

MEMO

To: Town Council
CC: Town Employees
From: Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager
Date: January 13, 2025
Subject: **Town Manager's Report**

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

- Fiscal Year 2025/26 budget development guidance documents were transmitted to all members of the municipal management team in mid-December. Operating departments are in the final stages of developing their budget requests, which will be reviewed in detail with the Town Manager, Chief of Shared Services and Administration, and Finance this month. The Town Manager will present his comprehensive budget recommendations to the Town Council in late-March. As a reminder, this will be the third year that the Town is developing its comprehensive annual operating budget and 5-year capital improvement plan using the ClearGov web-based platform. Mansfield Public Schools is now also using ClearGov to develop its budget moving forward as well.
- Preliminary revaluation assessment letters were mailed to property owners this past week. As expected, given the substantial upward shift in real estate market that has been experienced in the "post-COVID" era, the significant preliminary increases that many residents are seeing for their respective properties are raising a number of questions that we want to be sure are addressed. To this end, detailed information regarding the assessment process can be found on the Town's website: <https://empower.tylertech.com/Mansfield-Connecticut.html>. Informal telephone hearings with our revaluation vendor, Tyler Technologies, are currently being scheduled at the request of property owners. Appointments can be scheduled online or by calling Tyler Technologies at (844) 794-4159 between 8:30 AM and 4 PM, by tomorrow (Tuesday, January 14). Property cards can be viewed at: <https://www.axisqis.com/mansfieldct/>. It is important to note that the informal hearings are not the only opportunity to discuss your assessment. The formal appeals process will be in the spring. Additional details of the formal hearings will be available when final assessment notices are distributed. It is also important to note that changes in tax liability due to changes in assessment cannot be calculated until the mill rate is set. The mill rate will be set at the Annual Town Meeting on May 13, 2025.
- The CT Council of Small Towns (COST), CT Convention of Municipalities (CCM), and the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) have each finalized their respective legislative priorities for the 2025 session. As has been shared with the Town Council previously, the Town Manager once again served on the CRCOG Legislative Committee while this year's legislative priorities were being debated and formulated. The published legislative priorities of all three organizations have been included in the Council's January 13, 2025 meeting packet as a communication item. Topical areas of priority include economic vitality and community development, housing, infrastructure and multi-use trails, public sector workforce development and shared services, road safety, and transportation planning.
- This past Friday, the Town Manager and Mayor Moran joined Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz, State Senator Flexer, State Rep. Haddad, members of the Stearns Family, and representatives of the dairy industry to celebrate National Milk Day. The Stearns Family very graciously hosted the event,

which was well attended by regional media, at Mountain Dairy. The event serves as a reminder of the importance of milk production to local economies, jobs, community health, and our heritage/history.

