

MEMO

To: Town Council
CC: Town Employees
From: Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager
Date: February 10, 2025
Subject: **Town Manager's Report**

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

- Governor Lamont unveiled his proposed biennial budget (FY2026-FY2027) on February 5, which includes the following levels of municipal aid to the Town of Mansfield:

	Est. FY 25	Gov. Prop. FY 26	\$ Change	% Change
Adult Education	0	0	0	
ECS	11,860,593	11,693,596	(166,997)	-1.4%
LoCIP	313,778	313,778	0	0.0%
Pequot-Mohegan	179,151	179,151	0	0.0%
PILOT	11,940,181	12,319,342	379,161	3.2%
Town Aid Road	417,525	417,525	0	0.0%
Municipal Grants-in-Aid	6,841	6,841	0	0.0%
Motor Vehicle Reimbursement	0	0	0	
Supplemental Revenue Sharing	3,291,730	3,291,730	0	0.0%
TOTAL	28,009,800	28,221,964	212,164	0.8%

- Although the amount of Education Cost Share (ECS) funding the Town of Mansfield stands to receive in the Governor's proposed budget for FY 2026 represents a slight reduction from FY 2025, the Council will recall that the Town's adopted FY 2025 budget anticipated approximately \$2.1 million less in ECS funding than was ultimately included in the State's FY 2025 budget. As such, the municipal aid that the Town of Mansfield stands to receive based on the Governor's proposed FY 2026 budget would not present the same challenges that other communities with relatively level municipal aid are presently confronting in the face of rising inflation.
- The Town Manager, Chief of Shared Services and Administration, and Finance have nearly finished conducting initial meetings with department heads relative to their respective Fiscal Year 2025/26 operating budget and capital project requests. Members of the municipal management team have once again prepared well-researched requests intended to meet the needs of the community, and many tradeoffs will have to be confronted as the merits and budgetary viability of individual proposed service improvements and capital projects are carefully examined. The Town Manager will present his comprehensive budget recommendations to the Town Council in late-March. As in previous budget years, a primary goal for the FY 2025/26 budget is to sustain the high quality of Town programs, projects, and services while simultaneously promoting cost efficiencies, leveraging state and other "non-local" revenue sources, and minimizing—or avoiding—any increases in the property taxes owed by households. We want to ensure that Mansfield continues to be a welcoming and affordable community for residents of all economic backgrounds. 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.

- 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. Appeals 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.
- The Town Council’s appointed Ordinance Development and Review (ODR) Committee is scheduled to meet at 5:00 PM this evening to review and deliberate on an updated version of a possible new legislative ordinance regarding the abatement of property taxes for affordable housing projects. If the proposed ordinance is favorably reviewed by the ODR Committee, the Council will subsequently receive a recommendation to schedule an associated public hearing.
- On January 30, the Town Council joined 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, was reviewed and demonstrating in indisputable terms that the building is successfully delivering on the Town’s stated objectives of producing as much energy as the building consumes (definition of net zero), eliminating use of fossil fuels (entirely powered by renewable energy), and dramatically reducing annual energy-related expenditures. As questions were posed during the meeting relative to the Eversource solar energy rate program that the Town selected, staff are presently compiling additional related information that will be shared with the Council in the future.
- The Mansfield Middle School HVAC Committee met earlier today (February 10) for a status update on the project. The Town’s design firm (Crosskey Architects) has prepared preliminary drawings that the Facilities Management Department is presently reviewing. Crosskey informed staff and the committee that the tentative completion date for final design is March 7, which will enable the issuance of a request for proposals (RFP) later in March. Although the construction timeline may ultimately be impacted by the lead time associated with the Town’s eventual contractor being able to procure needed mechanical/system components, it is still the Committee’s goal to have the work completed in earnest during the summer months to avoid/minimize disruption to student learning.
- Progress continues on the much-needed repairs and renovations to our Old Town Hall and adjacent administrative building on Spring Hill (954 Storrs Road), currently leased by the Mansfield Historical Society, which commenced in early-January. The renovations will include site work and drainage improvements, structural repairs, and accessibility improvements. The general contractor is Sarazin Construction. In late-January, trees were removed on the west side of the Old Town Hall to allow drainage installation and footing drains were installed around the stone administrative building while lally column work was being performed. The Historic District Commission also approved the requested replacement windows, which helped save the Town approximately \$30,000 vs. repairing the existing windows. Early this month footing drains were installed around the Old Town Hall, stumps were removed, and window wells were installed. Excavation has also been performed in anticipation of installing a pre-cast bulkhead. Replacement windows have been measured and ordered.
- *Municipal Facilities Master Planning:* The Town did not receive a response from any qualified firms to the request for qualifications (RFQ) the Town issued 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). That project is being funded in large part via a \$250,000 planning grant from the State of Connecticut. We are in the process of finalizing a revised RFQ that will be issued later this month.

