

2014 State of the Town Address First Selectman Michael C. Tetreau

Good Evening. Madam Moderator, RTM Members, Elected Officials and Members of the Public.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on our town. I would like to publicly thank my colleagues on the Board of Selectmen – Cristin McCarthy Vahey and Kevin Kiley – for their hard work and dedication to our town.

I want to thank all the members of our Boards and Commissions, all our elected officials and all our volunteers who give so freely of their time and expertise to keep our town special.

And I especially want to thank all of our Department Managers and their teams for their dedication and commitment to our town. We have had the chance to see how hard our employees work to protect and serve our community and improve our town. We really need to take the time to say thank you.

I want to take this opportunity to look back on the past two years and look ahead to the next two years. It was just about two and a half years ago that I took office. A lot has been accomplished in that time.

A Vision of Fairfield –

To put the last two years in perspective, I think it's best to start by reflecting on a vision of our town. While I recognize there are many different perspectives, here is how I see our Town:

We are a family friendly and neighborhood oriented community that values our top quality School System. We value living in a safe and secure community.

We work diligently on providing opportunities for our Seniors to be able to afford to stay in town and to have plenty of activities & services to make them want to stay here.

We have a vibrant local economy. We are a destination for Culture, the Arts, Dining, Entertainment and shopping for the region.

We are a leader in Sustainability – especially in the use of Green and Renewable Energy options. We do our best to be responsible and protect the environment.

We work daily to strengthen our financial foundation and make responsible decisions about our future. We are committed to planning for and meeting our long term financial obligations.

We value our historic character and the important roles our citizens have played in shaping our town's rich history. We strive to keep our heritage alive for future generations.

We value and respect the Open Space, Parks, Beaches and recreational opportunities our town provides.

We want Fairfield to be a good value for all who live here today and tomorrow.

Leadership –

When I look at all that we have been through in the last two years, I realize how much we have bonded together as a community. We have overcome more challenges in the past 30 months than any time most of us can remember.

We met the challenge of completing the long awaited Fairfield Metro Train Station. We discovered a cost overrun of over \$7 million and reorganized the project to get the job done. We met the State deadline and negotiated almost \$3 million in additional funding to save our taxpayers money.

We came close to being hit with a hurricane that we endured as Storm Irene. We survived flooding and widespread power outages. We learned how to recover and how to better respond when storms come our way.

Storm Sandy hit us hard and changed our definition of a storm. We saw our town employees especially Fire, Police, Public Works, Health, Board of Education, Library and Building departments work together protecting our residents and our property. We had Fire, Police and Public Works employees risk their lives to save residents, to save our neighbors. We saw our volunteers from CERT managing our

shelter and a thousand person volunteer beach area clean up team brought together by three self-motivated leaders and an understanding of social media. We saw the lessons learned from Irene get tested and proven under fire.

The meaning of tragedy was hammered home by the events of December 14th in Newtown. We came together to share their pain and suffering. We understood that a community doesn't end at a town border. We are still searching for answers. We have learned that our world is different today and we need to be prepared for events we never thought possible.

Storm Nemo dumped more snow on us in one day than ever before – 36 inches in all with drifts even higher. Storm of the Century was getting to be an overused term. We had the chance to see our Public Works team in action going as they rose to the challenge. They cleared town roads including over 300 cul-de-sacs (who knew we had so many?), even some state roads that needed it, town parking lots and school parking lots. They left only one question unanswered – where did they put all that snow?

Our Police and Fire Emergency Management teams were called upon once again to help in the Metro North train crash that sent 70 people to the hospital and shutdown commuter service for four days. Our Police and Fire teams joined with Bridgeport in a unified and extremely well managed joint response.

We are seeing clean-up work finally begin on Mill River. We have cleared the way for new commercial development providing jobs and some much needed commercial tax revenues. It is a 2-3 year project but it wouldn't have started without the cooperation and teamwork of our Conservation, Harbor Management and Shellfish Commissions working with State DEEP (Department of Energy and Environmental Protection), Exide, key Town Staff and the neighborhood group FairPLAN. These commissions worked for almost six months and in an unprecedented event – unanimously approved the revised remediation plan for our river. Thanks to our State Delegation – Senator John McKinney along with State Representatives Brenda Kupchick, Tony Hwang and Kim Fawcett for their help and support.

