

MEMO

To: Town Council
CC: Town Employees
From: Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager
Date: February 23, 2026
Subject: **Town Manager's Report**

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

- **Winter Storm Update:** As the Council is aware, a significant winter storm began impacting the region last night (Sunday, February 22) and has continued up through this afternoon (Monday, February 23) with the heaviest snow falls taking place during the late-night and early-morning hours. The storm brought a combination of heavy, wet snowfall, sustained winds, and gusts that created hazardous travel conditions, downed trees, and scattered to potentially widespread power outages. High wind speeds continue to pose threats of more storm damage as of this writing.

The Town initiated storm response protocols Sunday evening, with the Department of Public Works (DPW), Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services, Police, and Emergency Management coordinating closely to prepare for and respond to impacts as they occurred.

Due to the timing, snowfall totals, and hazardous travel conditions, Mansfield Public Schools, Regional School District 19, and all municipal buildings were closed on Monday, with the exception of the Public Works facility, fire stations, and the animal shelter, which remained operational to support storm response and essential services. Given the volume and weight of snow, it is possible that snow removal operations, power restoration efforts, and cleanup activities will continue to impact the reopening and normal operation of schools and municipal facilities on Tuesday. The Town will continue to assess conditions and communicate any operational decisions as circumstances evolve.

DPW began on primary roadways at approximately 4:00 PM Sunday in advance of the onset of precipitation. As of this writing, the Department had mobilized:

- **Personnel:** 22 Public Works staff on Sunday, increasing to 23 on Monday with the addition of a new team member.
- **Equipment:** 8 large plow trucks, 5 small plow trucks, 3 bucket loaders, 2 mini bucket loaders, and 2 sidewalk machines.

During the storm, two pusher boxes sustained damage; one has been fully repaired, while the other remains usable but is considered beyond repair after the conclusion of the season. Crews have faced significant challenges with heavy drifting, particularly near schools, parking lots, and roads adjacent to open fields.

Road treatment operations were prioritized consistent with the Town's established snow and ice control plan, with primary and emergency access routes addressed first, followed by secondary and residential roadways as conditions allowed. Crews encountered fallen trees and debris obstructing travel lanes and coordinated with utility crews and tree contractors to safely clear roadways where electrical hazards were present.

Residents have been strongly encouraged to avoid non-essential travel while the storm was active, both for their own safety and to allow plow operators and emergency responders adequate space to work. Up-to-date information on road closures is available on the Town's website [here](#).

Eversource advised the Town to anticipate extensive power outages due to heavy, wet snow and wind loading on trees and power lines. Likewise, we anticipated that numerous local roads would become temporarily impassable due to fallen trees, blocked roadways, or downed wires. The Town's Emergency Management structure was activated at a monitoring level, with readiness to escalate as conditions warranted. Fortunately, there have not been any road closures as of this writing and there were only 37 total outages in Town and all customers who lost power had power restored by Eversource line crews within a matter of hours.

As of the time of this writing, snow removal, roadway clearance, and restoration operations are ongoing. This update reflects operational status as of 2:00 PM and will be refreshed prior to distribution of the final written report to incorporate verified snowfall totals, confirmed outage figures, roadway status, and any significant follow-up developments.

I want to thank our Public Works crews, first responders, school administrators, and emergency management personnel for their proactive preparation and sustained efforts under difficult conditions. Their professionalism and readiness were essential to maintaining public safety and continuity of services during this event.

- *Train Derailment Incident – Follow-Up Update:* Since the issuance of my February 9 report, substantial progress has been made in concluding response and recovery operations associated with the February 5 freight train derailment on Stafford Road (Route 32). Transloading of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from the derailed railcars has been fully completed without incident, and controlled flaring operations associated with vapor management have concluded in accordance with established safety protocols.

While the emergency phase of the incident has ended, certain recovery activities remain underway. The derailed railcars, although fully transloaded, remain on site. The railroad company is preparing to mobilize heavy equipment, including large cranes, to move the spent and condemned railcars a short distance down the track to De Siato Sand and Gravel where they will be offloaded and eventually scrapped. This had been anticipated for the middle of this week, but, the storm may have impacted these preliminary plans. Beginning on a date that is still to be determined, and extending for a period of time that will depend upon operational conditions, it will be necessary to temporarily close Stafford Road (Route 32) in order to safely position and operate this heavy equipment. Advance public notice will be provided to the fullest extent possible once the timing and duration of this temporary closure are confirmed.

