

MEMO

To: Town Council
CC: Town Employees
From: Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager
Date: January 27, 2025
Subject: **Town Manager's Report**

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

- The Town Manager, Chief of Shared Services and Administration, and Finance have convened a number of initial meetings with department heads relative to their Fiscal Year 2025/26 operating budget and capital project requests. 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.
- The Superintendent of Mansfield Public Schools and Town Manager distributed a letter to school families earlier today communicating Mansfield's policy about undocumented residents, as well as providing a link to the school district's web page that includes resources compiled by the State about families' rights and the importance of having a family plan. The Mansfield Town Council adopted a [policy on undocumented immigrants in 2017](#), which assures that all people are free and welcome to use public services, without fear that they will be questioned by Town staff about their immigration status or that services will be denied because of that status. By law, schools and staff cannot ask for, collect, or share information about our students' and families' immigration status.
- This past week, I had the opportunity to join with all three of my children in attending the second annual "Snow Ball" hosted in the Mansfield Elementary School gym and café by the MES Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO). Events like this, convened for our Town's youth and their families (while also being an important annual fundraiser for the PTO), are yet another example of what Mansfield such a wonderful community to live in and serve.
- This past week, the Town received word that the Downtown Storrs commercial/retail properties owned by the CT Pension Fund (1, 9 & 11 Dog Lane, 1 and 8 Royce Circle, and 1220 Storrs Road) just sold to an entity incorporated under the name of 1266 Storrs Road LLC for \$40,250,000 with \$100,625 conveyance tax paid to the Town. Limited additional information is available at this time, other than the new ownership group is based in Delaware. Town officials, senior officials from UConn, and the Mansfield Downtown Partnership look forward to meeting the new owners in the near future and learning about their vision for the future.
- As the Council is aware, preliminary revaluation assessment letters were mailed to property owners at the beginning of January. 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>. Property cards can be viewed at: <https://www.axisgis.com/mansfieldct/>. The Assessor is working to finalize property values with an anticipated signing of the Grand List prior to February 28, at which time property owners will receive final assessment notices. Details regarding formal appeals processes

will be available when final assessment notices are distributed and are anticipated to occur in March. 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 for FY 2025/26 (July 1, 2025- June 30, 2026). The mill rate for FY 2025/26 is anticipated to be set at the Annual Town Meeting on May 13, 2025

- This coming Thursday, January 30, the Town Council will be joining in a meeting of the Mansfield Board of Education to receive a presentation regarding the “net zero” energy performance of the Mansfield Elementary School, which will have been in operation for two years this coming April. Information relative to energy production and consumption, as well as associated operating expenditures, will be reviewed. Representatives will be on hand from the School Building Committee, the Town and Mansfield Public Schools, as well as Colliers Project Leaders who serves as the Owner’s Project Manager.
- As the Council is aware, we recently broke ground on the much needed repairs and renovations to our old town hall buildings on Storrs Road. These buildings are 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. Drainage work will close the driveway today through Wednesday, January 29, so the parking lot and trail head for the Fifty-Foot Cliff Preserve will not be accessible. Initial work has focused on removing trees in the temporary right-of-way to enable heavy equipment access and installing footing drains on the west side of the Old Town hall. Additionally, the chimney on the east side of the administrative building has been demolished and crews are preparing the new lally column footings in the Old Town Hall basement to be poured.
- Following the last Council meeting, a member of the Council expressed concerns and posed related questions pertaining specifically to the blasting activities associated with “The Hub” project (large-scale group dwelling project planned for multiple sites on N. Eagleville Road). Staff subsequently reached out to the developer for The Hub project regarding their environmental due diligence. They have completed a Phase I Environmental Assessment, which is a standard tool used to identify potential risks and ensure compliance with environmental regulations. The Phase I process involves gathering detailed information about the property and its surroundings to identify any areas of concern. If such areas are found, a more detailed Phase II Environmental Assessment would be conducted. At this time, no Phase II has been undertaken; however, the developer is currently reviewing the Phase I findings to determine if further investigation is necessary. To address the Council member’s specific concerns regarding the potential impact of blasting near the decommissioned UConn landfill, Town staff contacted Paul Ferri, UConn’s Environmental Program Manager. Mr. Ferri provided assurance that UConn is closely monitoring development activities related to this project. He also shared his experience with the blasting conducted during the construction of Discovery Drive, which was located closer to the capped landfill than The Hub project site. According to Mr. Ferri, there were no adverse effects on the landfill, the plume, or private drinking water wells resulting from the blasting associated with construction of Discovery Drive. He has offered to answer any additional questions about the landfill or previous blasting activities. Additionally, in a letter provided by Maine Drilling & Blasting (the blasting subcontractor on the project), they stated the following: “The capped landfill is approximately 1,900 feet away. At that distance, vibrations diminish to a level where their impact becomes negligible. This occurs because of the natural decay of energy due to geometric spreading and material damping in the medium through which the waves travel.”
- *Municipal Facilities Master Planning:* Just after the New Year, the Town published a request for qualifications (RFQ) for professional architectural services related to the next phase of municipal facilities master planning project work (focus on municipal campus at 4-10 South Eagleville Road, and the Mansfield Senior Center) being funded in large part via a \$250,000 planning grant from the State of Connecticut to engage in master planning efforts for the. Unfortunately, the Town did not

