



Youth Commission

Wednesday, December 10, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.

Bristol City Hall-111 North Main Street Bristol, CT 06010 Room G-1

1. Call to Order

Officer Matthew Gotowala, chair, called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

a. Pledge of Allegiance

b. Attendance

Members Present:

Matthew Gotowala, Chair
Deborah Ahl, Vice Chair
Jonathan Lukasiewicz, Commissioner
RJ Motel, Commissioner
Donna Osuch, Commissions
Steven Seymour, City Council Liaison
Joshua Medeiros, Superintendent
Stephen Bynum, Youth and Community
Services Supervisor

Absent:

Luke Viens, Commissioner
Antonio Chatfield, Commissioner

2. Public Participation

None.

3. Approval of Minutes

a. Approval of Minutes - October 22, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes

MOTION: Made by Vice Chair Ahl to approve the October 22, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes.

Seconded by Commissioner Kilby; all in favor; motion approved.

4. Supervisor's Report

a. Supervisor's Report

Youth and Community Supervisor Stephen Bynum presented the Supervisor's Report. Since the October meeting, staff conducted three counseling intakes and have recently seen an increase in families seeking individual and family counseling services, with numbers expected to rise by the next reporting period. Currently, 18 families are receiving Youth Service Bureau services, and 36 families have been referred by the Board of Education, many participating in the Positive Youth Involvement Program. Basic needs support remains in high demand, with 15 recent intakes, eight evictions, seven foreclosures, and continued use of the Caring Closet, while housing instability and missing juveniles remain growing concerns. No Families With Service Needs referrals have been received, and during this period staff made two referrals to the Fair Rent Commission and one to Fair Housing while continuing to assist residents with tenant/ landlord concerns.

b. Project Aware Updates

Youth and Community Services Coordinator Raven Cody and Ashante Malone presented the Project Aware Updates. Project Aware programs continue to be offered through Youth Services in collaboration with the Board of Education, school partners, and after-school programs. Empower Hour, facilitated by Youth Services staff and an intern, recently concluded with nine first- through third-grade students from multiple Bristol elementary schools and will return in the spring for fourth- and fifth-grade students due to strong parent feedback. Girls with Goals at Bristol Central High School remains ongoing and was extended by one week, engaging a positive group of freshman girls and allowing for identification of students needing additional one-on-one support. The Young Women's Issues Group at Bristol Prep began in early November and runs through April, offering a longer 20–22 week program focused on similar topics, relationship building, and planned exposure opportunities through field trips. Additionally, the Lunch Buddies program, facilitated by an intern, recently concluded with a group of second-grade students, focusing on friendship and social skills in response to identified school needs.

The Young Men of the Future Program, facilitated by two contract workers at Bristol Prep Academy, serves 12 young men in a 22-week program focused on leadership, accountability, and community service, and continues to progress well as a counterpart to the young women's program. Additionally, Troy Ellison is facilitating a mentoring program at Bristol Prep, with plans to expand his involvement and launch a father's group that has received strong interest.

The department is actively managing its holiday gift-giving program, serving 489 children with support from 53 donors, including families, individuals, businesses, and organizations. Strong donations have allowed the program to operate using only about half of its allocated budget, though staffing shortages and increased participation have made the effort especially demanding. Gift distribution will take place throughout the week, alongside special events such as Shop with a Cop, and the department continues to welcome volunteer support and donations—particularly gift cards, teen items, and practical necessities.

c. B.E.S.T. Update

An update was shared on the wellness survey results, highlighting that teen substance use has decreased since the last survey, a success credited to Deedra's work and the BEST program. Efforts are underway to clearly connect these positive community outcomes to the program's impact to ensure its continuation, with more information to be shared during upcoming budget discussions and into 2026. Special appreciation was expressed to Dee and the coalition for their visibility and engagement with students, noting that their presence in schools and support of major events—such as the pre-Thanksgiving pep rally—has had a meaningful and lasting impact on student safety and well-being.

d. Year to Date Financials

Youth and Community Services Supervisor Bynum presented the Year to Date Financials. He stated the department is still early in the budget year and most accounts are in good shape, with no major concerns identified at this time. One notable highlight is the relocation account, which currently has approximately \$28,000 remaining, helped in part by fewer relocation clients this year. While the account is holding steady, it remains unpredictable, as a single large incident could significantly impact expenses due to relocation, storage, and moving costs. Overall, the budget is stable and being managed well.