Environmental assessment work has confirmed that soils in the immediate vicinity of the derailment contain residual food-grade grease that was discharged from a leaking railcar during the initial incident. Remediation efforts were initiated to remove and properly dispose of impacted soils under appropriate regulatory oversight. This was completed as of Sunday afternoon. Importantly, no hazardous gas releases were detected at any point during the incident, and air and water monitoring did not identify adverse impacts to public health or the Willimantic River.

With emergency response objectives achieved and no ongoing threat to public safety, the Town's local emergency declaration was formally lifted on Monday, February 16. On that same date, Stafford Road (Route 32) was reopened to through traffic following final safety inspections and demobilization

of response equipment. Most of the equipment that was used by the hazardous material contractor has also been removed from the site at this time.

Looking ahead, the railroad company will be responsible for coordinating with the private property owner to restore areas of the site that were heavily impacted by large volumes of response vehicles and heavy equipment entering and exiting the property. The Town continues to document all direct and indirect costs associated with the response and will be working with legal counsel to pursue appropriate reimbursement from the responsible parties.

I again want to express tremendous appreciation to Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services, all our local/regional mutual aid partners, state and federal agencies, and Town staff for their professionalism and sustained commitment throughout this complex incident.

- 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 are presently being 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.
- During its regular business meeting this evening, Jay O'Keefe, Director of Parks and Recreation, will provide the Council a department update relative to the operations, services, programs, and ongoing/upcoming projects and priorities of Mansfield Parks and Recreation.
- Housing Needs: Town staff have accepted an invitation from an official in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Field Policy and Management to meet in April to discuss Mansfield's housing needs and potential collaborative opportunities. The HUD Office of Field Policy and Management plays a key role in translating national priorities into meaningful local impact by supporting the effective coordination and implementation of HUD programs and strengthening engagement with community partners. This upcoming meeting will provide an important opportunity for Town staff to share Mansfield's local housing and economic development priorities, explore potential partnerships, and identify ways HUD programs might support the Town's objectives. Engaging directly with HUD officials reflects the Town's ongoing commitment to proactive planning, resource development, and collaboration with federal partners to address local community needs.
- Appointment and Hiring Updates:
 - Promotion – Public Works Department: Nicholas Bill has been promoted to the position of Truck Driver with the Public Works Department, effective February 9, 2026. Nick joined the Town of Mansfield team in December 2024 as a laborer. Prior to joining the Town, he gained experience in landscaping, tree care, and automotive repair in the private sector. Congratulations to Nick on this well-deserved promotion!
 - New Hire – Public Works Department: David Littlefield has been hired as a laborer with the Public Works Department and will begin work on March 9, 2026. David brings a decade of private sector experience in landscaping and tree care, as well as education and training in automotive repair. We are pleased to welcome David to the Town team.
 - New Recycling Coordinator: Dylan Steer has been selected to succeed our long-tenured and valued Recycling Coordinator, Virginia (Ginny) Walton, who will be retiring in April after 35 years of dedicated service to the Town. Dylan will begin work on March 9, ensuring an overlap period to allow for transition and training with Ginny. Dylan brings strong sustainability and environmental experience, having served as a Sustainable CT Fellow, President of the UConn environmental club EcoHusky, a member of UConn's Carbon Reduction Working Group, and a Sustainability Outreach Intern for UConn's Office of Sustainability. He holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Environmental Studies from UConn. Welcome Dylan!
 - Parks and Recreation Director Recruitment: The Town is progressing to first-round interviews for the Parks and Recreation Director position on February 26, 2026. We were fortunate to

receive a strong pool of highly qualified candidates. As previously announced, our current Director, Jay O'Keefe, will be retiring in the spring after nearly 32 years of dedicated and meritorious service to the Town. Second-round interviews with finalists are scheduled for the week of March 9, 2026.