receive a response from any qualified architecture and design firms. Staff are in the process of updating the RFQ for republication in the near future.

- 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 has completed its initial comprehensive review and discussion of qualified candidates. Candidates have been identified as semi-finalists to proceed on in the selection process and the search committee is presently finalizing the interview questions that will be posed during this round of the 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. It has been helpful 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, and I look forward to ensuring that this remains an area of emphasis as the semi-finalists are interviewed.
- 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 in the latter stages of the selection process for the next Executive Director of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership. 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 met with the search committee earlier this month and the goal is to present a preferred candidate to the full Board of Directors for the Mansfield Downtown Partnership in the coming week.
- Rachel Vertefeulle has been appointed to the position of Assessor's Assistant, effective February 17th. Ms. Vertefeulle has over 25 years of experience working in municipal assessor offices. She has previously served two municipalities in a similar capacity. During recent staffing transitions in our Assessor's office due to retirements, Ms. Vertefeulle has assisted the Town in a temporary capacity. She is currently the Board Chair for the Windham Region Transit District (WRTD). Congratulations, Rachel!
- The Town held the first of a two-part training series for its supervisors on January 16th. The first session focused on the Municipal Employees Relation Act (MERA), and approximately 40 supervisors and senior staff attended. The second session will focus on compliance topics and is scheduled for February 13th. The Town's labor and employment attorney, Ken Weinstock, did an expert job facilitating the first session and will be back on hand to facilitate the second session next month.
- As the Council is aware, the Town has been 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 Town received an updated conceptual design and associated cost estimates from the vendor within the past week, and staff are in the process of completing review to ensure alignment with our needs before presenting additional information to the Council relative to recommendations and possible funding approaches.
- 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](#).
- My next interview on WILI-AM with Wayne Norman is scheduled for Friday, February 7.
- *Regional School District 19*: The annual municipal "stakeholder" meeting organized by Regional School District 19 in association with development of the budget took place on January 14. This gathering provided members of the Region's state legislative delegation (State Senator Flexer and Reps. Haddad and Boyd participated, and other legislators were invited) 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). Local stakeholders including the Boards of

Education and representatives from the governing bodies for the three towns (Mansfield, Ashford, and Willington) also had a chance to post questions or convey constraints.

- *Mansfield Tomorrow Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) Update:*
 - *Ad Hoc Committee on the POCD-* The next meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee is on January 30. At this meeting, the committee will review the Community Engagement Strategy. Staff is working with Sustainable CT to review the strategy to ensure that it is equitable and inclusive.
 - *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 three-part process is being carried out with Town Department Heads, and the first such part took place this past week.
 - *Town-wide community engagement-* Additional community engagement to inform the POCD will take place later this 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.
 - *Public Workshop Scheduled for Saturday Morning, April 5th* at the Mansfield Middle School. Childcare and light refreshments will be provided.



