

MEMO

To: Town Council
CC: Town Employees
From: Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager
Date: April 8, 2024
Subject: **Town Manager's Report**

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

- The much anticipated NCAA Men's College Basketball Championship Game between UConn and Purdue University will be taking place this evening, with tipoff scheduled for 9:20 PM eastern time. The Mansfield Resident Troopers Office (RTO), other divisions/offices within CT State Police, UConn Police Department, and other pertinent public safety agencies have been actively preparing for enhanced public safety. This will include staffing substantial increases in patrol units over and above what was provided for last year's championship game and collecting intelligence in advance of tonight's game. Our RTO is in regular communication with UConn PD, CT State Police personnel (including command staff at Troop C and headquarters), and Town officials. UConn has increased the number of patrol officers for on-campus activities and took a number of proactive steps – such as removing lamp posts – to reduce the potential for a repeat of many of the highly concerning actions that were observed in the immediate aftermath of last year's championship game. With the exception of a viewing of the game at Gampel Pavilion, there are no planned on-campus events. Attendance at Gampel to view tonight's championship game is being capped at 70% (roughly 7,000 spectators) of what was permitted last year, and, unlike last year, alcohol will NOT be served on-site. Sergeant Merrill is in contact with Town of Mansfield Fire/EMS and emergency management personnel. Operation plans have prepared and shared with all pertinent officials. Mansfield will have additional patrol troopers to assist and respond in the case of any critical incidents. Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services has arranged to have elevated staffing on shift as well. On a related note, this past week DPW Grounds Crew assisted the Mansfield Downtown Partnership by removing outdoor tables and chairs in Betsy Paterson Square to reduce the potential for any damage to public property during this window of time. I know we are all rooting for UConn to bring home another NCAA basketball championship trophy to Mansfield, and hopefully the UConn student body and other Husky fans channel their emotions (hopefully all celebratory) in a safe and constructive manner.
- The Town Council's annual budget review season is now well underway. After receiving an initial presentation of the Town Manager's comprehensive FY 2024/25 operating and capital budget recommendations to the Town Council during its March 25, 2024 business meeting, additional budget review workshops were held on April 1 and April 4. A public hearing on the FY 2024/25 budget coincides with the Council's regular business meeting this evening, April 8 beginning at 7:00 PM. The next budget review workshop, which will focus primarily on the budgets for Mansfield Public Schools and Shared Services (Finance, Facilities, and Informational Technology) will be held at 7:00 PM on Wednesday, April 10. The detailed budget review calendar can be reviewed [here](#). The proposed budget aims to maintain and enhance the exceptional level of municipal services we offer the public while requesting additional funding to increase staffing capacity in the areas of public safety and public works, as well as infrastructure projects. We are projecting that increases in non-tax revenues will help fund these additional investments while still enabling a slight reduction in the mill rate.

Favorable budgets for our two public school districts have also made it possible to plan for a 1.0 mill (3.2%) reduction in the mill rate for FY 2024/25.

- As detailed in a separately enclosed Agenda Item Summary for the Council's April 8 business meeting, the Town intends to apply for a Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant later this month. The Town's SAFER grant application specifically requests funding to cover the wages and benefits for two additional full-time firefighter/EMTs. Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services presently operates with full-time personnel working one of four 24-hr shifts (meaning a given member works a 24-hour shift, is off for 72 hours barring the need to call a member back, and then the 24-hr/72-hr cycle repeats itself). The Town Manager's proposed FY 2024/25 operating budget recommends adding two (2) full-time firefighter/EMTs. If the Town Manager's proposal is adopted, and if a SAFER grant is awarded, the total number of full-time positions would increase to 24 (adding one new FT firefighter to each of the four duty groups/shifts), which would double full-time staffing for Mansfield Fire and Emergency Services within just over a decade.
- As the Council was previously informed, the bipartisan Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, that was signed into law this past month included multiple member-directed funding requests submitted by Congressman Courtney. Among the "community projects" Congressman Courtney was able to secure funding for in the legislation was \$1 million toward the 10-ft wide multi-use trail that Town officials have been advocating to construct along the portion of CT-195/Storrs Road extending from the Four Corners to Tower Loop Road. As the pace of new development continues to accelerate in this part of town, the critical importance of the trail continues to rise to ensure public safety. However, given that the total anticipated cost of designing and constructing the proposed trail is approximately \$3.5 million, it will be essential for the Town to secure at least \$2.5 million in additional funds in order to make this project come to fruition. To this end, the Town is preparing to request additional funding for this project via the latest round of "community projects" being solicited by Congressman Courtney and U.S. Senators Blumenthal and Murphy (April 14, 2024 application deadline).
- *Northwest Mansfield Vision and Strategy Plan*- The Community Engagement Summary has been posted at www.mansfieldtomorrow.org/nw-neighborhood-plan. A draft plan will be presented in early-May and there will be ample opportunity for public feedback.
- *Development Activity*: Staff continues to update the [Development Activity](#) portion of the Planning and Development website.
- The Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) continues to work with Tyche Planning and Policy Group on substantive updates to the zoning regulations relative to future multi-family housing projects. The PZC is refining a new approach to the multi-family applications, which includes a Planned Housing Development District. This proposed regulation would require applicant to follow the following procedure:
 - Pre-Application Staff Review
 - Conceptual Development Review
 - Master Development Plan Zone Change Application
 - Public Hearing
 - Site Plan Application no public hearing
 - Commission Decision
- *April 2, 2024 Primary Summary* – Each of the four days of Early Voting (March 26-28 and March 30) as well as the Primary (April 2) went very smoothly for the recent Presidential Preference Primary. Turnout, which was notable low, can be summarized as follows:
 - Early Voting Dem 3% (118 of 3941 registered voters)
 - Early Voting Rep 1.6% (17 of 1073 registered voters)
 - Primary Day Dem 11.5% (494 of 3941)
 - Primary Day Rep 12.5% (123 of 1073)