- *Planning and Development Updates:*
 - Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC)/Inland Wetlands Agency(IWA):
 - The Inland Wetlands Agency (IWA) will hold a Public Hearing on March 2, 2026 at 6:05 PM 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](#)
 - The Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) will hold a Public Hearing on March 16, 2026 at 6:05 PM 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](#)
 - 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](#).
 - The Agriculture Committee has set the date for the Farmer's Forum on Thursday, March 26 at Lenard Hall. This year's Forum will feature an update on local Agriculture Regulation Changes and State PA 490 revisions.
- *Mansfield Public Library Updates:*
 - MPL's Digital Navigator, Emily Jane Jajliardo, has accepted a full-time position with the Girl Scouts of Connecticut. While this represents an exciting professional opportunity for Emily, she will be greatly missed by both staff and patrons. The position has been posted on the Town's website, and MPL looks forward to welcoming another strong addition to its team.
 - Gardening 101 (February 24 at 6:00 PM): Chaplin farmer Kelly Caisse of KDCrop Farms will present an introduction to home gardening, covering the fundamentals of starting seeds, preparing and conditioning plants for outdoor growth, organic gardening techniques, and harvesting. Attendees are encouraged to bring questions for what promises to be an informative and engaging session as the spring growing season approaches.
 - History of Huskies Hoops (March 3 at 6:00 PM): The Library will host award-winning sportswriter and author Marty Gitlin for a lively and engaging presentation celebrating the history and achievements of UConn's men's and women's basketball programs. The program will feature video highlights and a historical journey from the early years of each program through the present day, showcasing many of the teams, players, and defining moments that have shaped UConn basketball.
 - Read to a Therapy Dog: Emerging readers will have two upcoming opportunities, on February 24 and March 7, to build literacy skills and confidence by reading to a licensed therapy dog in a supportive and encouraging environment.
- *Mansfield Parks and Recreation Updates:*
 - In Memoriam – Betsy Parker: The Parks and Recreation staff and the entire Town of Mansfield employee community mourn the passing of Betsy Parker, a cherished and valued supporter, volunteer, and longtime member of the Mansfield Parks and Recreation community. Betsy's passion, commitment, and remarkable leadership were widely recognized throughout Mansfield in her roles as an elementary school teacher, volunteer coach, and leader of summer basketball camps, among many other contributions. She consistently placed the best interests of children first and took great joy in supporting youth in the community. The

Department is deeply grateful for her more than 30 years of service, and her talents, teamwork, and contributions will be forever valued.

- Winter session programs are currently in full swing. Staff are finalizing layout, content, and proofreading for the upcoming Spring Parks and Recreation Brochure, which is scheduled to be mailed to Mansfield households during the week of March 16. The spring brochure will also include detailed information regarding youth summer camp offerings.
- Park Improvements Update:
 - The Department is finalizing the selection of a firm to provide planning and design services for ADA and other park improvements at Sunny Acres Park and Southeast Park. Once a contract is executed, the design and planning phase is expected to take approximately six months and will include a community engagement component.
 - Planning and design services are also being finalized for the future Mansfield Dog Park at a site to be determined. Following contract execution, the anticipated six-month planning and design phase will likewise incorporate community input.
 - Contract details are being finalized for the purchase and installation of a modular bathhouse, with installation anticipated in June. Site preparation work is expected to begin soon. Backup plans to provide alternative facilities for Camp Mansfield participants and the general public during construction are being coordinated.
 - Exploratory site work related to the future purchase and installation of two shade structures on the Community Center grounds will begin later this winter, weather permitting.
 - New ADA-compliant picnic tables for Bicentennial Pond Pavilion #1 have been purchased and are currently being assembled by the Department of Public Works. Installation is anticipated later this winter or early spring, weather permitting.
- Community Center Improvements: Enhancements to Community Center amenities continued during February, including installation of new window blinds and light-filtering window film. Staff are also working with furniture vendors on the final selection of replacement furniture for the sitting room.
- Seasonal Programs and Events:
 - The Winter Scavenger Hunt/Nature Bingo and Winter Photo Challenges remain ongoing throughout the season. This free, all-ages initiative encourages residents to explore Mansfield's parks, trails, and open spaces during the winter months. Prizes are awarded for participation.
 - The next free Community Paint Day will be held on March 5 at Lenard Hall; preregistration is required.
 - The next free Mansfield Day at the Mansfield Community Center is scheduled for February 27.
 - The Mansfield Community Center will be the host site to the Town's Earth Extravaganza on Saturday, April 25. Town departments are beginning to plan for exhibits and activities to celebrate the earth, spring, and community, and are inviting community organizations to join in.
- Warming Center: The Mansfield Community Center continues to serve as a warming center for residents during regular operating hours throughout the winter months.
- *Mansfield Downtown Partnership Updates:*
 - Business Support Initiative: The Mansfield Downtown Partnership is launching a new business-support event series titled *Mansfield Builds Business*. The initiative will feature three events in 2026 aimed at strengthening the local business community and promoting long-term economic resilience. The first event in the series, "*Let's Collaborate*," is designed to foster partnerships among Mansfield businesses to help mitigate seasonal slow periods while maximizing activity during peak times. The program encourages creative collaboration models, including home-based or service-oriented businesses hosting workshops, classes, or

