

MEMO

To: Town Council
CC: Town Employees
From: Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager
Date: February 9, 2026
Subject: **Town Manager's Report**

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

- **Train Derailment Incident Update and Response Summary:** On the morning of Thursday, February 5, 2026, at approximately 9:00 a.m., a freight train operated by New England Central Railroad derailed along Connecticut Route 32 (Stafford Road) between the intersections of Route 44 and Route 275. The derailment occurred near the Willimantic River/Eagleville Pond area on the Spring Valley Farm, a largely rural and agricultural/wooded stretch of roadway and track. Of the train's 41 cars and two locomotives, 13 cars detached and 10 derailed, with six of the overturned cars carrying liquefied petroleum gas (liquid propane) and others loaded with food-grade grease, grain, and lumber. Several cars came to rest partially in the Willimantic River, prompting immediate concern about potential environmental impact and public safety. The Town Manager issued a local emergency declaration.

Local, state, and federal authorities mobilized quickly. There was an enormous emergency services mutual aid response from neighboring/area communities that is incredibly appreciated. Emergency responders, including Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), hazmat teams, and railroad contractors, established a large, multiday incident response. Because of the presence of hazardous materials, officials issued a shelter-in-place advisory for residents within approximately one-half mile of the site out of an abundance of caution, though no evacuation was necessary and no injuries were reported. Throughout the initial hours and subsequent days, responders focused on air and water monitoring, placement of containment booms in the Willimantic River, and stabilization of the derailed cars. Despite the derailment of multiple propane-loaded cars into the river, there were no detected leaks of propane or other hazardous gases. The only reported product release was a leak of food-grade grease, which was contained and not believed to have entered the waterway.

Over the course of five press conferences held on the matter, officials consistently emphasized that the situation, while serious, did not escalate into an environmental disaster due to the integrity of the tank cars and the proactive response by emergency teams. Specialized cranes and heavy equipment were brought in to upright and remove the derailed cars from the river and surrounding tracks. By Saturday, all railcars had been removed from the riverbed and stabilized on land, with several cars able to be returned to rail and repositioned in a nearby field as a staging area while they are drained and prepared for transport off-site.

Throughout the response, Route 32 has remained closed to through traffic between Route 44 and Route 275 to ensure public safety and allow space for heavy equipment, contractor vehicles, and emergency personnel. Local access to driveways and businesses is being maintained from the Route 275 end. Electronic message boards deployed by the Connecticut Department of Transportation

continue to advise motorists of the closure and alternate routes, and residents have been urged to avoid the area due to ongoing recovery operations.

As of 10:00 a.m. today, transloading of liquefied petroleum gas from the derailed railcars into new railcars has begun. Each car is expected to take approximately 14 hours to complete the transloading process. Following transloading, the damaged railcars will be cleaned and prepared for safe removal from the site. Residents may observe a visible flame during nighttime hours associated with controlled flaring of vapor, which is a standard safety practice. Environmental crews continue continuous air monitoring during this phase of operations. Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services remains on site along with DEEP and multiple specialized contractors. Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services is now operating with two complete “shift” assignments on duty. One group is dedicated to the ongoing rail incident, while the other remains available to cover all our routine 911 calls that continue to occur. Our service level to our local residents has not been degraded.

Given the continued closure of Stafford Road/Route 32, which is a heavily used roadway, Town staff will provide periodic updates through the Town’s website, social media channels, and other communication platforms regarding the status of the roadway. The road is closed until further notice, and a clear public announcement will be made when Route 32 is reopened to through traffic. At this time, traffic detours, congestion, and travel delays associated with the closure represent the most direct and ongoing impact of the derailment on Mansfield residents, and timely communication on this issue will remain a priority.

Investigations into the cause of the derailment remain ongoing, with winter weather conditions noted as a possible contributing factor. Coordination among local, state, and federal agencies has remained strong throughout the response, and the Town will continue to provide updates as recovery and investigation efforts progress.