e. Youth Diversion Team

The Youth Diversion Team (formerly the Juvenile Review Board) is transitioning to a more restorative, diversion-focused model aimed at keeping eligible youth out of court by connecting them with community resources. In November, there were 11 juvenile arrests, all involving felony charges, which made them ineligible for diversion and resulted in court referrals; several arrests stemmed from incidents involving multiple youth. Currently, the YDT has two lower-level cases pending (shoplifting and breach of peace), and notably, there were no alcohol, marijuana, or narcotics-related offenses reported. The increase in November activity aligns with long-standing trends seen in both police and school discipline data, where October and November are typically the busiest months.

f. Circle of Security

Youth and Community Services Supervisor Bynum presented The Circle of Security Program. The Circle of Security parenting program, offered in collaboration with the Bristol Board of Education, continues to see strong demand. The program, hosted at 51 High Street and supported with childcare and meals, filled all 16 available slots within a week of the flyer being released and has already started a waitlist. Due to its high impact and positive feedback from participants, discussions are underway to expand the program, potentially offering additional sessions or incorporating other parenting models such as Triple P. The success of the program has also highlighted a growing need for father-focused services, prompting further exploration of expanded training and capacity to meet community demand.

5. New Business

a. Youth Report Discussion

Chair Gotowala presented the Youth Report Discussion. The commission discussed creating space on the agenda for youth members to provide regular reports and feedback on community trends, needs, and priorities they observe. The goal is to ensure youth voices play a central role in shaping discussions, initiatives, and community service projects, recognizing that this is a Youth Commission and should be youth-led. Youth commissioners were encouraged to take an active leadership role, including participating in opportunities such as YSB Day at the Capitol, where they can engage directly with legislators and advocate on issues important to them.

MOTION: Made by Vice Chair Ahl to add the Youth Report to the agenda. Seconded by Commissioner Kilby; all in favor; motion carried.

b. Youth Commission 2026 Calendar

Chair Gotowala presented the Youth Commission 2026 Calendar. The commission reviewed the proposed 2026 meeting calendar and discussed scheduling considerations related to parenting programs and other commission meetings held on Wednesday evenings. While January presents conflicts, February and beyond may allow for adjustments, with further discussion planned to avoid frequent changes in meeting locations. The dates were reviewed for conflicts with school vacations, conferences, and holidays, and no major issues were identified. Overall, members expressed agreement with the proposed dates, and a motion was requested to accept the 2026 calendar with the location change to High Street.

MOTION: Made by Vice Chair Ahl to Approve the Youth Commission 2026 Calendar with the location changed to the Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth & Community Services Office on 51 High Street. Seconded by Commissioner Kilby; all in favor; motion carried.

d. By Commissioners

Nothing to report.

6. Old Business

a. 51 High Street Relocation Update

Youth and Community Services Supervisor Bynum presented the 51 High Street Relocation Update. He had confirmed that the department will remain at 51 High Street rather than moving to City Hall. This location is seen as more accessible and comfortable for the community, benefiting both the department and the residents who rely on its services.

c. 2026 Youth and Community Services Division Budget

Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services Joshua Medeiros presented the 2026 Youth and Community Services Division Budget. The commission reviewed the proposed annual budget, which has been under development since August. The budget reflects a large status quo approach, with only minor adjustments in a few areas. A key request for the upcoming year is the addition of a third Youth and Family Coordinator to support the BEST prevention program, with funding proposed from the city's cannabis revenue. Programming costs are already included in the existing budget, so no additional funds are requested for program operations—only for the new staff position. The budget is due to the comptroller in January, and the recommendation is for city approval of this plan.

MOTION: Made by Commission Kilby to Endorse the 2026 Youth and Community Services Division Budget.

Seconded by Commissioner Motel; all in favor; motion carried.

b. Holiday Gift Giving Tour

The Commissioners were given a tour of the space used for the Holiday Gift Giving giving program following adjournment.

c. Assist in the Preparation of Gifts for the Holiday Gift Giving Program

The Commissioners were given the opportunity to help assist with the Holiday Gift Giving program following adjournment.

d. By Commissioners

Nothing to report.

7. Adjournment

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Motel to adjourn at 6:45 p.m.

Seconded by Commissioner Kilby; all in favor; motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amaris Estrada
Recording Secretary
Youth Commission