focus was on the “noble profession” of local government management, with ICMA President Tanya Ange emphasizing the importance of this work in serving communities and addressing complex societal challenges. This theme was reinforced by discussions on the vital role local governments play in bridging divides within increasingly polarized societies. Another central theme was the challenges towns and cities face in addressing affordable housing shortages, shrinking public safety forces, and workforce recruitment and retention. Several of the panel discussions explored strategies for balancing these challenges with economic development opportunities. The conference also featured sessions on innovation (i.e., artificial intelligence), ethics, and global engagement, reflecting on ICMA’s century-long commitment to professional excellence and the growing importance of international perspectives in local governance. In addition, the event celebrated the 100th anniversary of the ICMA Code of Ethics, a foundational element of professional local government leadership, and hosted numerous networking events to foster connections among the nearly 5,000 attendees.
- Through Dr. Michelle Williams, Chief of Staff to UConn President Maric, in my capacity as Town Manager (who also serves as the Town’s chief of public safety), I have been invited to serve on the search committee for UConn’s next Vice President of Public Safety.
- As the Council is aware, funding was included in the approved FY 2024/25 budget to enable the placement of an additional trooper in the Mansfield Resident Trooper Office. This would have brought our total uniformed personnel to eleven (11) including the Sergeant. Unfortunately, we have been informed that the CT State Police (CSP) Colonel has declined the Town’s request to add an additional full-time Trooper at this time. As this is new information, we are in the process of arranging for a follow-up meeting with appropriate CSP leadership to better understand the reason(s) why the request was declined and whether this is temporary in nature. This of course has real implications on the ability to incrementally add more personnel over the course of the next two fiscal years and ultimately reach the Town Council’s stated targeted staffing level of thirteen (13), including the Sergeant.
- The Town Manager, Mayor, Chief of Shared Services and Administration, and Director of Finance will be attending the CT Council of Small Towns (COST) Fall Conference being held tomorrow, October 16. Topics being discussed include new laws and challenges facing towns (i.e., housing and land use laws), environmental challenges, and helpful municipal grants and resources.
- The most recent sessions of the 2024 Mansfield Local Government Academy - Session #4 and Session #5 – focused on Human Services and Inspection Services (Building and Housing Department and the Fire Marshal) will achieve the mid-point of the 12-session program later this week when Session #6 is held on Thursday, October 17. The sixth session will focus on Shared Services, which includes Finance, Facilities, Information Technology, and Human Resources. Further details on this year’s Local Government Academy are available on the Town Manager’s [webpage](#).

