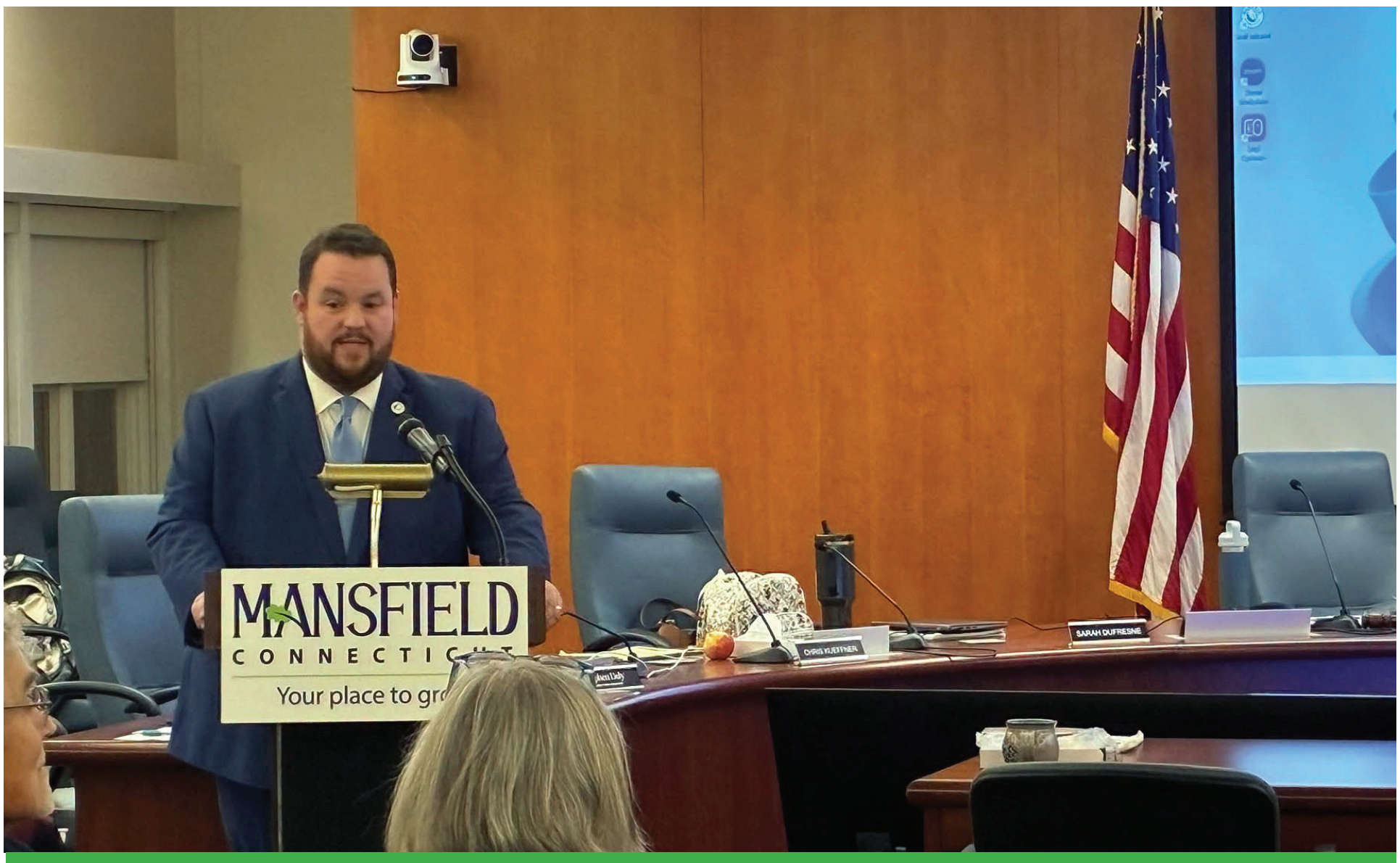
News

Mansfield elects new mayor and deputy mayor



Ben Shaiken sitting as the new mayor for the town of Mansfield, Connecticut. Shaiken was the Deputy Mayor, and elected to replace former mayor, Antonia Moran.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BEN SHAIKEN ON FACEBOOK

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MANSFIELD — Deputy Mayor Ben Shaiken was elected to replace Antonia Moran as mayor Monday following her resignation at the previous town council meeting. Current Council Member Carlita Cotton, a Democrat, was nominated by Sarah Dufresne, a Democrat, to fill in for Shaiken's role now that he's mayor. She became deputy mayor after Samuel Bruder, a Republican, seconded Mullen's motion.

Republican Council Member Gail Zaicek was supportive of the nominations but raised concern about Shaiken's role working at a non-profit called The Alliance, a Hartford-based association of community nonprofits across the state.

"You're a lobbyist for non-profit companies in Hartford and so I just question if there's ever any conflict of interest with that," Zaicek said.

Shaiken has been on the council since 2015 and said he's always recused himself for budget decisions that go towards the small grants Mansfield gives to non-profits.

He added that working at the nonprofit means he may be less available than Mayor Moran was. Shaiken said he will be the first mayor in at least 20 years to not be retired.

"Toni was everywhere, and Paul and Betsy before her were everywhere," Shaiken said. "At every community opening, on every board and commission [and] attending every council committee meeting and I think the community should just know that that's going to change a little bit."

He added that he will do his best to attend town events.

Moran said she left the role because she did not want to search for a new town manager. The previous manager, Ryan Aylesworth, resigned amid an investigation into his conduct with town employees and concerns over how he monitored security cameras.

After his resignation the town hired an acting town manager, Stephen Daly, on a contract which paid him $75,075 in addition to reimbursements for housing, weekend trips home to Maine and work travel reimbursement, according to the Sept. 14 meeting agenda.

At Monday's meeting the council would also replace Daly with a new interim town manager, Amanda Backhaus, who is currently the town's director of finance. The temporary position would give Backhaus a 10% increase in pay and last until Jan. 4, 2027.

"There's been a lot of conversation in the public and on this council about the costs that the town has incurred dealing with this transition," Shaiken said about the decision. "Those costs are not over. We still need to hire a town manager and there will be costs associated with that, but to have someone internal take over, particularly Amanda, when we are entering budget season, made a lot of sense."

Backhaus' appointment was passed unanimously with council members like Republican Chris Kueffner supporting it because of her knowledge of the town's budget. After she was elected, Shaiken joked about the events leading to her promotion.

"Congratulations Amanda, or condolences depending on who you talk to," Shaiken said. "If you have talked to other staff who have served this role, condolences might be in order, but we really appreciate it and look forward to working with you."

In public comment during the meeting, residents raised concern about the council's handling of Aylesworth's investigation, construction plans for town buildings and the conduct of Democratic campaigns in the town.

Mansfield Republican Town Committee Chairman Aaron Bowman said a campus student leader at the University of Connecticut told him the Democratic committee pays students to distribute political door hangers in campus dorms.

He questioned whether the hangers were approved in accordance with UConn's residence hall posting policy and said he met with officials at UConn who told him the Democratic campaign door hangers were under university investigation.

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