



## Town of Fairfield

Office of the First Selectwoman  
Brenda L. Kupchick

# STATEMENT

December 13, 2022

Following the SantaCon event at Lantern Point on Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, the First Selectwoman, the Police Department and Fairfield University met Monday morning to review what happened and identify ways to improve going forward.

The estimated 1,000 party goers that showed up Saturday morning at Lantern Point was much larger than the Town and University anticipated based on information available. According to reports, students from Sacred Heart University, Quinnipiac University, and other schools arrived by train, bus, ride shares and with many parking at Veterans Park and Reef Road. While the event was unofficially organized by Fairfield University students, University officials worked with the Fairfield Police prior to the event to exchange information and to ensure additional resources, as is standard protocol when any large event is expected.

During Monday's meeting, all parties acknowledged the serious impact this large scale event had on Fairfield residents in the beach area and the reported behavior the community were witness to throughout the afternoon. The University expressed real concern for the disruption that transpired and the scale to which this event escalated so quickly, likely due to student social media promotion. The safety of all in the area, including the students was put at risk when this event grew much larger than expected.

In an effort to create a better experience for year-round residents and University students who live in the beach area, the [Living at Fairfield Beach Guide](#) was developed by the Town in conjunction with the University to help inform all stakeholders of relevant rules and policies. As highlighted on page 24, Lantern Point is private property governed by the association that independently leases housing to Fairfield University students for the school year. Their rules for student living clearly state that no large gatherings are permitted, specifically listing a prohibition on SantaCon. Additionally, while there is a legal injunction prohibiting more than 250 guests at the point, it is a legal civil order that is not enforceable by the Fairfield PD. The Town has inquired to the Lantern Point Association (LPA) what consequences will result for the students who broke the LPA Rules of Student Living.

The LPA hires private security for known events, which has had success in limiting the size and scope of student events in the past. The LPA reports that for Saturday's SantaCon, they hired seven guards for the event. The LPA also coordinated with Lund Court and completely shut down access through that path. Gates were all locked, and resident and guest passes were

checked and enforced. The majority of access came from the beach side down lighthouse point and from the direction of Penfield, which overwhelmed the guards on duty.

In advance of the event, the University did attempt to hire more Police Officers to be on duty, but many of the posts went unfilled due to staffing issues. As a result, the Police Department had to order three officers over after dayshift to increase their presence when it became obvious that the crowd had grown to an unreasonably large event. The PD also diverted five on duty personnel from other patrols in town, to assist with calls for service, crowd management, and pedestrian/vehicular traffic control. The staffing of both the LPA guards and our Police Department was simply no match for the size of the crowd at the Point.

Both Fairfield University and the Police Department are limited in their ability to prohibit or sanction students without being direct witness to illegal behavior. Identifying students after the fact can be difficult, though the University has pledged to pursue all avenues in an effort to identify those responsible through police reports, social media and resident reports, and hold them accountable.

Law enforcement has no authority to treat University students any different than other citizens with regard to first amendment rights. Infractions were issued on Saturday for open containers and other misdemeanors, but it is important to note that while a Police Officer is writing those tickets, they are taken away from other crowd control and other matters that require a police response, including motor vehicle violations and other law enforcement issues.

The PD and the Town regret that due to this large scale event, for periods of time residents were unable to travel certain roads to access their driveways while police were managing ambulances and crowd dispersal.

The SantaCon event on Saturday was similar to Clam Jam events that took place many years ago, before the University adopted it as a sponsored and ticketed event, which is monitored and contained. This adjustment made in partnership with the Town, completely changed the size of the event, improved safety and security, and dramatically reduced the impact on Fairfield beach neighbors.

The Town and University agreed on Monday morning to make similar changes to SantaCon for next year to have a more controlled event on Town-owned property, ensure all guests are 21+ and attended by Fairfield University students only.

In an effort to minimize the impact on residents, the University organized a beach cleanup Sunday morning, as they do weekly through-out the semester, with roughly 40 students along the beach and side streets on Fairfield Beach Road, and Reef Road. The Town will continue to maintain a collaborative with both the beach area residents and the University to identify methods to improve preparation and response going forward.