- Management continues to negotiate successor collective bargaining agreements with the Public Works and Professional and Technical Employee unions, which are both represented by CSEA.
- Hiring and appointment notes:
 - Kevin Danielson has been appointed to the position of Deputy Fire Chief of Operations effective January 2, 2025. Mr. Danielson has over 30 years of experience in the fire service, including 26 years with the City of Clifton Fire Department in New Jersey. He most recently held the rank of captain, serving as Acting Deputy Chief as needed by his Department. He currently serves as a mass decontamination Team Manager in New Jersey, and is very active as an instructor in the National Fire Academy. Mr. Danielson holds two associate's degrees, one of which is in the fire service. He is a veteran of the United States Air Force. He holds numerous certifications in the fire service. As a reminder, the career Deputy Fire Chief position was newly created and authorized this fiscal year. Welcome Kevin!
 - On October 8, 2024, staff participated in and attended a CRCOG panel event on shared services. Maria Capriola served as a panelist for the event.
- *Mansfield Tomorrow POCD Update:* Planning and Development staff attended the Celebrate Mansfield Festival to introduce the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) to the community. Adopted in 2015, the *Mansfield Tomorrow* POCD serves as both the Town's POCD and its Strategic Plan. At its October 7, 2024, meeting, the Planning and Zoning Commission established an Ad Hoc Committee on the POCD. This Committee's primary responsibility is to guide the POCD update, informed by a public engagement process, to meet the evolving needs of the community. The planning process will include an extensive public engagement effort, designed to gather diverse feedback through focus groups, a town-wide survey, online engagement, participation in community events, and a community-wide meeting. Since the plan serves as both the Town's POCD and Strategic Plan, the Ad Hoc Committee will include members of the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) and the Town Council, in addition to four non-voting ex officio staff members. For more details on the planning process and ways to get involved, visit www.mansfieldtomorrow.org.
- *Northwest Mansfield Vision and Strategy Plan:* Work on the NW Mansfield Vision and Strategy Plan continues, with draft recommendations expected soon. To strengthen the plan's impact, the NW Plan will be incorporated into the Town's POCD once adopted, ensuring that its recommendations are part of the Town's overall vision. Follow the progress at www.mansfieldtomorrow.org/nw-neighborhood-plan.
- *Multi-Family Development Regulations:*
 - PZC-Initiated Amendments to Article 4, Section 190-33 of the Zoning Regulations to Establish Planned Housing Design District Regulations (PZC File #907-62)
The Public Hearing will resume for the proposed Planned Housing Design District (PHDD) regulations, which will apply to multi-family developments of over six units. The PHDD is intended to replace the existing multi-family regulations.
 - PZC-Initiated Zoning Regulation Amendments to Repeal Certain Sections Related to Multi-Family Housing (PZC File #907-61)
A separate public hearing will be held to receive comments on the proposed repeal of specific sections related to multi-family housing.
- Mansfield Public Library is featuring several fun and exciting programs during the month of October! These include:
 - *Teen Halloween Party!*
Thursday, October 17 from 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
Halloween fun for teens & tweens! Come by to hang out with friends, eat FREE pizza & Halloween treats, play ghoulish games & creepy activities!
 - *Keep Kids Safe Online: Internet Safety Course for Parents, Guardians & Caregivers*
Thursday, October 17 at 6:00 pm in the Program Room

Join the Mansfield Public Library's Digital Navigators for a presentation and discussion designed to provide information and resources that community members can use to protect the children in their care from online dangers.

- *Annual Halloween Party!*

Saturday, October 26th from 10:30 am – 1:00 pm

Celebrate Halloween at the library! Join us at 10:30AM for a Not-So-Spooky Storytime followed by creepy crafts, ghoulish games, & a raucous Halloween parade around the library. Costumes encouraged! Fun for kids of all ages!

- *Mansfield Human Services Department Updates:*

- Our Mansfield Farms to Family program is wrapping up its fourth growing season, with October's final distribution. It has been another very successful year supporting our community with overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding the selection and volume of produce provided.

- The Seasons of Giving Campaign administered by the Human Services Department has begun. With so many families in need, the department does an annual giving campaign to help support many of the programs administered over the year. Contributions can be designated by donors toward to the holiday program, scholarships for summer camp, warm clothing for seniors, and many other things.

- Price Chopper collected donations for our food pantry and donated over 150 bags of food to stock the community pantry. The contributions made by various members of the community were very generous and we know they will be appreciated by the community members that utilize the pantry located at the Human Services Department office

- The Mansfield Career Firefighters Union is sponsoring its annual Food and Goods Drive from Oct. 1 – Oct 31st. Members of the public are invited to drop off anytime at the front entryway of the Spring Hill Fire Station (Fire Station 307), located at 999 Storrs Road.

- The Early Childhood team of the Human Services Department, in collaboration with the Ballard Institute, hosted a puppet making workshop to highlight a social emotional learning (SEL) program called Feel Your Best Self on October 4th. It was well-attended, and the children enjoyed meeting puppets and learning skills to manage big emotions.

- On September 26th the Mansfield Senior Center held its 49th anniversary celebration. The event was a great success, and included a variety show that highlighted the decades from the 1950's forward, appetizers, and a celebratory cake. There were 15 acts that performed and 60 guests attended.