Our town came together to fight against Aquarion's rate hike on our water. Residents along with State and Local elected leaders attended meetings, wrote letters and spoke out against the hike. Together we were able to get the proposed raise cut by two thirds! Our Town led the way for the region.

We have had to overcome the finding of PCBs at Osborn Hill School. The BOE, Central Office, our Health Department as well as State and Federal resources provided the leadership to tackle this problem, mitigate the PCBs, get the school back in service and put together a long term plan for this school and other facilities.

We found mold in the basement of Fairfield Woods Branch Library. Again, through the efforts of our Public Works Department, Health Department and the Library management team, we were able to have the problem identified and mitigated on a very timely basis with a minimum of inconvenience to our residents.

As I look back on these experiences of the past two and a half years, I am very grateful for living in this community. Fairfield is a town filled with dedicated volunteers and employees at so many levels who are so willing to help when there is a need. We should be very proud of who we are and how special we make our town.

School System

Where would we be without our excellent school system? It is the reason my Dad moved our family here so many years ago. It is one of the primary reasons our homes maintain and grow in value over the years. We have made education a top priority with 55-60% of our annual budget going to this purpose. We have invested heavily in new and improved school facilities. Our school system has been a cornerstone in supporting premium property values by attracting buyers to our town.

We are committed to maintaining Fairfield as a top performing school district and preparing our students for the future.

We have new challenges going forward to keep our schools safe and secure.

With the Town, Police, Fire and School Administration working together, we will develop a comprehensive plan and specific proposals for:

- Enhancements to the physical security and safety in our schools
- Additional training for our students, staff and educators
- Costs associated with starting these improvements will be included as part of the overall budget presentation.

Economic Development

It is no secret Fairfield is the “hot spot” for commercial ventures especially new restaurants in the State. We have a 5-8% commercial vacancy rate – one of the lowest in the county. We are an oasis amid the economic turbulence throughout the rest of the state.

We have become renowned for our quality and diversity of restaurants. We held our first Restaurant Week in 2012 and followed it up this past year with an even better one. Just check out the recent *Connecticut Magazine* restaurant ratings to see how special we are!

On a single Saturday in July, we held our biggest Sidewalk Sale Days ever along with the CT Challenge Bike Race and the Pequot Library Book Sale. There was truly something for everyone. You could literally hear the music as you drove through downtown Fairfield. A special thanks to those of you who did not stop by the Ludlowe HS Girls Swim Team “Dunk Tank” fundraiser – I got plenty wet without you! There were people everywhere which, after all, is the whole point.

We also held our first Holiday Shop and Stroll. This was very successful and looks to be a new Fairfield tradition. It was held throughout Downtown, Southport, Greenfield Hill and Grasmere. We look forward to expanding it next year. With merchants keeping shops open late, it provided beverages and food for shoppers. We even had carolers walking the sidewalks to help get everyone in the holiday spirit.

We have all been able to see the tremendous growth of the Fairfield Theatre Company (FTC). It is bringing people from all over to our downtown. Partnering with the Art/Place, they form the foundation of the arts and culture in downtown. The FTC has proven to be a critical piece of our renaissance in our downtown. Add in the Fairfield Library and the Fairfield Museum and History Center – you can see the momentum continuing to build.

We want Fairfield to continue to be a destination for shopping, dining and entertainment. We have established the Fairfield Arts Advisory Committee chaired by Sherri Steeneck and Alan Neigher to provide guidance and recommendations on how to continue to promote the arts throughout Fairfield.

This past year could be one of the most significant in Fairfield history. This is the year that Jane's All the Worlds Aircraft – the veritable bible of the aviation industry formally recognized and declared that Gustave Whitehead was the first to fly an airplane and he did it here in Fairfield on August 14, 1901. This event took place a full two years ahead of the Wright Brothers flight in Kitty Hawk. We recognized it this past year with a proclamation, but we are working with our neighboring cities of Bridgeport and Stratford and the State to plan ongoing recognition. This has the potential to be a real economic boon to Fairfield and the region. Stay tuned.....