In parallel, the Town Manager, Department of Finance, and Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services are carefully documenting all direct and indirect costs incurred by the Town in response to the incident and will be conferring with the Town Attorney to develop an appropriate strategy to pursue full reimbursement from the responsible parties.

- With the new Town Council being seated following the municipal elections in November, during its December 8 meeting, the Town Council deliberated on goals for your 2025-2027 term. Materials pertaining to the *Mansfield Tomorrow: Plan of Conservation and Development* and the Council’s goals from its 2023-2025 term were reviewed by Council members in advance of the meeting. Based on the substantial and wide-ranging input provided during this session, staff developed proposed draft goals for the Council’s consideration. These draft goals were also incorporated into the comprehensive FY 2026/27 budget development guidance that the Town Manager transmitted to all municipal operating departments last month. A proposed list of the Town Council’s goals for the 2025-2027 term was presented for consideration and adoption at the January 12 meeting. At this meeting, by consensus, the Council elected to defer further deliberation and final action on the draft goals until its January 26, 2026 meeting to give members additional time to review what had been assembled and propose any specific modifications as appropriate. At the January 26 meeting, Council elected to again defer final action until its February 9, 2026 meeting to give staff additional opportunity to confer with a specific member of the Council who had a series of proposed revisions he wished the Council to consider for incorporation. Council-adopted goals will ultimately be incorporated into the FY 2026/27 budget book and the Council Policy Index on the Town’s website.
- The Town Manager, Chief of Shared Services and Administration, and Finance Director have completed all initial meetings with department heads to review and discuss their respective FY 2026/27 operating budget and capital item requests. Possible necessary adjustments identified by the

Town Manager will be subsequently reviewed and discussed with the corresponding operating department's leadership before being finalized as part of the formal FY2026/27 budget recommendations that the Town Manager will present to the Town Council in late-March.

- The October 1, 2025 Grand List was certified on January 28th with a total taxable value of \$1,836,449,410. This represents an increase of \$60,923,290 or 3.43%, and reflects the additional property tax revenue that the Town will receive from The Standard at Four Corners now that the project was completed and obtained a certificate of occupancy in August 2025.
- Governor's Proposed FY2026/27 State Budget (Municipal Aid) Adjustments: This past week, on February 4, the Governor released his proposed FY 2026/27 biennial budget adjustments, and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities subsequently distributed the town-by-town municipal aid figures included in the proposal. While the General Assembly frequently makes substantial modifications to municipal aid levels during the legislative review process, the funding amounts shown in the table below reflect the Governor's initial proposal as it currently stands. Consistent with past practice, these proposed figures will serve as the starting point for the revenue assumptions incorporated into my FY 2026/27 budget and capital recommendations, which will be presented to the Town Council in late March. At present, the Governor's proposed budget adjustments program a total of \$29,707,308 in aggregate municipal aid to the Town of Mansfield, which represents a roughly \$316,000 (0.7%) reduction in state aid to the Town vs. the FY2026/27 municipal aid funding programmed for the Town of Mansfield in the previously enacted biennial budget. The single largest area of reduced municipal aid is in payment-in-lieu of taxes (PILOT), which is a result of the significant reduction in the Town's mill rate (now 20.00 per \$1,000 in assessed value) following last year's town-wide revaluation outpacing the relative increase in the net valuation of real property on the UConn campus. Town officials will be in close communications with members of our state legislative delegation and the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) to ensure that the Town's PILOT funding is being accurately estimated.

	Est. FY 26	Orig. FY 27	Gov. Prop. FY 27	\$ Change Gov. Prop. v. FY 26	% Change Gov. Prop. v. FY 26	\$ Change Gov. Prop. v. Orig. FY 27	% Change Gov. Prop. v. Orig. FY 27
Adult Education	0	0	0	0		0	
ECS	13,112,190	13,112,190	13,112,190	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
LoCIP	392,916	313,778	392,916	0	0.0%	79,138	25.2%
Pequot-Mohegan	179,151	179,151	179,151	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
PILOT	12,355,747	12,319,342	12,116,988	(238,759)	-1.9%	(202,354)	-1.6%
Town Aid Road	545,183	556,701	545,183	0	0.0%	(11,518)	-2.1%
Municipal Grants-in-Aid	6,841	6,841	6,841	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Motor Vehicle Reimbursement	0	0	0	0		0	
Special Ed and Expan Dev	139,217	138,016	62,309	(76,908)	-55.2%	(75,707)	-54.9%
Supplemental Revenue Sharing	3,291,730	3,291,730	3,291,730	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	30,022,975	29,917,748	29,707,308	(315,667)	-1.1%	(210,440)	-0.7%