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>

- *Presentation on Housing Choice:* Emmeline Harrigan, President of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association, will present “*Diversifying Housing Choice for Today’s Diverse Households*” to the Planning and Zoning Commission during its February 3 meeting. The presentation is scheduled to begin at approximately 6:15 PM. Council members and members of the public are encouraged to attend. Jennifer Kaufman, Director of Planning and Development, and I had the opportunity to see this presentation at a CCAPA and CCM event and found it highly informative.
- *Downtown Partnership:*
 - *Taste 2 Towns Has Returned!* –Back for its fourth year, Taste 2 Towns: [Mansfield-Windham Restaurant Week](#) starts today! Enjoy take-out deals and special dine-in menus at 20 restaurants in Mansfield and Windham. Our restaurant owners have put together tempting menus featuring their best flavors plus special items only available during Taste 2 Towns! Participating from Mansfield: Coyote Flaco, Dad’s Doughs, Dog Lane Café, Fenton River Grill, Gansett Wraps, Hops 44, Huskies Restaurant & Bar, Little Aladdin Mediterranean Grill, TaCo, and The Tavern at Spring Hill Road. Taste 2 Towns is a collaboration between the Town of Mansfield, Mansfield Downtown Partnership, Town of Windham, and Willimantic Downtown Neighborhood Association. Taste 2 Towns begins today (Monday, January 27) and extends through Sunday, February 9, and is supported by radio and print advertising, social media, and press outreach. Visit taste2towns.com for more information and menus. 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:*
 - Mansfield Public Library (MPL) is delighted to share that one of our Digital Navigators, John Cropp, has accepted the open position for a part-time librarian at our library! John has been a phenomenal addition to the team through his technology assistance appointments, programs, and outreaches and we are thrilled to see him step into this new role where he will continue to serve the public and also assist MPL’s Youth Services and Adult Services departments with programming for children, teens, and adults. The Digital Navigator position is currently posted and, while the new team member will have big shoes to fill, we will ensure that whoever is selected is every bit as friendly, helpful, and committed to public service as John.
 - *Celebrate Take Your Child to the Library Day on February 1 from 10:30- 12:00 PM with an [Elephant and Piggie Party](#)!* Sing along to a silly storytime with Ms. Emily at 10:30AM. Then, we’ll welcome some special guests for a dance party and family photo opps- our very own

Elephant and Piggie! Elephant & Piggie-themed crafts and a scavenger hunt will be available in the Children's area all day!

- *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).

- *Craft Swap!*

Donation Dates: Thursday, January 30 – Friday, February 7

Date of Swap Event: February 8 from 1:00-5:00 PM

Location: Mansfield Public Library Program Room

Back by popular demand! Do you have craft supplies that you no longer use? Would you like to try a different kind of craft but don't want to spend a lot of money on materials just to try something new? Then donate some of your old craft supplies during normal library hours from January 30-February 7 and then do a little free shopping at our swap event on Saturday, February 8 from 1:00-5:00 PM. We will be accepting craft supply donations at the library circulation desk for all types of crafts: yarn, fabric, paper-crafting, tools, etc. Please make sure all donations are in good, usable condition. Previously opened containers of liquid (paint, glue, etc.) will not be accepted. Any items left at the end of the swap will be used by the library, donated, or discarded.

- *Mansfield Human Services Department Updates:*

- Adult Services:

- The Mansfield Farms to Families Program is starting registration for all those who are interested in accessing fresh food and local products from local farm producers this coming growing season. A weekly CSA or monthly food box distribution options are available to qualified families. If you are interested in learning more about this program, you can go directly to the food programs webpage at

<https://www.mansfieldct.gov/1896/Food-Programs> and select Mansfield Farms to Family Program. We are hosting pop up events for residents at the following dates, times and locations:

- 1/28/2025 – Library – 10:00 am to noon
- 2/4/2025 – Library – 10:00 am to noon
- 2/6/2025 – Senior Center – 11:30 am to 2 pm
- 2/13/2025 – Senior Center – 11:30 am to 2 pm
- 2/20/2025 – Senior Center – 11:30 am to 2 pm
- 2/27/2025 – Senior Center – 11:30 am to 2 pm
- 3/10/2025 – Rolling Hills – 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm

You may also call the Human Services Department at 860-429-3315 to inquire about more registration or to sign up.