- On January 6, 2025, the Town held a groundbreaking ceremony for the renovations to our old town hall buildings on Storrs Road, currently leased by the Historical Society. The renovations will include site work and drainage improvements, structural repairs, and accessibility improvements. The general contractor is Sarazin Construction. With the help of our state legislative delegation, the Town received an \$834,000 grant from the state of Connecticut to assist with the cost of the renovations.
- On December 17, the Town Manager, Mayor Moran, and Town staff met with State Senator Flexer and State Rep. Haddad (State Rep. Boyd was unable to attend) to discuss capital projects for which the Town wishes to seek state funding, as well as other priorities for the 2025 legislative session.
- On December 19, the Town held its annual Employee Recognition Luncheon. This is an important annual tradition for honoring the service of employees celebrating professional milestones, as well as the invaluable contributions of all Town employees.
- This past week, staff in U.S. Senator Murphy's Hartford office met with the Town Manager, Mayor Moran, and additional Town staff to discuss the status of infrastructure projects (i.e., multi-use trail along Storrs Road) for which the Town is currently seeking or plans to seek federal funding.
- *Community Investment Fund Grant Update:* As a reminder, last year the Town was awarded a \$250,000 planning grant by the state of Connecticut to engage in master planning efforts for the municipal campus at 4-10 South Eagleville Road, and the Mansfield Senior Center. Recently, the Town received approval from the state to release a request for qualifications (RFQ) for professional architectural services related to the project work. RFQ responses are due by January 16th. The RFQ can be found at: <https://www.mansfieldct.gov/bids.aspx?bidID=299>
- As a reminder, in my capacity as Town Manager (who also serves as the Town's chief of public safety), I have been serving on the search committee for UConn's next Vice President of Public Safety. At this stage, the search committee is finishing its initial comprehensive review and discussion of qualified candidates – all of whom have already taken part in an initial screening meeting with UConn Human Resources – and determining which candidates will be identified as semi-finalists to proceed on in the selection process. As was previously shared, the field of candidates for this position is very strong. The search committee is a large group of stakeholders with a diverse array of professional roles (the majority of which are of course associated with UConn) and backgrounds being represented. I look forward to continuing to provide input on the qualities and attributes of candidates that I believe will be most important in the context of cultivating effective collaboration between the Town and UConn.
- Management continues to negotiate a successor collective bargaining agreement with the Professional and Technical Employee union (represented by CSEA). Additional information relative to the ongoing contract negotiations with the union will be shared with members of the Council at such time as a negotiated agreement is in place and ready for ratification.
- We are moving into the latter stages of the selection process for the next Executive Director of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership (full position profile is available [here](#)). As the Council will recall, the recruitment process commenced in early-November, review of applications took place in early-December, and initial interviews with qualified candidates took place in mid-December. Finalists will be meeting with the search committee this week. This is a very important position and the application window will remain open until a final selection is made.
- The Town is hosting the first of a two-part training series for its supervisors on January 16th. The first session will be focused on the Municipal Employees Relation Act (MERA), with approximately 40 people attending. The second session will focus on compliance topics and is scheduled for February 13th. The Town's labor and employment attorney, Ken Weinstock, will be facilitating the sessions.
- The Town Manager and Animal Control Officer have been taking part in ongoing discussions (facilitated by CRCOG) with the Towns of Tolland, Willington, and Stafford regarding possible cooperation relative to animal control services and facilities. At this time, it is not clear that there is a

path forward for the Town of Mansfield to collaborate with these other Town's on a regional solution that would be advantageous for Mansfield, but we continue to evaluate different options that could present operational/budgetary efficiencies. As the Council is aware, the Town is presently working with a vendor to finalize a space needs assessment and conceptual architectural plans (including cost estimation) for a new Animal Control facility that would replace the outdated/undersized existing facility that is not capable of meeting new regulatory standards that are going into effect by 2029.

- The February/March issue of the Town's bimonthly e-newsletter will be published on February 3 and is in pre-production. As a reminder, the December/January issue can be accessed [here](#).
- The Town Manager participated in his monthly WILI-AM session with show host Wayne Norman (1040 AM or 95.3 FM) on January 3, and the segment can be accessed [here](#).
- *Regional School District 19*: The annual municipal "stakeholder" meeting organized by Regional School District 19 in association with development of the budget is taking place tomorrow evening (January). In addition to providing a high level summary of the Superintendent's budget priorities and fiscal constraints for the district, this gathering will provide members of the Region's state legislative delegation an opportunity to share their perspectives on any important legislative actions that may affect the amount of state aid the Region will receive in the ensuing fiscal year (FY 2025/26).
- *Mansfield Tomorrow Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) Update*:
 - *Ad Hoc Committee on the POCD*- The Ad Hoc Committee met last on December 19, 2024, and discussed existing conditions in Mansfield gleaned from the 2020 Census and American Community Survey. This information will be "ground-truthed" before being incorporated into the Plan. The next meeting is scheduled on January 30. At this meeting, the committee will review the Community Engagement Strategy.
 - *Working Group-Boards and Committees*- The first of three Working Group meetings for Boards and Committees was held on January 6th. (Workshop #1) focused on benchmarking the 2015 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). Workshop #2 will focus on Visioning and Goal Setting, and Workshop #3 will review the draft plan.
 - *Working Group-Department Heads*- A similar process will be held with Town Department Heads later this month.
 - *Town-wide community engagement*- Additional community engagement to inform the POCD will take place later winter and into the spring. This includes a Town-wide survey, attendance at community-wide events, focus groups, and a public meeting in April. For more information about the planning process and opportunities to get involved, visit www.mansfieldtomorrow.org.