- On October 9th the Senior Center held a very successful Vaccine clinic where we served over 40 individuals.

- A multi-town Veterans Day event has been planned on Saturday, November 9th. The VFW that supports Willington/Ashford/Mansfield/Eastford/Union is working with veteran representatives from the five towns to put this event together. The Ceremony has been scheduled for 11:00am at the Ashford's Veterans Memorial located on Tremko Lane adjacent to the Ashford Senior Center. Each year this event recognizes a specific group of veterans, and this year is set to recognize Korean War era veterans.

- **Make Time for Offline Campaign:** The Community Read of the book, *The Anxious Generation* this summer reinforced that declining mental health among youth is correlated with the increasing use of technological devices. The book also stresses that technology has replaced free play. The Board of Education endorsed the Make Time for Offline Pledge Campaign last Thursday. Mansfield Make Time for Offline is a call to action asking for a pledge from all community members to balance the use of technology, social media, and smartphones, especially modeling appropriate use for children, and taking the time to play more. The goal is to ask Town departments, committees, and other local organizations to sign on to the pledge. For example, the Mansfield Advocates for Children may concentrate on providing guidance materials for families on fun, easy ways to play with preschool

aged children. A webpage has been created which will build out the campaign as it evolves:

www.mansfieldct.gov/MakeTime

- The Taste of Mansfield Community Dinner is returning. On Wednesday, November 13, Mansfield Public Schools Food Services Director Chef Maraiiah Popeleski-Tilley and her staff will create and serve a dinner featuring locally grown foods and produce. All members of the public are invited to come to the Mansfield Middle School to enjoy this dinner and to connect with the community through local food. Reservations are required, however. Details on the times and the reservation link will be publicized soon. The Mansfield Senior Center is arranging for transportation to seniors who request it so they may attend the dinner.
- The Human Rights Commission is hosting a workshop this Saturday with a representative from the Center for non-Violent Communication. The workshop will focus on building skills to learn to find common ground in challenging conversations to enhance respectful relationships while speaking honestly in difficult situations. It will be held Saturday, October 19 at the Buchanan Auditorium of the Mansfield Public Library from 2:00 to 4:00 PM, and is free to all.
- *Mansfield Parks and Recreation Updates*
 - Following the first presentation of the Mansfield Parks and Recreation Master Plan (“the plan”) to the Town Council in June, and assimilation of advisory committee feedback, Town Staff took steps to revise the plan by integrating many of these comments and identify elements of the plan for which further attention may still be needed. The updated version of the draft plan is being presented to the Council this evening. The Master Plan, and corresponding financial sustainability strategy and associated supplemental plans, will ultimately be living documents that are subject to periodic review and update/modification as warranted to meet evolving community needs. Staff believes that the current plan, as revised to reflect valuable feedback provided by staff and committee members, is ready for adoption by the Town Council.
 - Mansfield Parks and Recreation welcomes local businesses, organizations, and families to participate in the annual [Trick-A-Trunk](#) at the Halloween Party in Downtown Storrs on Saturday, October 26 from 3:00-5:00 PM in the Downtown area.
- *November 2024 Election:* Overseas and Military ballots continue to be issued (total 101 so far). Regular absentee ballots are now available (248 issued so far). A reminder that Early Voting at the Town Hall and UConn Bookstore begins on October 21st. As a reminder, the Office of the Town Clerk prepared a detailed [list of answers to frequently asked questions \(FAQs\) regarding voting options](#) for the November 5, 2024 Election (both early voting and Election Day voting).
- *Facilities Management Updates*
 - The Department is in the process of arranging for the first meeting of the recently formed building committee associated with the Mansfield Middle School (MMS) HVAC project that is being primarily funded through a state grant awarded to the Town.
 - The Department is currently reviewing bids and will be furnishing award recommendations in regards to the rehabilitation of the old Town Hall and adjacent administrative building, both used by the Mansfield Historical Society, which is being funded in part from a state grant.
 - We are nearing the completion of construction drawings and price estimates associated with the MMS main entrance/security improvements. Once finalized, the Town will post an RFP to solicit bids for the work, which is being funded primarily through a state grant.
 - The Department continues to offer support regarding the physical space needs associated with both the Early Voting Centers (October 21-November 3) as well as the Election Day voting that will take place on November 5.
- *Public Works/Infrastructure Improvement Updates*
 - Hunting Lodge Road Culvert- Genovesi Construction completed installation of the new box culvert, headwall, endwall, and wingwalls. The parapet walls, which protect the traveling public will be formed and remaining drainage structure installed this week. Genovesi at that time will complete grading of the roadway and paving.

