

MEMO

To: Town Council
CC: Town Employees
From: Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager
Date: March 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 – Follow-Up Update:* Since my February 23 update, response and recovery operations related to the February 5 freight train derailment on Stafford Road (Route 32) have largely concluded. Over the past two weeks, the railroad company completed the final phase of railcar removal operations, which represented the last significant on-site activity associated with the incident.

In order to safely carry out this work, Stafford Road was temporarily closed for a few hours on Monday, March 2 to allow cranes and other heavy equipment to access the site and position the remaining railcars for removal. Following completion of that work, the road was closed again for a few hours on Wednesday, March 4 to facilitate the demobilization and removal of this equipment after the final railcar was loaded and transported from the site. When Town officials were made aware of these planned closures and the anticipated timeframes, proactive notifications were issued to the public through the broadcast media, Town's social media channels, on the website, email notifications, and the CodeRED reverse 911 system. Unfortunately, the Town's emergency management team encountered a technical issue on CodeRED's end getting the messages to all users as intended. The Town has made CodeRED aware of this unacceptable issue and we are working with their tech support to get it resolved. The closures of Stafford Road were coordinated in advance with local and state public safety officials to ensure the work could be completed safely and efficiently.

With the removal of the final railcar and associated equipment, the active recovery phase of the incident has come to a close. Environmental remediation activities previously undertaken to address soils impacted by the release of food-grade grease were completed under appropriate regulatory oversight, and monitoring conducted during the incident confirmed that there were no hazardous gas releases and no identified impacts to air quality, water resources, or the Willimantic River.

Looking ahead, the railroad company will continue coordinating with the private property owner to restore areas of the site that experienced heavy equipment traffic during the response and recovery operations. Meanwhile, the Town continues to compile and document all direct and indirect costs associated with the incident and will be working with legal counsel to pursue appropriate reimbursement from the responsible parties.

I again want to thank Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services, our regional mutual aid partners, state and federal agencies, and Town staff whose professionalism and coordination ensured a safe and effective response to what was a complex and highly visible incident for our community.

- *FY 2026/27 Budget Development:* With ongoing support from Finance and members of the Town's management team, I am in the final stages of preparing/finalizing the Town Manager's comprehensive FY 2026/27 proposed budget. Necessary adjustments identified by the Town

Managers are being reviewed with the corresponding department heads as appropriate before being finalized as part of the formal FY2026/27 budget recommendations that the Town Manager will present to the Town Council on March 23.

- *Municipal Services Campus Master Plan:* Work continues to move forward on the municipal services campus master planning effort being undertaken with EDM Studios, supported by the \$250,000 Community Investment Fund grant previously awarded to the Town. As the Council is aware, the municipal services campus currently includes the Audrey Beck Municipal Building (Town Hall) and the Mansfield Community Center on South Eagleville Road.

The planning process is focused on evaluating long-term options for key municipal facilities, including the future of Town Hall and the Mansfield Senior Center. Potential strategies under review include renovation, replacement, relocation of facilities to the campus, or thoughtful integration with other municipal or community uses in order to ensure that the Town's public facilities are well-positioned to meet evolving community needs.

Since my last report, staff and EDM Studios have continued to refine the project scope and prepare for the public engagement phase of the process. After careful review and consideration, the concept of exploring the potential siting of a new main branch of the Mansfield Public Library on the municipal services campus and/or in the downtown area is being removed from the current scope of this planning effort. While the potential benefits of such a concept remain recognized, Town leadership believes it is appropriate to revisit that discussion at a future time so that the present study can remain focused on the most immediate municipal facility priorities.

The in-depth stakeholder and community engagement phase of the project officially launched today, with EDM facilitating a focus group discussion with members of the Commission on Aging. Staff and EDM intentionally scheduled this meeting as the first engagement session in order to underscore the shared recognition that addressing the needs of the Mansfield Senior Center and our aging residents is of paramount importance to the Town Manager, the Department of Human Services, and the Town Council. Additional focus groups and community engagement opportunities will take place throughout the coming weeks to gather input that will help inform the development of future facility concepts and recommendations.