As you have seen from the recent SHU survey, we continue efforts to find an entrepreneur or organization to renovate and restore life to the Fairfield Community Theater.

FAME has come to Fairfield - in the shape of the Fairfield Accelerator and Mentoring Enterprise. This is an innovative partnership in our town with Kleban Enterprises and Fairfield University. Entrepreneurs and their business plans are evaluated. Those selected have the opportunity to work with professors from Fairfield University School of Business and be mentored by successful business executives to give them the best chance at success. This is an excellent example of entrepreneurs helping nurture the next generation while creating jobs to help our economy.

And as you have all heard, 2014 is Fairfield's 375th Anniversary. We are going to celebrate all year long! We really need to give thanks to Co-Chairs Town Clerk Betsy Browne and Bob Hojnacki from Bankwell. Thanks for taking the lead in planning our celebration and thanks to their hardworking committee. The events are too numerous to mention but to highlight just a few – you have seen the fire hydrants turned into painted redcoats by Fairfielder of the Year Jeanne Harrison. The Chamber of Commerce has a Cake Baking Competition coming up in two weeks with the winner getting to bake the official town birthday cake and the Fairfield Museum and History Center is hosting the re-enactment of the burning of Fairfield and a town-wide Memorial Day picnic. The FTC, the Fairfield Public Library, Fairfield University, Sacred Heart University and Pequot Library are all participating. And you won't want to miss the very special Kosher BBQ coming to town on September 7th.....

Check out everything planned on www.fairfield375.com

There really are too many events to mention but let me leave you with one very special one – Fairfield’s Biggest Ever Food Drive on April 26-27. We want everyone, every school, every team, every church, every synagogue, every organization to come together and give those in need a birthday present. I can think of nothing more symbolic on our town’s birthday than giving rather than receiving. This represents our true volunteer spirit – the generosity that is part of our town’s character and heritage. A special thanks to our Probate Judge Dan Caruso for generating this idea.

This is a great chance to promote Fairfield, celebrate what is special about our town and have some fun!

In the interest of full disclosure, I have challenged the Mayors of Stratford and Milford – towns which are also celebrating their 375th – that we will hands down have more fun than they will!

Energy Conservation and Sustainability

Our town has been a leader in Energy Conservation and Sustainability. We were recognized for the second year in a row with the Green Coast Award for our efforts.

We have a long list of accomplishments that save energy and save money for our town:

- Installed over 200 LED lights at the Downtown and Southport train stations and along the Post Road.
- Installed lighting controls and LEDs in the main library.
- Improved electric controls in Independence Hall with an estimated annual savings of \$75,000.
- Installed an energy saving tri-generation facility at the Police Station with an estimated savings of \$50,000 per year.
- Installed a Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) filling station at our Public Works Garage.

- Installed an Electric Vehicle Charging Station on Sherman Green Parking Lot.
- Installed diesel emissions filters in our older DPW vehicles with a \$33,000 grant from the EPA. Emissions from older diesel engines have been identified as a contributor to a rise in asthma and other respiratory diseases.
- Participated in the Solarize Fairfield initiative promoting the implementation and use of Photovoltaic systems. As a result, we now have 140 new PV systems providing clean renewable energy for homeowners.
- Planning Improvements to our Water Pollution Control Facility for variable speed blowers/LED lighting/new control systems with a planned savings of \$55,000 each year.
- Installation of a co-generator at the Water Pollution Control Facility for electricity and heat that will lead to savings of over \$160,000 per year.
- Approved a Micro Grid Project to lower costs and improve power supply reliability for Fire HQ, Police, HQ, ECC and Operation Hope.
- This RTM recently approved 6 Photovoltaic installations to save energy costs and improve our sustainability.
- We also are joining in the State of Connecticut C-PACE initiative to provide very low cost funding to commercial property owners in Fairfield for installing cost saving and energy efficient systems for their properties.
- Upcoming projects at Independence Hall and the Town Garage will generate additional savings.

All these projects and initiatives are designed to save money for residential property owners, commercial property owners and taxpayers – as well as help improve the environment.

As I hope everyone realizes, Ed Boman from Public Works has been a key piece for our sustainability efforts and planning.