The Town Clerk's Office also issued 52 absentee ballots in conjunction with the Primary.

It is difficult to gain any useful information about the success/efficacy of the first event Early Voting based on a Primary where the candidates are already decided. Voters were pleased that Early Voting was available and were very patient with a slow and cumbersome process. Registrars attended a statewide debriefing hosted by the Secretary of the State and consensus was that the days and times of Early Voting in future elections should be reconsidered.

- *Implementation of Wayfinding Signage Plan:* The first phase of implementation of the Wayfinding Signage Plan continues to progress. As the Council was previously informed, following a competitive bidding process, a vendor called Forge was chosen to develop the new wayfinding signs for Mansfield parks and Downtown Storrs. The Town's sign designer, Merje, is assisting with construction administration. The signs are currently in the shop drawing phase. The goal is for the signage to be in place by late-summer.
- After 22 years of dedicated and admirable service, Cynthia van Zelm will be leaving her post as Executive Director of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership. Ms. van Zelm has served in that role for 22 years, and was the very first professional paid staff member of the Partnership. Ms. van Zelm was instrumental in the planning, development, and implementation of the Downtown Storrs project. Her tenacious advocacy assisted Town leadership in securing over \$26M in state and federal funds for the build out of the various public infrastructure components of Downtown Storrs. Downtown Storrs has created a vibrant and transformational space for our community's benefit. Cynthia's work leaves a legacy that will benefit our community for generations to come. I want to thank Cynthia for her vision, hard work, and commitment to our community. I wish her well in her next chapter. She will be greatly missed.
- Please join me in welcoming John Roache as our next Fire Chief. Mr. Roache will begin work on May 6th. He will be sworn in at 6:30pm in advance of the May 13th Town Council meeting. Mr. Roache has more than 30 years of experience in the Fire Service. Most recently, he has served as Fire Chief in Somers, holding that position since 2016. He also worked for the 8th Utilities District of Manchester in the position of Deputy Chief. Chief Roache's career began, as with many firefighters, with a long tenure of volunteer fire service. His time with the Town of Andover department led to multiple positions over the years including past Assistant Chief and past Fire Marshal. He has earned numerous certifications in the fire service such as Fire Officer IV, Fire Instructor III, Fire Marshal, and a paramedic license. Outside of fire and emergency work, Mr. Roache also had a successful career in information technology working in several positions in the private sector before transitioning to career (paid) positions in the fire service. Chief Roache earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Connecticut in economics and sociology and a master's degree from the University of Phoenix in information systems. During the recent staffing transition, retired Chief David Dagon returned to serve as Interim Fire Chief since December 2023. Chief Dagon previously served the Town of Mansfield from 2003-2016, first as Fire and Emergency Services Administrator, and later as Fire Chief. He will be assisting with the upcoming transition in Chiefs. We are grateful to Chief Dagon for his service to our community. The press release with more details can be found here: <https://www.mansfieldct.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=1905>
- We have completed the written exam, first round interviews, and Chief's interview of candidates for Firefighter/EMT. We are in the final stages of vetting and selecting a preferred candidate for the remaining full-time vacancy. A certified list of qualified candidates has been created, of which we will have the option to fill future full-time and part-time vacancies.
- Please join us in welcoming Jillian Funk as our new Recreation Supervisor for Health & Fitness. Ms. Funk will begin in her new role with Parks and Recreation on May 6th. Ms. Funk has both private and non-profit sector experience in the health and fitness industry. She holds a master's degree in physical education and a second master's degree in social work. She also has a bachelor's degree in youth development with a minor in coaching. Ms. Funk replaces longtime Recreation Supervisor, Jessica Tracy, who was recently promoted to Senior Center Supervisor. Congratulations Jillian!