- Municipal Services Campus Master Plan: Town staff continue to advance work with EDM Studios on the municipal services campus master planning effort, which, as the Council is aware, the Town was awarded a \$250,000 Community Investment Fund grant to support. The Municipal Services Campus presently includes the Audrey Beck Municipal Building (Town Hall) and the Mansfield Community Center on South Eagleville Road. The scope of work includes evaluating options for the future of Town Hall and the Mansfield Senior Center – whether through renovation, replacement, relocation to the campus, or integration with other facilities – and was later expanded to also examine the potential for a new main branch public library at or near the campus, recognizing the benefits of co-locating civic and community services in a centrally accessible location. Following a competitive RFQ process, EDM Studios was selected to lead this effort and has completed a draft space and program needs analysis, which indicates that the current Senior Center site presents significant limitations for major

renovation or expansion. This evening, Chris Wante of EDM Studios will join the Council to present an overview of the project scope, preliminary findings, and the planned community engagement process that will inform future decision-making.

- This past week, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a government funding package (H.R. 7148) that includes more than \$9.6 million for 10 Community Projects in Connecticut's Second Congressional District, represented by Congressman Joe Courtney. Earlier funding was also secured for the District, including over \$2.6 million for four additional Community Projects in January and \$1 million for one project in North Stonington in November. Funding for all 15 Community Projects has now been signed into law. Among these projects, Mansfield will receive \$1.952 million to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety and accessibility in the downtown area through the design and construction of a 10-foot-wide multi-use trail. This work will serve as Phase II of a larger initiative to establish bicycle and pedestrian connectivity along CT-195 (Storrs Road) between US-44 (Middle Turnpike) and Tower Loop Road. Congressman Courtney previously assisted the Town in securing \$1 million in funding for Phase I of the project. With this latest federal award, Mansfield has now secured approximately \$3.25 million for the multi-use trail project. To fully utilize the \$1.952 million in new federal funding, the Town will provide an additional \$488,000 in non-federal match, representing 20% of the project cost. This funding positions the Town to advance a critical infrastructure project that will enhance safety, mobility, and accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists in the downtown area.
- During its regular business meeting this evening, Director of Public Works John Carrington will provide the Town Council with an overview of the Department's responsibilities and operations, as well as an update on priority projects and initiatives being carried out by the Department as we enter the 2026 construction season.
- Appointments of New Firefighters: As previously reported, following completion of a competitive recruitment process for Firefighter/EMTs, the Town extended conditional offers to seven candidates, all of whom were subsequently cleared and began employment with the Town. The swearing-in ceremony for these new Firefighter/EMTs, which had been scheduled for Thursday, February 5, was postponed due to the train derailment incident and the resulting emergency response activities. Details regarding the rescheduled ceremony will be shared with the Town Council once a new date have been finalized (we anticipate that the event will still have a 6:00 PM start time at the Mansfield Middle School Auditorium). Six of the seven newly hired members are scheduled to attend the Fire Academy program beginning this month, completing the hiring process associated with the SAFER grant awarded to the Town.
- *Planning and Development Updates:*
 - Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC)/Inland Wetlands Agency(IWA):
 - March 2, 2026:6:05 PM- The IWA will hold a Public to hear comments on the Application of the Town of Mansfield, Department of Public Works, for Replacement of Bridge over Fenton River on Gurleyville Road, IWA File #1641. A link to the IWA Agenda Packet with the application materials can be downloaded [here](#).
 - March 16, 2026: 6:05 PM- PZC will hold a Public Hearing on the Application of the Standard at Four Corners LLC to modify the affordable housing requirements of the approved special permit for a mixed-use development with 392 residential units, located at 1725 Storrs Rd (Assessor's Parcel ID 8.15.9), File #P1372-3. A link to the PZC Agenda Packet with the application materials can be downloaded [here](#).
 - Regulation Amendments- The next PZC Regulatory Review Committee meeting, scheduled for February 19 at 5:00 PM, will focus on the Non-residential Mixed-Use Tables. Consistent with the residential use table amendments adopted in December, the goal is to improve usability and clarity by consolidating and simplifying use categories.
 - Mansfield Tomorrow Plan of Conservation and Development: Work continues on the draft goals, strategies, actions, and plan narrative with an intent to finalize the plan in early 2026. Stay informed and follow the plan's progress [online](#).