- *Community Project Funding Submission:* In advance of last week's March 6 application deadline, the Town submitted a federal funding request to Congressman Joe Courtney for consideration under the FY 26 Community Project Funding program for the Mansfield Middle School Stormwater Quality and Pedestrian Improvements Project. The project will upgrade aging stormwater infrastructure, reconstruct the parking lot, implement modern stormwater treatment practices, and create a safe pedestrian connection between the school and downtown Mansfield. These improvements will protect watershed and drinking water quality, enhance student and community safety, and strengthen the long-term resilience of a key public facility that also serves as a community gathering and recreation space. The project will complement the Town's planned Spring Hill Road reconstruction, including a complete street corridor and multi-use trail linking the school to the community center and downtown. The Town appreciates Congressman Courtney's support and has provided full project materials for consideration. Special thanks must be extended to the Town's Public Works engineering staff for assembling the substance of the application and to Mansfield Public Schools, the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, and Windham Water Works for providing letters of support.
- At the request of the Region 19 Superintendent, and with the support of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, I attended the March 3 meeting of the Region 19 Board of Education's Buildings and Grounds Committee to participate in a high-level discussion regarding the Region's current lease agreement with the Town for a portion of the former Vinton School building, which is being used to operate its STAAR program. The conversation also touched on a conceptual idea that has been raised regarding the possible purchase by the Region, at fair market value, of a portion of the Vinton School property—

specifically the “backland” area located well behind the existing school building—for the purpose of constructing a new educational facility that could accommodate both the STAAR program and additional programming currently housed in the Town-owned former Reynolds School building on Depot Road. I emphasized that this discussion was strictly exploratory in nature. Should there be interest in pursuing the concept further, the Town Council would first need to consider whether to authorize the Town Manager to enter into formal negotiations with Region 19 regarding a potential land sale. Any tentative agreement that might ultimately be reached would then be subject to a public hearing process and further Town Council deliberation prior to any final decision. I also conveyed that the Town would not be interested in selling the entire parcel, as the portion of the property with significant frontage along Stafford Road (Route 32), where the existing school building is located, retains considerable strategic value for potential future municipal use. One possibility that has previously been discussed is the construction of a new fire substation to better serve the southwestern and southern portions of Mansfield and to eventually replace the aging, undersized, and outdated Eagleville Fire Station (Station 107).

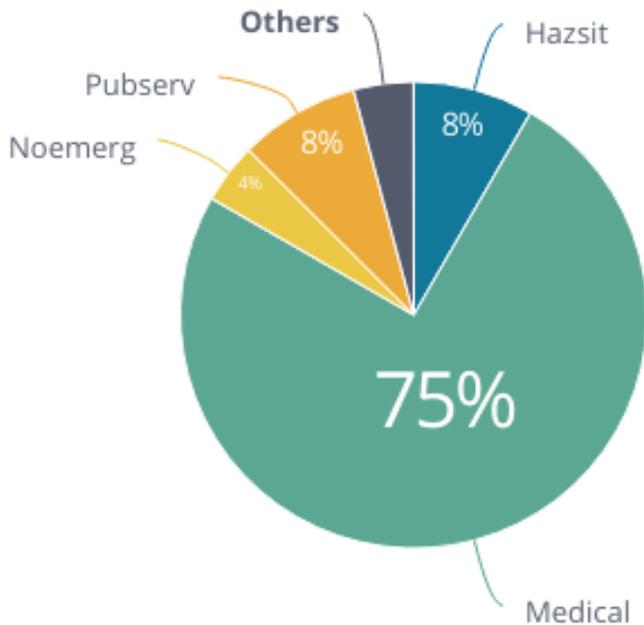
- *CRCOG Legislative Breakfast:* Mayor Moran and I attended the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) annual legislative breakfast in Hartford this past week. The event provided a valuable opportunity for municipal leaders from across the region to engage directly with members of the state’s legislative delegation on key policy and funding priorities affecting local governments. Gatherings such as this serve as an important forum for discussing issues including municipal finance, infrastructure investment, housing, and the many ways in which state policy decisions shape the ability of towns to effectively serve their residents. CRCOG continues to play an essential role in fostering regional collaboration and ensuring that the collective voice of member municipalities is heard at the State Capitol. As a point of reference, I currently serve on CRCOG’s Executive Committee, Policy Board, and Legislative Committee, while Mayor Moran serves on the Executive Committee and Policy Board. We were particularly pleased that – in addition to several other members of the CT General Assembly – State Representative Greg Haddad, one of Mansfield’s three members of the state legislative delegation, was able to attend the breakfast and participate in the discussion. Representative Haddad underscored his continued commitment to supporting the needs of Mansfield and municipalities across Connecticut, and we appreciate his engagement and advocacy on issues that are important to our community and the region.
- *CTCMA Quarterly Luncheon:* The Town Manager and the Town’s Chief of Shared Services and Administration will be attending the Connecticut Town and City Management Association (CTCMA) quarterly luncheon on Thursday, March 12. These gatherings provide an opportunity for municipal administrators from across the state to connect with colleagues, share perspectives on emerging issues facing local governments, and stay informed about legislative and policy developments that may affect municipal operations. The Town Manager serves as CTCMA Vice President and sits on the Executive Committee. Participation in professional associations such as CTCMA helps ensure that Mansfield remains engaged with statewide best practices in municipal management and continues to benefit from the exchange of ideas among local government leaders.
- The Town Manager and Finance Director Amanda Backhaus have agreed to participate in a panel discussion being organized by EASTCONN on Friday, March 20 titled “*High-Impact Collaboration Between Town & Board Finance Offices: How Municipal and School Teams Build One Fiscal Strategy.*” The session will highlight how Mansfield and Ellington have each developed durable, high-trust working relationships between municipal and Board of Education finance offices. Panelists will discuss practical approaches to collaboration, including communication practices, organizational structures, and joint decision-making strategies that support transparency, operational efficiency, and long-term financial planning. In addition to Mansfield representatives, the panel will include Tiffany Pignataro (Finance Director, Town of Ellington), Alisha Carpino (Director of Finance and Operations, Ellington Public Schools), Stephanie Veturis (Accounting Coordinator, Ellington Public Schools), and Sharon Cournoyer (Superintendent, EO Smith/RSD19). The event provides an opportunity to share