- We are making steady progress in our Human Services Director recruitment. Finalists will be visiting Mansfield the week of April 15th.
- Our Chief of Shared Services and Administration has been serving on the state Comptroller's Office CMERS work group. The work group has consisted of members from towns/management, labor, and staff from the state Comptroller's Office. They have been collectively working on proposed reforms to CMERS to ensure the plan's financial sustainability, amongst other topics. Raised H.B. 5515 is a result of this work. Information can be found here: https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&bill_num=HB05515&which_year=2024 and the bill wording can be found here: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2024/TOB/H/PDF/2024HB-05515-R00-HB.PDF> Staff views the raised legislation favorably for towns and cities.
- We anticipate that final work on the new pickle ball facility being constructed adjacent to the Mansfield Community Center will be complete prior to the Memorial Day weekend next month. Remaining work includes application of the finish top/performance coat (which has to be done when overnight temperatures are conducive) and installation of fencing enclosure. The new facility should be open for use for the lion's share of the warmer weather season. The associated parking lot expansion project is now largely complete and is already receiving good use following the excavation and base installation that was performed in recent weeks. New pavement will be applied when the asphalt plant opens later this spring. Department personnel also backfilled around the new pickle ball courts prior to upcoming fencing installation.
- *Hunting Lodge Road Culvert Project Update:* As the Council was previously informed, the bid for this emergency replacement project was awarded to Genovesi Construction (based in Tolland, CT) on October 13, 2023 for a contracted value of \$869,000. The Town Council provided supplemental funds for the project in late-September 2023 as the bids came in higher than the amount previously estimated. Genovesi has been submitting shop drawings to the DPW Engineering Division on a regular basis since December 31, 2023. The Town has been coordinating with EVERSOURCE, since August 2023, to relocate utility poles that are critical to EVERSOURCE's power delivery and the relocations are necessary for construction. Resolution required numerous discussions, meetings, and iterations. On March 26, 2024 EVERSOURCE removed several trees necessary for the pole relocation and intends to set the poles within the next 1-2 weeks. Genovesi is planning on mobilizing in early-May 2024 with a late-June delivery date for the culvert. Completing this work during low flow (summer) periods is critical. During July, the remaining roadway will be reconstructed and graded with paving and final work completed in August. The Contract has a required completion date of August 24, 2024.
- *Mansfield Elementary School Project- Resolution of Pending Claims:* Legal negotiations between the Town and Newfield Construction (general contractor) relative to outstanding claims associated with the Mansfield Elementary School construction project have reached a resolution. The Town Council will receive an update on this matter during a planned Executive Session toward the end of the April 8, 2024 business meeting. Following conclusion of the Executive Session, if the Council finds the terms of the negotiated tentative agreement acceptable, action will be taken to ratify the terms of a proposed negotiated settlement.
- *Mansfield Elementary School Project- Water Treatment:* The Town and its contracted engineering firm, Weston and Sampson, based on ongoing substantive feedback and review being provided by the CT Department of Public Health (DPH) continue to work diligently to finalize the revised water treatment design. It is referred to as an optimal corrosion control treatment (OCCT) system that will mitigate the slightly elevated levels of copper that continue to be present in the water sampled at MES. We believe this matter is close to a resolution. It should be noted that the raw source water drawn directly from the two drilled wells (Wells A and B) is potable and meets all requirements for drinking water. Because the raw water is not showing elevated copper levels, the elevated copper concentrations present in samples taken from fixtures inside the building signal that copper continues to leach from the building's copper piping. As soon as CT DPH approves the final design of an OCCT

system, the Town and Mansfield Board of Education will proceed with implementation and the precise timeframe for installation will be tailored so as to avoid unnecessary disruption to students and staff. Throughout this process, students, staff, and visitors have had access to safe drinking water within the building using either bottled water stations or filtered drinking fountains which are tested twice a month.

- The April/May issue of the Town's bimonthly electronic newsletter was published this past week and can be accessed [here](#).
- The Town Manager's latest monthly appearance on WILI-AM on the Wayne Norman Show took place this past Friday, April 5. Unfortunately, the segment has not yet been posted to the WILI-AM website for viewing after the fact.