



The new Coventry Town Council was sworn in back in November. From the left are, Democrat Lisa Thomas, Republican Richard Williams Jr., Democrat Lisa Conant, Republican Matthew O'Brien Sr., Republican Matthew O'Brien Jr., Democrat Jonathan Hand and new town council chairperson Julie Blanchard, a Republican. Lisa Massicotte | Staff

A year of triumph, tumult in Coventry

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COVENTRY — Time flew by for Coventry in a very active 2019 that came and went while town officials worked to make progress on several long-term projects.

But that progress did not come without a little bit of political strife indicative of the divisive times the nation is in.

Infrastructure and energy was a major theme of 2019 for Coventry, as voters approved a \$4 million bond in May to make improvements to town roads, the Coventry Grammar School parking lot and the Hop River Road Bridge — some of which will con-



tinue into 2020.

Additionally, the town worked hard in reducing its electricity consumption over the year and achieved the Sustainable CT Silver Certification in November.

Coventry Town Manager John Elsesser said progress has also been made regarding the microgrid project, but there is a lot of technicalities to still work out. “That’s just

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This sign on its side symbolized the fall of the embattled Caprilands site in Coventry. In July, a public auction took place to sell off items to benefit the estate of the herb farm’s founder. Lisa Massicotte | Staff

Coventry had an active, controversial 2019

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a huge project," he said.

Also still in the works for 2020 will be the library renovation project, the merger of the two fire departments, the development of a regional economic development action plan, the Nathan Hale Greenway, the Bolton-Coventry sewer initiative and much, much more.

Coventry Lake seems to be improving from a serious case of the invasive aquatic plant hydrilla.

This summer the town continued the hydrilla treatments in Coventry Lake along with fanwort treatments in Eagleville Lake.

"We made very good progress on hydrilla," Elsesser said. "We stopped the spread and the original colonies were decimated. But we'll have to keep going."

Back in late February, the First Congregational Church of Coventry took heavy damage to its roof structure, forcing the church to hold

Sunday sermons outside of its sanctuary.

Damages from what the church believed was a wind storm caused a beam supporting a truss - the roofing framework - split, causing a safety hazard.

The truss has since been repaired, but the construction destroyed the interior of the sanctuary and it is anticipated worship will resume within the sanctuary by spring of 2020.

Also recovering from damages is the Vinton Village Plaza, 3466 Main St. Wicked Slice came back and reopened in August, a little over a year after a fire in July 2018 destroyed the building and severely damaged tenants in the Vinton Village Plaza.

Wicked Slice is the only business operating out of the plaza, however, space is cur-

rently available to rent on the upper level of the facility, according to Coventry Director of Planning and Development Eric Trott.

This past year was a very productive year for the legal disputes regarding the future of Caprilands Herb Farm and the widower of Adelma Grenier Simmons fight regarding the site.

Elsesser said he believes 2020 might be it for the Caprilands saga.

"I think this will be the year for

Caprilands," Elsesser said. "The litigation continues but it is winding down."

Coventry received a \$20,000 grant for an assessment of the Caprilands buildings, which is expected to occur in three months.

"We'll put out a request for proposals to see what the private sector has for ideas that could adaptively reuse (Caprilands) with the hope of seeing who can come closest to Adelma (Grenier Simmons') will, while still being economically viable," Elsesser said last week.

"The clock is ticking. I think by this spring we'll know much more about Caprilands."

Political tension was rampant in Coventry leading up to and following the 2019 municipal elections.

The Coventry Republican Registrar of Voters' lack of

certification was brought to the attention of the Office of Secretary of the State.

In addition, political signage from the Coventry Republican Town Committee created talk in town.

Election Day Nov. 5 resulted in a close call between some candidates, prompting a lengthy vote recount.

And ultimately, the election results changed the party majority in both the town council and board of education from Democrat to Republican.

The new town council is currently working on developing its goals, according to Elsesser.

As for the residents of Coventry, Elsesser had an important message for them for the new year.

"Our town staff is here to assist and serve the public," he said. "And for us to do our job, we do need direct communications with residents. So if you have a question the right place to get an (answer) is actually from staff and not from Facebook or social media."

He said Facebook does not allow for proper dialog.

"We know it's easy and we know it's fun, but that's not the media you get answers from," he said.

"Above all else, this town has so much to be proud of. The quality of life is demonstrated by the people who live here and that's an honor for us to be part of."

Follow Lisa Massicotte on Twitter - @LmassicotteTC.

Our town staff is here to assist and serve the public.

John Elsesser

News in brief

Third annual New Year's bonfire to warm Jillson

WILLIMANTIC — The town's annual New Year's Day bonfire will take place on Wednesday to bring in a new year and a new decade.

The town-wide bonfire will take place on Wednesday, New Year's Day, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at Jillson Square.

The event is free and open to all.

This will be the third New Year's Day bonfire the town has held.

The bonfire first took place in 2017 as part of the town's 325th anniversary celebration.

In addition, this bonfire is the second bonfire of the winter season.