- *Mansfield Public Library Updates:*
 - Coming this spring, the Mansfield Library will add a plant propagation station to its seed library. The station will be open to the entire community, and no library card is required to participate. Community members interested in helping launch the propagation station can email Assistant Library Director Kaithlin Epling at EplingKM@mansfieldct.org.
 - A few weeks remain to participate in Winter Reading Bingo at the library. Participants can stop by to register and pick up a bingo card. Each completed square earns a drawing ticket for a chance to win one of the larger prizes.
 - During the February school break, the library will offer extended programming to keep children engaged. Events include a Valentine's CRAFT-ernoon and a program celebrating Black History Month through collages created with illustrations from Black children's book illustrators and text excerpts from Black authors.
 - All local teens and tweens are invited to the library's Teen Night Valentine's Party on February 19. Participants can design their own Conversation Hearts, play games with friends, and enjoy Valentine's treats, including free pizza.
 - The library's Digital Navigator, Lauren, will offer a Tech Savvy class on February 20 focusing on methods for backing up devices and storing files, covering external hard drives, cloud storage, best practices, and more.
 - The community is invited to the library's Lunar New Year Celebration on February 21 featuring interactive Lion and Dragon Dances by the Ju Long Wushu School for Chinese Martial Arts. Following the performance, families can enjoy dragon crafts and a Zodiac Animal Scavenger Hunt in the Children's Area.
- *Mansfield Parks and Recreation Updates:*
 - Winter session programs are currently underway, and planning is in progress for the upcoming Parks and Recreation spring brochure. The brochure will be mailed to Mansfield households the week of March 16 and will include information on youth summer camps.
 - The Winter Scavenger Hunt/Nature Bingo and Winter Photo Challenges continue throughout the winter season. These free activities are open to all ages and encourage residents to explore Mansfield's parks, trails, and open space. Prizes are awarded for participation.
 - The next *Plein Air* in the Parks event will be held at Bicentennial Pond on February 14 at 10:00 a.m. All skill levels are welcome to participate.
 - Mansfield Parks and Recreation, in collaboration with the Towns of Ashford, Bolton, Coventry, Hebron, and Willington, hosted Lakes League playoff and jamboree basketball games this past weekend. Appreciation is extended to DPW and Facilities Management for timely snow removal, which kept the events on schedule.
 - In partnership with the Downtown Partnership, Parks and Recreation hosted a well-attended Kids Night Out program at the Community Center on January 30. While children participated in activities, parents were encouraged to shop and dine at local businesses, coinciding with Taste 2 Towns, Restaurant Week in Mansfield and Windham.
 - Community Center improvements continue in February, including the installation of new window blinds and light-filtering window film. Staff are also working with furniture vendors to finalize selections for sitting room furniture replacement.
 - The next free Mansfield Day at the Community Center will take place on February 27.
 - Snowshoe rentals remain available at the Community Center.
 - The Community Center continues to serve as a warming center for residents during regular operating hours throughout the winter months.
 - Park Improvement Projects: Interviews were completed earlier this month with selected firms for ADA and other Park Improvements at Southeast Park and Sunny Acres Park, and we anticipate finalizing a contract for service with the preferred firm in the near future.
 - Bicentennial Pond Bathhouse: Mansfield Parks and Recreation continues to work collaboratively with multiple Town departments, the Town's architecture and design firm (PFA

Architecture), and pertinent vendors/contractors to develop detailed plans for a new bathhouse at Bicentennial Pond.