Plan of Conservation and Development:
Update Now Underway!




- *Affordable Housing 101: An interactive Forum-Wednesday, January 29 at 6:30 PM-Town Hall Council Chamber- open to the public with pre-registration encouraged.*



The forum will provide an overview of what affordable housing looks like, What has the State outlined as the Town's goal, and where does Mansfield stand in reaching it. Participants are encouraged to pre-register at <https://mansfieldct.jotform.com/243435537861058>

- *Downtown Partnership:*
 - *Mangia!* Mansfield's newest business is serving up a taste of Sicily at 650 Middle Turnpike in Four Corners. [Krispy Sicilian](#) offers home-style meals that are ready to eat as well as frozen meals that can be enjoyed at a later date. The menu features home-style favorites like lasagna, ravioli, braciolo, and more. Open Tuesday – Friday, 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM and Saturday 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM.
 - *Save the dates! Taste 2 Towns returns Jan 27* – Explore our area bite-by-bite during [Taste 2 Towns: Mansfield-Windham Restaurant Week!](#) Enjoy special take-out deals and prix fixe menus at participating restaurants in both towns. Try a new dish at your go-to place or discover a new favorite dining destination! This marks the fourth year of Taste 2 Towns, a collaboration between the Town of Mansfield, Mansfield Downtown Partnership, Town of Windham, and Willimantic Downtown Neighborhood Association. Taste 2 Towns runs from January 27 through February 9. We sincerely appreciate the sponsorship funding from the Eastern Connecticut State University Foundation, Liberty Bank, Vanderman Place, Berkshire Bank, and other local businesses and individuals.
- *Mansfield Public Library Updates:*
 - During the week of January 6, the Mansfield Public Library was closed to the public Monday-Wednesday so that a number of important projects and maintenance efforts could be completed as part of the customary annual shutdown. Library staff hope the public is as excited about the facility improvements as they are! MPL wants to extend its appreciation to the Facilities Management Department for their valuable assistance, and convey special thanks to the Library's custodian, Mike Balkus, for his leadership on the following projects:
 - Refinishing of circulation desk and other custom wood pieces designed by local woodworker Johnnie Walker
 - New toilets in two of the public restrooms
 - Carpet cleaning and whatever it's called when you get all of the dead bugs out of the overhead lights!
 - Repainting of all metal doors and frames
 - Replacing lightbulbs in vaulted ceiling at library entrance (required a lift to replace)
 - Deep cleaning of all restrooms
 - While the Library was closed to the public, the staff participated in special projects and trainings, including CPR and AED training – which the Town Manager also participated in –

that was led by Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services personnel, and a tour of UConn's Homer Babbidge Library.

- Beginning with the facility's reopening on January 9th, MPL patrons now have the ability to check out the latest exciting new addition to the collection in the form of *Wonderbooks*. Wonderbooks are storybooks with an audio player permanently attached to the inside cover. No separate device or Wi-Fi access is needed. All the user has to do is press play! The Library currently has 90 Wonderbooks (mostly picture books, early readers, and popular chapter books) and plans to grow the collection in the months ahead.
- Upcoming Library Program:
 - *Winter Reading Bingo for Adults, Teens, and Kids!*
January 1, 2025 – February 28, 2025
Winter is a great time to cozy up with some good books and take part in Mansfield Library's Winter Reading Bingo! Stop by the library to register and pick up one of our bingo cards. Bring your bingo card to the circulation desk each time you stop by the library. For each square that you complete anywhere on your card, receive a drawing ticket for a chance to win one of our larger literary prizes! Complete five squares in a row—up, down, across, or diagonal—to automatically win a small prize (limit of one small prize per person). Good luck and Happy Reading!
 - *Warm Up Mansfield*
All January
Throughout January, we will have a display of knitted hats, scarves, and mittens donated by the Friends of the Mansfield Library, the Mansfield Library Knitting Group, and the wonderful patrons of the Mansfield Library. Anyone is welcome to help themselves or knit additional items to be added to the display. (We even have knitting and crocheting books nearby to provide inspiration!)
 - *Teen Night: Cozy Winter Crafts & Hot Chocolate Bar*
January 16 from 6-7PM in MPL's Buchanan Auditorium
Get cozy at the library! Join us in January for cozy crafts and a Build-Your-Own Hot Chocolate Bar featuring a variety of sweet treats.
 - *Tech Savvy Seniors: Media Literacy*
January 17 from 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM in MPL's Program Room
Feeling overwhelmed by the flood of information online? Join Paul in a Media Literacy Course to learn how to evaluate news sources and separate fact from fiction. In this presentation, you'll discover practical techniques to identify credible sources and detect misleading content. Ideal for anyone who wants to navigate the digital landscape with confidence, this course will help you become a more informed and discerning consumer of news.
 - *Winter Wonder Workshop*
Thursday, January 23 from 4-6PM in MPL's Buchanan Auditorium
Families are invited to drop by for Snow Science activities, snowflake crafts and a Winter Wonderland-themed play area.