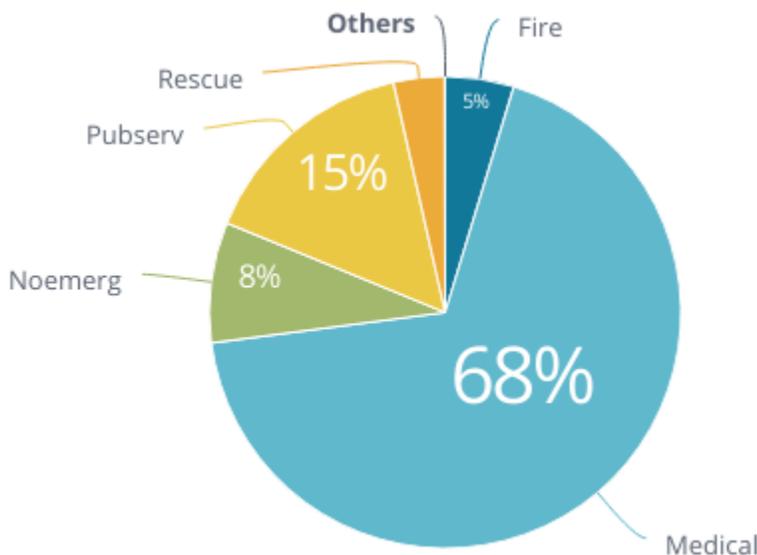
themed programming within brick-and-mortar establishments, as well as coordinated cross-promotional efforts among local businesses. With nearly 40 participants already registered, the Partnership has reported strong early interest in the program. It is anticipated that the event will lead to new business partnerships, increased foot traffic during traditionally slower periods, and expanded engagement opportunities for both the business community and Mansfield residents.

- *Human Services Updates:*

- Inaugural 5K PJ Run for a Cause: Mansfield Human Services will host its first-ever 5K PJ Run for a Cause on Saturday, March 28 at 12:30 PM at Mansfield Middle School. This new community event will feature a 5K run/walk for adults and a free fun run for children, with participants encouraged to wear their favorite pajamas. Proceeds from registration will support the Betsy Hamill Campership Program, which helps Mansfield children access the enrichment and developmental opportunities provided through summer camp experiences. Additional information and registration details are available in the “Fundraisers” section of the [Town’s website](#). The Department looks forward to strong community participation in support of this meaningful cause.
- Veterans Benefits Discussion Night: Human Services will also host its first Veterans Benefits Discussion Night on Thursday, April 16. The event will feature a Federal VA representative, Alex Spears, along with a specialist from the Veterans Benefits Administration, who will provide a brief informational overview and answer questions directly from local veterans and their families. The program is expected to begin between 4:00 and 4:30 PM, with a full two-hour block reserved to ensure attendees have ample opportunity to receive information and assistance. This event represents a valuable opportunity for Mansfield veterans to connect with knowledgeable representatives and learn more about available benefits and services.
- With the arrival of spring, the annual Renter’s Rebate application period will open on April 1. Residents may apply by contacting Human Services to schedule an appointment. Additional information about the program is available on the Department’s webpage, by calling 860-429-3315, or by visiting the Human Services office at 303 Maple Road.
- Pop-Up Blood Pressure Screening (February 24): Senior Services is collaborating with the Eastern Highlands Health District to offer a convenient pop-up blood pressure screening at the Senior Center on Tuesday, February 24, from 10:00 to 11:30 AM. No appointment is necessary. This initiative provides residents with an accessible opportunity to monitor their health in a welcoming community setting.
- Type II Diabetes Presentation (February 26): On Thursday, February 26, at 10:00 AM, the Senior Center will host an educational presentation focused on Type II diabetes, including prevention and management strategies. Community members are encouraged to attend. RSVPs are requested by calling 860-429-0262.
- St. Patrick’s Day Celebration (March 17): The Senior Center will host a St. Patrick’s Day celebration on Tuesday, March 17, from 12:00 to 1:45 PM. Attendees are invited to wear festive green attire and enjoy a traditional corned beef and cabbage meal, followed by a performance by the SRL Irish Dance Academy. Pre-registration is required by March 13 and may be completed by calling 860-429-0262 or visiting the Senior Center in person.
- Commission on Aging Community Feedback Session (May 11): The Commission on Aging will hold a community feedback session on May 11 at 10:00 AM and invites residents to share their ideas, concerns, and priorities related to aging in Mansfield. The session will also provide an opportunity for the Commission to outline its charge and responsibilities while engaging directly with community members.
- Early Childhood Fair (May 16): Youth Services, in collaboration with Mansfield Public Schools, is planning the Town’s first Early Childhood Fair. The event will be held on May 16 from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM at Mansfield Elementary School. Families will have the opportunity to connect

with a variety of local service providers and community organizations, while enjoying light refreshments and family-friendly activities. The event is designed to showcase the breadth of resources and supports available to families with young children in Mansfield.