- *Mansfield Downtown Partnership Updates:*

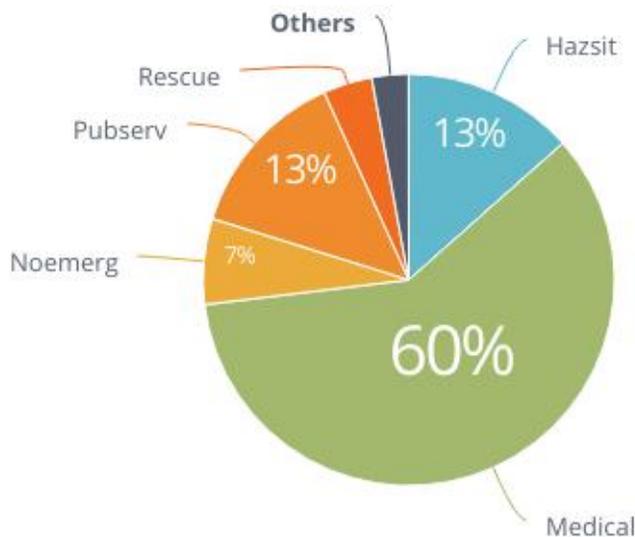
- Taste 2 Towns: Marketing efforts for the Taste2Towns initiative generated significant visibility for both Mansfield and Windham. Website traffic, paid Facebook advertising, and social media posts have all contributed to increased awareness of participating restaurants and the overall event. The Partnership plans to conduct an internal debrief following the conclusion of the initiative on Sunday and will provide a detailed wrap-up report at the next Council meeting. This initial update highlights the strong engagement and promotional impact of the campaign, with additional metrics and insights forthcoming.

- *Human Services Updates:*

- Veterans Roundtable Discussion: On Wednesday, February 4, the Human Services Department hosted its first Veterans Roundtable Discussion. Nearly 20 veterans participated, sharing their experiences and insights to help the department better understand the immediate needs of local veterans. Their engagement has provided a meaningful foundation for strengthening and expanding Veteran Services, and the department plans to build on this momentum with additional opportunities to connect with and support veterans in the community.
- Mansfield Human Services will host its inaugural 5K PJ Run for a Cause on Saturday, March 28, at 12:30 p.m. at Mansfield Middle School. The event will feature a 5K run/walk for all participants and a free fun run for children, with participants encouraged to wear pajamas. Proceeds from registrations will support the Betsy Hamill Campership Program, which helps Mansfield children attend summer camps. Additional information and registration are available on the town website [here](#) or directly at [this event page](#).
- AARP began offering free simple tax preparation at the Senior Center on Thursday, February 5. Appointments have filled quickly, with very limited spots remaining. Residents interested in scheduling an appointment can contact the Mansfield Senior Center at 860-429-0262.
- The Maple Road Café brought Super Bowl spirit to the Senior Center on Friday, February 7, with a menu featuring grinders and baked potato soup. Two more Café dates are scheduled for Friday, February 13, and Friday, February 20, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (or while supplies last). The Café is open to all ages, and no membership is required. Community members seeking more information can contact the Senior Center at 860-429-0262.
- Youth Services Supervisor Sarah DeLuca and Prevention Specialist Maddie DuBaldo represented Mansfield at the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) National Leadership Forum & Conference in National Harbor, Maryland, from February 2-5. They met with Senator Richard Blumenthal's staff at Capitol Hill to advocate for continued prevention funding, learned about emerging programs and strategies, and connected with leaders from surrounding communities. Their participation strengthens Mansfield's local prevention efforts and ensures the Town remains aligned with national best practices and regional partnerships.
- Early Childhood Services Coordinator Jocelyn Santiago recently completed specialized training on recognizing perinatal mood disorders, including postpartum depression, anxiety, and psychosis. The training provided connections to community resources and strategies to support families navigating these challenges. Given that perinatal mood disorders affect an estimated one in five to seven women, this training supports early identification and intervention, aligning with the goals of Early Start CT to ensure timely family support and optimal outcomes.