- It is that time of year for all seniors and veterans to sign up for the tax credit program if you have not already! 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:

- 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.

- The AARP free tax preparation begins on February 6th and runs through April 13th, only on Thursdays. This is the 50th year that the AARP and Mansfield Senior Center have collaborated on this event. Appointments are filling up quickly so call the senior center now to reserve your spot! 860-429-0262.
- This month, the Senior Center said goodbye to our Nutrition Coordinator extraordinaire, Kristen Roccanti, as she went on to start a new chapter in her family's life in another part of the country. We are actively seeking to fill her position at this time. While we find the right fit for our role, we have modified our food program offerings. We will do our best to offer as many options for our seniors as possible.
- One of our part-time Transportation program drivers has decided to leave and pursue other career opportunities. This leaves the Senior Center with a part-time driver position open for our medical transportation program as well as our day trips. We are actively recruiting for this role, and the position is posted.
- The Meals on Wheels program is in need of Volunteers to drive meals out to our homebound residents in town. The time commitment is approximately two hours on assigned delivery days (Tuesdays – Fridays). We will provide all necessary training to anyone interested. If you are interested in learning more please call the Mansfield Senior Center at 860-429-0262 or sign up online to volunteer within the Town of Mansfield at the link provided <https://www.mansfieldct.gov/353/Job-Opportunities>

○ Youth Services:

- The Youth Services Department has been busy with scheduling its spring programming, which is set to start next week.
- The “Feel Your Best Self” social emotional learning programs is up and running in the four preschool classes at the Mansfield Elementary School. This program has received a lot of positive feedback from the staff and children participating.
- In January, we started our weekly themed activities for the Teen Center housed within the Mansfield Community Center. We are excited to continue to explore opportunities to make the Teen Center a fun alternative setting for teens to gather.
- Our Youth Services Supervisor has been collaborating with the Mansfield Elementary School support services team to help educate school staff about what Youth Services can provide, and identify students and families in need of supports. We have seen an increase in our counseling referrals to our Youth Services program.

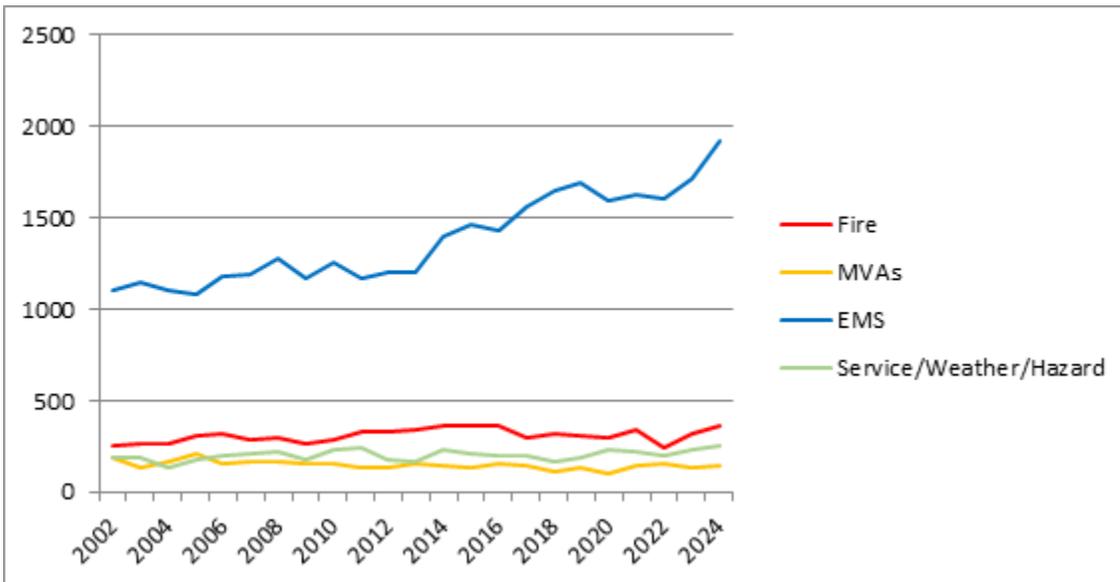
● *Mansfield Parks and Recreation Updates*

