

Chris ANDERSON

Town Council Dist. 1

Dear Neighbor and Potential Employer,

As a candidate for the District 1 Town Council seat, I want to explain my position on the Central Coventry Fire District, particularly in light of the current litigation regarding the election held on September 12th. The Central Coventry Fire District has been a continuing source of instability threatening not only the safety of the Town's residents, but also the financial health of the District and the Town as a whole. After explaining what is currently happening in court, I will explain what I believe the Town Council should be doing to address the ongoing Central Coventry F.D. mess and the Town's four fire districts collectively.

On September 12th, the Central Coventry Fire District (CCFD) had its annual meeting at which the voters of the district were asked to vote on the budget and to fill three seats on the Board of Directors (BoD). As you are likely aware, there were three named candidates on the ballot, and an active campaign asking voters to elect three different individuals as write-in candidates. The CCFD BoD initially refused to allow voters to write-in candidates for the BoD positions, and then refused to provide a place on the ballot for names to be written in. This was in direct violation of the law, necessitating a lawsuit be filed to force the CCFD BoD to recognize your constitutional right to write-in the name of the candidate of your choice, on a line provided, as is done in every other election for public office. However, what happened on election night is truly unbelievable in a democracy.

Supporters of the CCFD BoD have suggested that the election produced three winners, specifically the candidates whose names were printed on the ballots. However, if you ask the CCFD BoD:

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| 1) How many ballots were cast at the election? | They don't know. |
| 2) How many ballots were set aside and not counted? | They don't know. |
| 3) What reason was given for not counting any particular ballot? | They don't know. |
| 4) How many provisional ballots were cast? | They don't know. |
| 5) Were the provisional ballots included in the vote totals given? | They don't know. |

And yet, it is the CCFD BoD's position that not only do they know who won the election, but their determination cannot be reviewed by anyone, including the Superior Court. This is the stuff of banana republics, not the United States of America.

If we make a few basic assumptions, it appears that somewhere between 141 and 176 (give or take) ballots were not counted for unknown reasons. Further, it seems highly likely that the overwhelming majority of the uncounted ballots were cast for the write-in candidates. It would only take 128 to 136 votes to establish the write-in candidates as the winners. The law is clear on how to tabulate these set aside ballots. The vote shall be counted if the intent of the voter is obvious from the face of the ballot. It is "the intent of the voter" that matters, not a procedural defect (like forgetting to connect two sides of an arrow or a simple spelling mistake).

Let me be clear as to my involvement and position in the ongoing lawsuit. I am the attorney for the three candidates who ran the write-in campaign. However, I represent them in their capacity as voters in the district. I am not advocating that they be declared the winners, that is up to the voters. If, after all the votes are counted the three named candidates get the most votes. . . Great! They win! My *only* objective is that the winners be determined by the voters and not the CCFD BoD.

At each court hearing, multiple firefighters from multiple departments attend in their dress uniforms or union tee shirts in support of the positions advanced by the CCFD BoD. Despite this being a critical matter in the future of the CCFD which services half of District 1, (and a basic issue of democracy), my opponent, a Lieutenant in the Coventry Fire District has been remarkably silent. This is understandable as he has an inherent conflict:

Defend democracy, our rule of law and your right to have your vote counted,

or. . .

Fall in line with his Union, which openly seeks to suppress as many votes as it can.

I have no such conflict. I am in court fighting for the basic principle that as members of a constitutional democracy, it is the voters who get to determine the outcome of an election.

So what needs to be done at the Town Council level to address the ongoing problem of the CCFD? And, what is my position regarding the structure of our four fire districts collectively?

There are two changes that need to be made by our State Legislature. The first is an amendment to the CCFD Charter that would change who is an eligible voter in the district. Currently, only residents of the district can vote. This needs to change so that both property owners and residents in the district can vote. This is common in many other R.I. fire districts. This change would increase the number of potential voters and provide a larger potential pool of experienced candidates for the BoD.

Second, the Council needs to work with our state representatives to change the authority the Town has over the fire districts. Currently, the Town has only one option at its disposal, the complete takeover of all the districts to create one municipal department. The law needs to be changed to give the Town more flexibility to take over a single district.

I am in favor of consolidating the Hopkins Hill, Central and Coventry fire districts into a municipal fire department while leaving Western Coventry alone. While I could give many reasons why I think this makes sense, I do not pretend to have the knowledge to speak definitively on this and would rely on the experts who would have to be hired to assist in such an endeavor. As for Western, that department handles a very different type of fire risk. Western has no fire hydrants and thus must source and haul its water, it covers a sparsely populated rural area and must be ready to fight residential, commercial and forest fires. In short, it doesn't fit as well into the other three districts and there is no reason to mess with something that isn't broken. I could see expanding Western's territory to Philips Hill Rd., but again, I would consult with the experts on this.

Establishing a municipal fire department is a monumental undertaking that will take years to study, plan and execute. I point to East Greenwich as an example. Several years ago, the East Greenwich Fire District and the Town of E.G. agreed in principal to create a municipal fire department and do away with its sole fire district. At the time, the Town was already doing the fire district's tax billing and collection. This should have been as easy as handing over the keys from the fire district to the Town, or so it seemed. Instead, the process took two years and almost fell apart at the very end.

Replacing three fire districts is far more complex with issues of pay disparity, equipment and facility needs, financial condition and leadership to name a few. I commend the current council for taking the first step in this process through the request for proposal for a "Fire Services Assessment Study" (available at AndersonDistrict1.com/Articles). Strangely, my opponent has stated that one of his objectives if elected is to, "Fix the Fire Department issue using a Fact-finding study commission". Apparently, he is unaware that the Council is already doing this.

There are many differences between myself and my opponent. Future mailings will highlight the differences in our respective resumes. You can also learn about our differences in experience and positions by visiting our websites:

AndersonDistrict1.com and PascuaForCoventry.com

You owe it to yourself to choose the most capable candidate to represent you on the Town Council. I welcome the opportunity to discuss these and other issues facing our town with you. I can be reached at 401 415-0001 (texts can also be sent to that number). Please leave a message if I do not answer, I will return your call. This time of year I can usually be found working at Coventry Pines Golf Course and would be happy to meet you there, or at my office (321 S. Main St.), or elsewhere at your convenience.

Sincerely,