- *Mansfield Human Services Department Updates:*

- Adult Services:
 - With the bitter cold this week, it is hard to believe that it is already time to start to work with our local farmers to plan our next growing season! We have started to book pop-up events in the community, to share more about the Mansfield Farms to Families program, and start to sign up our residents to take place in this program to connect residents with locally grown fresh foods. If you are interested in learning more about this fantastic program, you can go on our webpage at <https://www.mansfieldct.gov/1896/Food-Programs> and select Mansfield Farms to

Family Program. You may also call the Human Services department at 860-429-3315 and ask for more information.

- With income tax season, it is also time to apply for elderly and veteran tax credit programs. The Human Services department is available to complete these applications with you and support you in this process. If you have any questions or would like to schedule an appointment please reach out to us at 860-429-3315.
- Senior Services:
 - January is Glaucoma Awareness month and the Senior Center hosted an informational session on January 9. If you were not able to attend and have questions, please either stop into the Senior Center or call them at 860-429-0262 to pick up a packet of information that shares a little about what Glaucoma is and how to talk to your doctor about it.
 - Tax season is just around the corner, and AARP is again coming to the Senior Center to help with tax preparation. The AARP Foundation Tax aide provides assistance to anyone, free of charge, with a focus on taxpayers who are over 50 and have low to moderate income. You do not need to be an AARP member to use this services. For more information please go to the AARP [website](#). The appointments are filling up quickly, if you would like to secure your appointment please call the Senior Center at 860-429-0262 to reserve your spot.
 - We have two exciting events coming up in January at the Senior Center. If you are interested in either event, call the senior center to inquire at 860-429-0262:
 - On January 15th at 12:00pm Become a part of the most original murder mystery show of all time! Join our “professional detective” and Improv comedian as they lead us through our very own story, where your presence and creativity is vital in to unravelling the mystery. \$10 PARTICIPATION FEE DUE AT REGISTRATION INCLUDES LUNCH AND MURDER MYSTERY EVENT.
 - On Wednesday January 29th, come and help us celebrate the Chinese New year! The Chinese Lunar New Year Celebration is a traditional event celebrated in large parts of the world to welcome luck and prosperity in the year to come. Wear lots of red, and come embrace the delights of this vibrant celebration with lantern making, festive foods, and more. Find your zodiac and learn what it reveals about you. \$7 PARTICIPATION FEE DUE AT REGISTRATION PRE-REGISTER BY FRIDAY, JANUARY 24TH
 - December wrapped up with two very successful and well-attended events. We had our Holiday Celebration on December 17th, which was a day packed with food, company, singing and dancing! On December 31st, we rang in the New Year with Bangladesh, watching their ball drop at 12:00pm (EST).
- Youth Services:
 - The Youth Services Bureau has been busy over the last few weeks, and has implemented daily activities at the Teen Center during the open hours. For information on what is planned for activities and to sign up for any special events, please visit our website at <https://www.mansfieldct.gov/2231/Teen-Center>. For any questions please don't hesitate to call the Youth Services department at 860-429-3319
 - We are working on finalizing the youth services springtime program offerings for the community. More information will be distributed soon both on social media as well as in students' digital backpack.
 - Starting in January, Youth Services is partnering with Mansfield Middle School on a community service program for students to volunteer at local agencies in our community. This program will be every other week to start and will work at the Covenant Soup Kitchen.