- New Parent Ambassadors Collaboration Efforts: The New Parent Ambassadors are actively meeting with staff from the Mansfield Public Library and the Community Center to explore opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration. These discussions aim to build upon existing programming and further strengthen coordinated services for families in the community.
- Safe at Home Program (February 17): On February 17, nine Mansfield youth participated in a Safe at Home program offered in collaboration with Coventry Youth Services. During the 90-minute session, participants learned essential skills to prepare for staying home alone safely. Topics included developing safe habits, preventing unsafe situations, responding to emergencies such as power outages, basic first aid, and strengthening decision-making skills to build confidence and independence.
- Drug Take-Back Day (April 25): Youth Services, in partnership with the Resident Trooper’s Office, will host a Drug Take-Back Day on April 25 in conjunction with the Town’s annual Earth Day event at the Community Center. This initiative provides residents with a safe and responsible way to dispose of unused or expired medications.
- Community Feedback Session (May 28): Youth Services will host a Community Feedback Session on Thursday, May 28, from 5:30 PM to 7:00 PM in the Large Community Room at the Mansfield Senior Center. Youth and families are invited to share input regarding community needs, program interests, and opportunities for expanded services. Additional information will be shared in the coming weeks. Pizza and childcare will be provided; RSVPs are required for childcare and encouraged for attendance.
- *Fire and Emergency Services Updates:*
 - Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services responded to 85 incidents over the past two weeks (February 7 to February 20, 2026) with the breakdown by type as follows:



Mutual Aid

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

- *Facilities Management Updates:*
 - Mansfield Elementary School Sound Mitigation Project: Color selections for the cafeteria’s sound mitigation panels were finalized last week. A fabric sample will be produced for final review and approval prior to full production.

- Mansfield Middle School (MMS) Cafeteria Renovation: The Facilities Management Department is advancing construction drawings and preparing the bid package for the Mansfield Elementary School cafeteria renovation project. The intent is to issue the Request for Proposals (RFP) in sufficient time to coordinate construction activities during the upcoming summer break, thereby minimizing disruption to school operations.
- MMS Main Entrance and Elevator Project: Installation of the new elevator car was completed last week. Masonry work at the elevator entryways is currently underway and is expected to continue through this week. Upon completion of this work, the Town will schedule a final inspection with the State Elevator Inspector in order to place the new elevator car into service.
- 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:
 - Interior painting at the Historic Town Hall and Administrative Building (both of which are occupied and operated by Mansfield Historical Society) is underway and expected to be completed this week.
 - A contract with Sarazin is currently being finalized for renovations to the Spring Hill Fire Station (Station 307) that will include completion of locker room and bathroom shower upgrades. Upon execution of the agreement, Sarazin has indicated it is prepared to mobilize promptly and commence work.
- *Public Works Updates:*
 - Snow and Ice Removal: The winter season has been particularly active. As of February 19, which does not include the present major storm, the Department has conducted one treatment event and two additional snow events, adding approximately four inches of snow. Total seasonal snowfall now stands at 44 inches. To date, the Department has utilized roughly 2,000 tons of salt and 364 bags of salt. Snow removal efforts have continued across the road network, including clearing roadway sightlines and removing large piles of snow from municipal facilities.
 - Tree Removal: Since the last report, the in-house tree crew has removed 20 trees, and contracted tree services have removed an additional 18 trees.
 - Trail Maintenance: The Grounds Division has completed maintenance on five of the 31 miles of trails within the Town and has replaced two trail bridges.
 - South Eagleville Road Project: The project remains in winter shutdown, although limited work continues. The contractor is coordinating with Eversource to install the electrical meter needed to power sidewalk lighting and RRFBs. Shipment of the light poles was delayed due to a manufacturer breakdown and is now expected by March 9. Installation will proceed promptly once the materials are received.
 - Route 275 / Separatist Road Signalization Project: This project is under the direction of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) and involves multiple locations. Recent updates indicate CTDOT is preparing equipment and materials to begin erecting steel structures (shafts and mast arms) at other sites before mobilizing to Mansfield. A firm schedule for work in Mansfield has not yet been provided.
 - Ongoing Maintenance: DPW staff continue routine operations, including replacing missing signs, responding to citizen requests, patching potholes, and collecting wood from downed or removed trees.
- The February/March issue of the Town's bimonthly newsletter was published on February 2, 2026 and can be accessed [here](#).