- [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 Annual Valentine's Dance will be held at the Mansfield Community Center on February 1, 6:00-8:00pm. Additional information is located [here](#).
- The Mansfield Arts Advisory Committee announces a call to artists for an exhibition titled “The Wonder of Winter” February 22, 2025 through March 29, 2025 in the Mansfield Community Center. The exhibition is open to all artists 18 years of age and older currently residing in the 8 town Mansfield area. (Mansfield, Ashford, Chaplin, Columbia, Coventry, Tolland, Willington, and Windham) Applications must be submitted with an image of your artwork by January 30th. More information can be located [here](#).
- The lap/main pool at the Mansfield Community Center remains closed for repairs. Limited use of the therapy pool will be continue to be made available as feasible while work is being performed. Over the past week, work slowed with the project but the pace is anticipated to pick up early next week with cleaning of the stainless steel pool rim, joint chalking, and preparation for applying a bond coat prior to re-plastering. Once the bond coat is applied, the

next step is applying new plaster. At the end of January/early February, we anticipate being able to have a better idea of the feasibility of the pre-project estimated reopening date of the week of February, 16. Information to the public continues to be made available on the parks and recreation web site, direct emailing, and Facebook.

- **Fire and Emergency Services Updates**

- In 2024, a Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services responded to a total of 2,677 calls, representing an approximately 11% year-over-year increase in call volume. The calls can be further broken down as follows:
 - Structure Fires: 20 (of these, only three were in Mansfield, and all three were kept to the area of origin)
 - Other Fire related calls (car fires, brush fires, fire alarms): 338
 - Motor Vehicle Accidents: 146
 - EMS Calls (medical calls, lift assists): 1918
 - Service Calls / Weather Related: 255
- The Department has prepared a summary “look back” on its call trends dating back to 2002 (which is when Mansfield and Eagleville first consolidated their NFIRS). While other call types are relatively stable (perhaps increasing modestly over time), EMS call volumes are growing at significantly steeper rate. EMS is now over 70% of the Department’s call volume.



- 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.
- The CT Fire Chiefs Association has nominated Chief Roache to represent them on the CT EMS Advisory Board. This will give Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services a little more exposure at the state level.
- Below is a breakdown of the calls for service that Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services responded during 1/10/25 to 1/23/25.

Call Type	# of calls	# of calls which were responded as Mutual Aid
ALS Medical	33	1
BLS Medical	24	1
Total medical	57	2
Fire Alarm	5	
Smoke in Building	1	
Natural Gas Leak	1	
CO Alarm	2	
Vehicle Accident	2	
Tree/Wires Down	1	
Service Call	1	
Officer Call	1	
Total Non-medical	14	0
Total	71	2

- *Public Works/Infrastructure Improvement Updates*
 - The Department, together with the CT Department of Transportation (CT DOT) and its bridge design contractor, will host an in-person public information meeting on the planned replacement of the Atwoodville Road bridge over the Mount Hope River on Tuesday February 11 beginning at 6:00 PM in the Council Chamber.
 - Since the last report, Department crews have responded to a winter storm and conditions that warranted treating. Treating events occurred on January 11 and 19. The second winter storm of the season occurred during January 19 into 20 and resulted in a total of 3.5” of snow. Crews hauled snow out of the Downtown area on January 21.
 - A crew has been assisting our tree contractor with wood pick up.
 - One crew is clearing our drainage retention ponds around town.
 - On the new Pickleball courts, the electrical connection remains to be completed. DPW is working with EVERSOURCE on a utility pole location to deliver power to the site.
 - Crews continue to replace missing signs, address miscellaneous citizen requests, patch potholes and pick up wood from downed/cut trees.