- We are excited to announce that our Youth Services department is forming a youth council. This council will be focusing on youth-led programs, initiatives and service activities, as well as helping to plan events and programs for the youth and families in the community. We are looking for youth volunteers that are in middle school or older. Please contact Sarah DeLuca, Youth Services supervisor for more information.
- *Mansfield Parks and Recreation Updates*
 - As the Council is aware, the main pool at the Mansfield Community Center (MCC) remains closed. During the Council's January 13 business meeting, staff will provide an in-depth update on the issues that were experienced and the interventions that have been implemented to resolve the matter. Detailed information was also included in the meeting packet published this past week. Limited use of the therapy pool will be made available as feasible. The estimated reopening timeline (as of today) is mid-February. Information to the public has been made available on the parks and recreation web site, direct emailing, and Facebook
 - [Registration](#) for winter programs is now in progress.
 - Planning for spring and summer is underway with the first draft of the spring brochure to be completed this week.
 - The last Free Mansfield Day at the Community Center was January 11 and the next is February 16.
- *Office of the Town Clerk*
 - *Changes to Trade Name Filing Process* – Public Act 24-111 has changed the trade name registry process statewide. Trade names will continue to be filed at the local level but towns will use a system maintained by the Office of the Secretary of the State instead of the local systems that have been used to this point. Beginning January 1, 2025, Town Clerks are required to use forms created by the State to process trade names and (eventually) manually enter data into the State's new system. Additionally, the State has added distinctions within trade name filing types – namely initial filings, amendments, and cancellations – and each type of filing will carry a \$20 fee (a fee increase of \$10).
- *Fire and Emergency Services Updates*
 - Deputy Chief Danielson, who will be the subject of a ceremonial swearing in event later this evening, officially started in his new role on January 2 and is physically based in Town Hall in the Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services administrative office suite. His normal work schedule will be Tuesday-Friday days.
 - Chief Roache is in the process of preparing a comprehensive yearend call report for 2024. While this report is in production, we can report that there was a roughly 10% year-over-year increase in call volume in 2024 vs. 2023.
 - We want to extend a welcome to our newest volunteer members
 - Alyssa Tracy- a certified EMT and an ECSU student interested in Allied Health
 - Casey Berryman- a Navy Corpsman stationed in Groton who lived in Mansfield. He is presently taking a CT EMT class to obtain his certification.
 - As previously reported, the Department posted for its open full-time and part-time firefighter/EMT positions with a closing date in December. At present, we have two open full-time and four open part-time Firefighter/EMT positions. The exact hiring timeline is still to be determined, but, we anticipate that new hires will likely start in March following completion of the required testing and other aspects of the selection process.
 - Notable calls:
 - Structure fires – Pine Street, Columbia; Jackson Street, Willimantic
 - Below is a breakdown of the calls for service that Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services responded during 12/20/24 to 1/9/25.

Call Type	# of calls	# of calls which were responded as Mutual Aid
ALS Medical	49	7
BLS Medical	50	7
Total medical	99	14
Fire Alarm	7	1
Structure Fire	2	2
Outside/Brush Fire	1	
Smoke Odor Investigation	2	
CO Alarm	2	
Natural Gas Leak	2	
Vehicle Fire		
Vehicle Accident	3	2
Tree/Wires Down	1	
Service Call	1	
Standby	2	
Total Non-medical	22	5
Total	121	19

- *Public Works/Infrastructure Improvement Updates*

- Hunting Lodge Road Culvert Replacement Project- The road is now open. Genovesi Construction still has some work to do to complete the project which may temporarily close one lane of traffic. Line striping will be completed during warmer weather.
- Winter plowing- There were four events since the last Town Manager’s Report that required crews to apply treated salt to our roads (December 20, 24, 28, and January 11).
- The road crews have been backfilling the last of road edges on Browns Road following completion of road improvements this past construction season.
- One crew has started the repair of a drainage pipe failure at Mansfield Middle School.
- Pickleball facility update – the electrical connection remains to be completed, and Town staff continue to work with EVERSOURCE on a utility pole location to deliver power to the site.
- The Department continues to replace missing signs, address miscellaneous citizen requests, patch potholes and pick up wood from downed/cut trees.