Mansfield's collaborative financial management model with municipal and education leaders from across the region.

- *Town-University Relations Committee*: The Town-University Relations Committee will hold its bimonthly meeting tomorrow, Tuesday, March 10, at 1:00 PM. The committee provides a forum for ongoing collaboration between the Town and the University of Connecticut on issues of shared interest and community impact. The joint litter cleanup initiative, Don't Mess with Mansfield, will take place on Sunday, April 26 coordinated around campus by UConn Office of Sustainability. Town-based cleanup initiatives planning is underway, and will be promoted in association with the Earth Extravaganza April 25.
- *2026 Tax Sale*: The Town's 2026 tax sale process concluded without the need to proceed to a public auction. Eight properties had initially been identified for potential inclusion in the sale due to outstanding delinquent balances. One property was subsequently removed from consideration due to a pending foreclosure action. The remaining seven properties were fully redeemed prior to the sale date, resulting in the collection of approximately \$150,000 in outstanding taxes, interest, liens, and refuse charges.
- During its regular business meeting this evening, Jennifer Kaufman, Director of Planning and Development, will provide the Council an update relative to the operations, services, programs, and ongoing/upcoming projects and priorities of the Planning and Development Department.
- *Director of Parks and Recreation Recruitment/Selection*: The Town continues to make progress in the recruitment process for the Parks and Recreation Director position. First-round interviews were conducted on February 26, 2026, following the receipt of a strong pool of highly qualified applicants. As previously announced, our current Director, Jay O'Keefe, will be retiring this spring after nearly 32 years of dedicated and meritorious service to the Town. Second-round interviews with finalists are taking place this week, with candidates participating in in-person interviews as part of the final stage of the selection process.
- *Mansfield Public Schools*: Mansfield Public Schools is seeking input from community members and school families about the vision for the district's five-year strategic plan update. The school district is undertaking the initiative to ensure its Mission, Vision, and Core Beliefs are still aligned with the needs of Mansfield students in long-term collaboration with the community. A survey is available through the district's website Home page: www.mansfieldct.gov/schools.
- *Planning and Development Updates*:
 - *Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC)/Inland Wetlands Agency(IWA)*:
 - *Standard at Four Corners, LLC – Affordable Housing Modification*: The Planning and Zoning Commission will hear an application from Standard at Four Corners, LLC on March 16 to modify the affordable housing provisions of the approved Special Permit for a 392-unit mixed-use development at 1725 Storrs Road. Following the PZC's February 17, 2026 interpretation of §190-23E, alternative compliance is permitted only through conversion of existing market-rate units to income-restricted units, not through payment in lieu or reduction of affordable units. On March 2, the applicant withdrew requests for a fee-in-lieu and a reduction in affordable units. The remaining request is to modify the Special Permit and associated Land Use Restrictive Covenants to replace the LIHTC student eligibility standard with the Section 8 student eligibility criteria for affordable units. Revised application narrative available [HERE](#).
 - *Carriage House Redevelopment – Conceptual Development Review*: On March 2, 2026, the new owners of the Carriage House presented a Conceptual Development Review to the PZC pursuant to §190-32E(2) of the Planned Housing Design District regulations. The conceptual plan proposes a two-phase redevelopment, with Phase 1 including 192 units in 35 buildings and Phase 2 including 28 units in 5 buildings. This pre-application step allows feedback from the PZC and the Design Review Panel prior to submission of a Master Development Plan or zone change application. Conceptual presentation materials available [HERE](#).