- *Mansfield Tomorrow Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) Update:* The Ad Hoc Committee on the POCD met on January 30. At this meeting, the committee reviewed the Community Engagement Strategy. The overall strategy and the survey are being reviewed by Sustainable CT to ensure that it is equitable and inclusive. The Ad Hoc Committee will review the survey before it is released in late February. 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. Here are some ways the community can provide input:
 - Follow our Progress and Stay Up to Date at: www.MansfieldTomorrow.org
 - Take the Survey (coming soon!): Available mid-February through early May
 - Join the Public Workshop: Saturday, April 5, 9:30–11:30 AM @ Mansfield Middle School
 - Visit Us at the Earth Day Event: Saturday, April 26, 2025, at the Mansfield Community Center
 - Email Us at: MansfieldTomorrow@MansfieldCT.org
- *Affordable Housing 101:* An interactive forum open to the public was held on the evening of January 29. The forum, attended by over 30 people, provided an overview of what affordable housing looks like, what CT has outlined as the Town's goal, and Mansfield's status on reaching it. Slides from the forum can be downloaded at this [link](#).
- *Town Landfill Solar Field Project:* The Town was recently informed that the solar developer, Verogy, received interrogatories on this project from the CT Siting Council in late-January and responses to the questions were provided by stated deadline (today). We are being informed that it will ultimately still take some time to get the final approval from the CSC, as it has until mid-April 2025 to issue a decision. Verogy has have continued to check in with the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) on a regular basis regarding review of the Landfill Post-Closure Use Permit, and the agency has indicated it is still under review. Verogy also reports meeting weekly with Eversource, which has advised that the detailed engineering design for the required line extension to the site has been completed and submitted to the CT Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) for its review. Based on the fact that we are still waiting on approvals from CSC and DEEP, we are probably looking at a potential start of construction in late-summer/early-fall 2025 based on procurement and final engineering that would need to occur after receipt of remaining approvals. This would likely result in a Spring 2026 commercial operation date.
- The lap/main pool at the Mansfield Community Center remains closed for repairs. Over the past two weeks, cleaning of the stainless steel pool rim and acid washing required prior to joint/seam caulking was completed. The next step is applying the caulking and a bond coat prior to re-plastering. This "refresh" of the main pool should have an anticipated useful life of at least 15 years. The most recent update the Town received from the contractor provided an estimated reopening date of late-February. Updates and other pertinent information continues to be made available to the public on the Mansfield Parks and Recreation website, direct emailing, and social media.
- The Department of Public Works, 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.
- *Taste 2 Towns: Mansfield-Windham Restaurant Week:* Yesterday marked the conclusion of the fourth annual Taste 2 Towns: Mansfield-Windham Restaurant Week. This celebration of our culinary community is a collaboration between the Partnership and Town and the Town of Windham and the Willimantic Downtown Neighborhood Association. Nineteen restaurants participated this year, including from Mansfield: 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. Taste 2 Towns highlights our area as a dining destination for not only local residents but also a

regional audience. The program received coverage on WTNH; on WINY and WILL; in the *Norwich Bulletin*, *the Chronicle*, and *The Daily Campus*. As of Thursday afternoon, our social media ads promoting the event had reached nearly 20,000 people in our target areas of eastern Connecticut, Providence, Worcester, and Springfield and had notched over 34,500 impressions. The event website, which included [profiles](#) of each participating restaurant as well as a list of local [events](#) and [attractions](#), received over 5,500 visits in just the past 30 days. The program has been well-received by the restaurants and we will gather feedback from the participants in the coming weeks. We have already heard from restaurateurs who want to participate next year!

- *Connecticut Magazine* recently released their “[Best of 2025](#)” list highlighting exceptional restaurants around the state. Two Mansfield restaurants were recognized by the panel of food experts: Taco was named to the list of “Hidden Gems” and Gansett Wraps as “Best Overall Value.” Congratulations to these two locally-owned businesses!
- Management has negotiated a proposed successor collective bargaining agreement with our Professional and Technical Employees Union, and the Union members ratified that agreement via a vote of the full membership this past week. In accordance with our normal procedure, we are now presenting the proposed agreement to the Town Council for its review and consideration at the February 10 business meeting. A detailed summary of provisions of the tentative agreement are included in the informational packet.
- The selection process for the next Executive Director of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership is nearing completion. This past week, the MDP Board of Directors had the opportunity to meet in executive session for important deliberations. I continue to be optimistic that the selection process will be finalized in the near future and enable the appointment of a new Executive Director by the MDP Board of Directors by late-winter or early-spring.
- The Town will be holding the second of a two-part training series for its supervisors on February 13th. This session will focus on a variety of human resources compliance topics. The first session, held in mid-January, was facilitated by the Town’s labor attorney and focused on the Municipal Employees Relation Act (MERA).
- The February/March issue of the Town’s bimonthly e-newsletter was published on February 3 and can be accessed [here](#).
- My most recent monthly interview on WILLI-AM with Wayne Norman took place this past Friday (February 7) and can be listened to [here](#).