- *Fire and Emergency Services Updates:*

- Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services responded to 104 calls over the past two weeks (January 24, 2026 – February 6, 2026) with the breakdown by type as follows:



Mutual Aid

Town	Count
	N/A
Ashford	1
Lebanon	2
Mansfield	2
Mansfield Center	3
Storrs Mansfield	4
Tolland	1
UConn	4
Willimantic	6
Willington	2

- **Facilities Management Updates:**

- Mansfield Elementary School (MES) Cafeteria Sound Mitigation Project: The RFP for sound mitigation work in the Mansfield Elementary School café has been awarded to RnB Enterprises Inc. A purchase order was expedited to align with plans for installation during the summer break. Color samples are expected in the coming weeks, after which materials will be ordered to move the project forward.
- MES Building Generator: Facilities is seeking proposals to add additional outlets and equipment to the emergency power panels, which will be backed up by the Town's generator. This proposal will be formally presented at the next School Building Committee meeting.
- Mansfield Middle School (MMS) Main Entrance and Elevator Project: Elevator car installation at MMS is expected to be completed in less than a week. Following installation, the project team will require an additional week to repair block walls, repaint, and remove construction containment walls before the final state elevator inspection.
- MMS HVAC Improvements: The grant-funded HVAC system installation at Mansfield Middle School has been completed. Start-up and testing of the new units are scheduled for the week of April vacation, when outdoor temperatures are more suitable for evaluation.
- Other Facilities Projects:
 - Floor refinishing at the Historic Town Hall and Administrative Building (both of which are occupied and operated by Mansfield Historical Society) has been completed, with excellent results. Remaining exterior parking lot paving will be completed in the spring once warmer weather allows.
 - Septic tank replacement at the Eagleville Fire Station (Station 107) has been awarded to Art's Septic LLC and is scheduled for the week of February 16, weather permitting.
 - Frontier Communications has notified the Town of plans to upgrade or replace the fiber optic line on Clover Mill Road in front of the DPW Garage and Animal Shelter. This information and key contacts have been shared with the IT department to manage any potential service outages.

- **Public Works Updates:**

- It has been a very busy winter. As of February 5, there have been no additional plowable events since the last report. The Town has received 40 inches of snow and used 1,664 tons of treated salt and 300 bags of salt. Since the major storm on January 25, crews have been hauling snow nearly continuously, removing approximately 6,000 cubic yards from downtown and 1,300 cubic yards from Mansfield Elementary School. Crews have also cleared sightlines

on roadways, removed large piles of snow from Town facilities, and maintained and cleaned all trucks and equipment.

- South Eagleville Road Pedestrian Safety Improvements Project: The project is in winter shutdown, though some work continues. The contractor is coordinating with Eversource to install the electrical meter for sidewalk lights and RRFBs. Shipment of light poles was delayed due to a manufacturer breakdown, with arrival expected February 8. Installation will proceed as soon as possible thereafter.
- Route 275 and Separatist Road Signalization Project: Managed by the Connecticut Department of Transportation, the project currently has no specific schedule. The next phase involves erecting steel components for signal mast arms. Work in Mansfield will follow completion of the Old Lyme intersections, weather permitting, tentatively at the end of the month.
- Since the last report, the in-house tree crew removed six trees at Bicentennial Pond. Contracted tree services removed 10 trees on Lorraine Drive, six on South Bedlam Road, one on Bassetts Bridge Road, and three on Oak Hill Road.
- Crews continue to replace missing signs, address miscellaneous citizen requests, patch potholes, and collect wood from downed or cut trees.
- The February/March issue of the Town's bimonthly newsletter was published on February 2, 2026 and can be accessed [here](#).
- The Town Manager's most recently monthly appearance on WILI-AM with Wayne Norman took place this past Friday, February 6, and can be listened to [here](#).