- Mansfield Tomorrow – Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD): Staff is coordinating with FHI Studio/IMEG on schedule for completion, public engagement, and adoption of the updated POCD in compliance with CGS §8-23. The Town Council will receive the draft Plan on March 23, which will then be transmitted to CRCOG for the required 65-day regional review. The draft Plan will be posted online and a community-wide mailer will be distributed in early April, followed by a Joint PZC/Town Council public information session on May 6 or 7. The PZC public hearing is scheduled for June 1, with potential adoption on June 15, contingent on closure of the hearing.
- Public Act 25-1 (formerly HB 8002): On March 2, 2026, Jennifer Kaufman, Director of Planning and Development, provided an overview of key provisions of PA 25-1 relevant to Mansfield, including middle housing and summary review requirements, changes to residential parking standards, and new housing growth planning requirements. PA 25-1 introduces significant statewide changes to planning and zoning authority, and interpretations are ongoing; the law may be subject to technical revisions or clarifications as implementation proceeds. [Summary memo available [HERE](#)]
- PA 25-1 Workshop: Tyche Planning and Policy Group, in partnership with Halloran and Sage, will conduct a virtual workshop on PA 25-1 on March 11 at 7:00 PM. The session will provide an overview of the law’s requirements and implementation strategies. Town Council members are encouraged to register and participate.
- 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:*
 - Seed Library and Tool Library: The Mansfield Public Library’s Seed Library is now officially open, offering a selection of herb, flower, and vegetable seeds, with additional varieties to be added in the coming weeks. The Library’s Tool Library provides gardening equipment to support planting and cultivation. A new addition, the Plant Propagation Station, will soon allow community members to donate, swap, and adopt rooted household plant cuttings at no cost.
 - Gardening 101 Program: The rescheduled Gardening 101 program with KDCrop Farm will take place on Tuesday, March 10, at 6:00 PM. Chaplin farmer Kelly Caisse will guide participants through the basics of starting, tending, and harvesting plants, including seed starting, conditioning plants for the garden, organic gardening techniques, and more.
 - March School Break Children’s Programs: During the March school break, the Library will offer additional children’s programs designed to encourage screen-free learning, socialization, and engagement. From March 11–13, these programs will include a “make your own slime” activity, STEM play and crafts inspired by female artists in celebration of Women’s History Month, and a Pokémon Party.
- *Mansfield Parks and Recreation Updates:*
 - Spring Parks and Recreation Brochure: The Parks and Recreation spring brochure is scheduled to be mailed to Mansfield households during the week of March 16 and will include information on youth summer camps. The brochure is also now available for viewing online.
 - Call for Artists – Juried Art Exhibition: The Town of Mansfield Arts Advisory Committee is announcing a call for artists for its upcoming Juried Art Exhibition, to be held April 11 – May 30, 2026, at the Mansfield Community Center. The exhibition is open to artists aged 18 and older residing in Tolland and Windham counties, as well as college and university students from these counties.
 - 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 soon, weather permitting.
- *Human Services Updates:*
 - Inaugural 5K PJ Run for a Cause: Mansfield Human Services will host its first-ever PJ Run for a Cause on Saturday, March 28, at 12:30 PM at Mansfield Middle School. The event will feature a 5K run/walk for participants of all ages, and a free fun run for children, all in pajamas. Registration proceeds support the Betsy Hamill Campership Program, helping local children attend summer camps. Additional details and registration are available on the Town website at [event page](#) or via the “Fundraisers” section of the Human Services webpage.
 - Renter’s Rebate Program – April 1: As spring approaches, Mansfield Human Services is preparing for the Renter’s Rebate program, with applications opening April 1. Residents can schedule appointments through Human Services to determine eligibility and receive guidance on required documentation. More information is available online, by phone at 860-429-3315, or in person at 303 Maple Road. The program provides meaningful financial support for qualifying renters, and early appointments help ensure a smooth application process.
 - EHHD Health Services – Blood Pressure Screenings: On Thursday, February 26, the Eastern Highlands Health District (EHHD) provided free blood pressure screenings at the Senior Center, along with radon testing kits, toothbrushes, and tissues. EHHD is also offering a free Blood Pressure Education Series on March 10 and 24 from 10:00–11:00 AM. Residents with uncontrolled hypertension or other risk factors are encouraged to attend; a limited number of spots remain available. Registration is available by calling 860-429-0262.
 - Senior Center Programs: The Senior Center will host a St. Patrick’s Day celebration on Tuesday, March 17, from 12:00–1:45 PM, featuring a traditional corned beef and cabbage meal and a performance by the SRL Irish Dance Academy. Pre-registration is required by March 13. Additionally, a new Strength & Stability class launches in March on Thursdays from 3:15–4:15 PM, designed to build balance, confidence, and overall fitness. The Maple Road Café continues to offer themed café events, with remaining sessions on March 13 (Breakfast Café, 10:00–11:30 AM) and March 20 (Spring Equinox Café, 11:30 AM–1:00 PM), featuring a la carte items priced \$1–\$4.
 - Youth and Early Childhood Services: The Youth Services Prevention Specialist will serve as a liaison with the Mansfield Middle School Student Council to expand collaboration and support youth initiatives. The Early Start CT program continues to grow, with staff participating in training for the new Local Needs Assessment in March. This will inform early childhood priorities locally and statewide, with community input gathered over the coming months. Youth Services and Adult & Social Services staff will also attend the MES and MMS family conferences on March 11–12 to share information on programs and resources. Finally, the Teen Center remains open during half-day schedules on Wednesdays and Thursdays, allowing middle school students to stay until 6:00 PM or until picked up by an approved adult.
 - *Fire and Emergency Services Updates:*
 - Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services responded to 85 incidents over the past two weeks (February 21 to March 6, 2026) with the breakdown by type as follows:



Mutual Aid

Town	Count
	N/A
Ashford	2
Mansfield	1
Mansfield Center	8
Storrs Mansfield	1
Willimantic	4
Willington	1

- **Facilities Management Updates:**

- Mansfield Elementary School Sound Mitigation Project: Colliers Project Leaders, the Town’s Owner’s Project Manager for the Mansfield Elementary School construction project, has begun preparations for this summer’s sound mitigation work in the cafeteria. An on-site meeting with the contractor was held to identify which existing sound panels will need to be removed to accommodate the installation of the new suspended panels.
- Mansfield Middle School (MMS) Main Entrance and Elevator Project: As previously reported, the new elevator car was installed last month. We are currently running a communications wire to our generator prior to scheduling the final inspection. The need for the communications line was identified by the elevator vendor late in the project, so we are expediting this work in an effort to schedule the state inspection and place the elevator into service as soon as possible
- 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:
 - The Bicentennial pond bathhouse is being prepared for demolition tomorrow, Tuesday March 10. All reusable fixtures and equipment have been removed.
 - The Spring Hill Fire Station (Station 307) renovation project is being scheduled. A final review of the renovation and staging area plans with the general contractor (Sarazin) is set for Monday, with site mobilization and construction expected to begin shortly thereafter.

- **Public Works Updates:**

- Snow and Ice Removal: This winter has been particularly active. Since the last report, through March 5, the Department of Public Works has managed two treating events and three additional snow events, including a blizzard that added 19 inches of snow, bringing the season total to 63 inches. To date, 2,473 tons of salt and 433 bags of salt have been used. Crews have continued clearing roadway sightlines and removing large snow piles from Town facilities, hauling an additional 4,500 cubic yards of snow, for a season total of 12,720 cubic yards from Downtown Storrs, Town facilities, and Mansfield Elementary School.

- Tree Removal: Since the last report, the in-house tree crew has removed three trees, while contracted services have removed 18 trees.
- Grounds Division: In addition to supporting snow removal operations, the Grounds Division has prepared and maintained equipment, which is currently 90% ready for spring. The crew also assembled six new picnic tables for the Bicentennial Pond pavilions, four of which are wheelchair accessible.
- South Eagleville Road Pedestrian Safety Improvements Project: The project remains in winter shutdown, though some work continues. The contractor has confirmed delivery of light poles by the end of the week, with Eversource scheduled to activate power to the lights and RRFBs by the end of March.
- Gurleyville Road Bridge Project: A public hearing before the Mansfield Inland Wetlands Commission was held on March 2, and the project was approved with several conditions. Discussion included the need to distribute information regarding the proposed detour. The Town and CTDOT will continue providing updates as the project progresses.
- Route 275 / Separatist Road Signalization Project: This CTDOT-managed project includes multiple sites. Recent communications indicate that CTDOT is preparing equipment and materials to erect steel structures (shafts and mast arms). Weather delays and other site priorities have postponed mobilization to Mansfield; no firm schedule has been provided.
- The Town Manager's most recently monthly appearance on WILI-AM with Wayne Norman took place this past Friday, March 6, and can be listened to [here](#).
- The April/May issue of the Town's bimonthly newsletter is in production with an anticipated publication date of April 1.