- Work on Coventry Road to improve the stability of two areas on the unpaved portion of the road will commence next week. Geogrid material is ordered and will be delivered this week. The department hired a contractor to haul gravel. The construction will start with the smaller 400-foot area on the eastern end of the road so the crew can become more proficient before starting the 1,800-foot section on the western end of the unpaved section of the road.
- The Department has ordered five sets of trash and recycling containers for downtown Storrs that are capable of being serviced by automated trucks. These new containers will replace broken ones and add additional receptacles to the area. The department did investigate pizza box recycling only containers and found them to be expensive, not effective (as other trash can be deposited within the container) and require people power to empty as opposed to an automated truck. The department will continue to look for other options to prevent pizza boxes from clogging our trash receptacles.
- Town personnel completed all the driveway aprons on Browns Road with the exception of two large ones that the paving contractor will complete. Crews have started backfilling the road edges and restoring the lawns on Browns Road.
- The Elizabeth Road, Brookside Lane, Hickory Lane and Juniper Lane project is near completion. The paving contractor, All States Material Group, will return this week to complete the first layer of asphalt on Brookside Lane and the top course for the other roads.
- The Town tree crew removed 16 trees since the last report. The trees were located on Elizabeth Road, Clover Mill Road, and Mount Hope Road.
- VMS Construction is actively installing the replacement water main for the Connecticut Water Company along the section of South Eagleville Road that extends from Storrs Road (CT-195) to Maple Road.
- The Mansfield Resident Troopers Office is continuing with proactive party patrols this fall semester. This fall, Troopers have issued 25 town nuisance citations. These citations are usually given at parties that show signs of intention to have a large scale event to include DJ equipment, the ability to serve large quantities of alcohol, and attempts to conceal the party from the outside. While citations are up, students have been cooperative and polite. All citations are also passed onto John Armstrong and UConn Community Standards. The party season usually concludes after Halloween and the cold weather sets in. Sergeant King also attended a UConn Interfraternity Council (IFC) meeting with John Armstrong at their invitation. It was a good opportunity to meet and speak with fraternity leadership about town expectations as well as the police/UConn response to nuisance complaints.
- Production of the new Quint apparatus (aerial pumper) is complete final outfitting has been performed by the dealer, Greenwood Emergency Vehicles (North Attleborough, MA). The Town has taken title and received the Bill of Sale, and we anticipate delivery of the apparatus by the end of this week.
- The Fire Marshal's Office, in concert with the Department of Building and Housing, continues to provide ongoing inspections associated with The Standard at Four Corners (roughly 400-unit multi-family housing development) and Eagleville Green (42-unit multi-family housing development that contains 34 affordable housing units).
- Below is a breakdown of the calls for service that Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services responded during 9/27/24 to 10/10/24.

Call Type	# of calls	# of calls which were responded as Mutual Aid
ALS Medical	42	5
BLS Medical	53	11
Total medical	95	16

Fire Alarm	7	
Building Fire	2	1
Outside Fire	2	
Life Assist	11	
Vehicle Accident	9	1
Tree/Wires Down	2	
Service Call	2	
Standby	4	
Total Non-medical	39	2
Total	134	18