Improvements in Social Services, Senior Services and ADA Initiatives

With a goal to make everyone in town feel more welcome,

- We added a new 14 passenger bus at the Senior Center fueled by Compressed Natural Gas contributing to a cleaner environment and funded by State Grants. This will help us provide transportation services to those seniors in need.
- We completed a survey of our seniors funded by a private donation to identify what services and programs should be provided at our Senior Center.
- The Top 10 Task Force reported on their recommendations based on visits to neighboring senior centers. This is an excellent example of shared best practices. This is all about improving services to our Seniors.
- The RTM has expanded Senior Tax Relief program – providing over one million dollars in additional tax relief to help our seniors stay in Fairfield. This represents over a 30% increase in funding. This tax relief is a major component of keeping Fairfield affordable for seniors.
- We now have expanded hours and days at the Senior Center including evenings and weekends.
- We are using State Grants to expand and improve ADA Access to Jennings Beach, the marina and fishing pier, Sasco Beach, Ye Yacht Yard and Southport Beach.

Financial Standing

We continue to make significant improvements to our financial foundation.

One year ago, Moody's Rating Agency recognized these actions by removing the negative outlook for our AAA rating. We now have the highest rating from all three credit agencies.

Recently, Standard & Poor's reconfirmed our AAA rating and went on to rate our management as "very strong".

We have been able to "refinance" portions of our bonds twice in the last two years saving millions in long term interest payments.

We made significant progress on shoring up the town financial reserves in our Unassigned Fund balance and our Internal Service fund.

We have finally recovered all the monies we had originally invested in the Madoff fund.

Bob Mayer has joined the town administration as Chief Fiscal Officer. Bob is a CPA with extensive experience in healthcare and employee benefits. These are two critical areas for our town to manage in the years ahead.

I want to take a moment to recognize all the work and improvements that our CFO Bob Mayer has made on the reporting and financial controls to assist our Pension Board in its work. The Pension Board now meets monthly and is able to review cash flow projections along with our investment performance.

We identified "key drivers" for our tax increases. These represent the multi-year commitments that "drive" our tax increases. With our continued focus and management on these expenses, they will have less of an impact each year.

We established a Town and BOE Safety Committee to cut down on accidents and injuries in the workplace. This is a major education and training initiative to improve safety in the workplace. This year we are seeing the financial benefit with a lower Workers Compensation expense.

We are working hard to manage the growth in our Medical Insurance/ Healthcare costs with increased employee participation and we recently completed a bid process that helped lower costs.

We are working to manage our Retiree Benefits both by offering 401A type options and increasing cost sharing in retiree healthcare.

We worked with our Labor Unions to settle the final six contracts that were unresolved when I took office. With the support and cooperation of our employees, we were able to take some significant steps to manage our future costs.

While we do expect to receive less State Aid in the future, we do want to give thanks to our State Delegation for their support in getting our town STEAP and other State Grant funding.

Capital Projects and Capital Planning

We have implemented a comprehensive Capital Planning process that includes all projects proposed from the Town and BOE in one plan. These projects are mapped out with projected timing and costs so we can clearly see the impact on our annual Debt Service. This has proven to be an invaluable planning tool for helping us manage our annual debt service costs in the budget. Again, special thanks to our CFO Bob Mayer for providing the enhanced support that makes this all work.

While the pace of new projects has slowed down this past year, we still have a number of Capital Projects underway. In the past two years we have established building committees for: Riverfield School, Sherman School (completed Phase 1), Osborn Hill Expansion and PCB mitigation, Fairfield Warde High School Roofs, Fairfield Ludlowe High School Windows and Core Expansion and the Penfield Pavilion.

We have also established a new orientation process for our building committees to help them get up and running faster, educated on Roberts Rules and FOI requirements, as well as, become familiar with the support services provided by various town departments.

Storm Sandy Follow up

Our Public Works team did exceptional work on the clean-up of our town from the Beach Area through clearing the downed trees in our more wooded neighborhoods.

We held two Panel Discussions by FEMA and Town Building Officials. And with FairTV's help, we were able to get this much-needed information out to residents in our beach area to help answer the myriad of questions in the wake of the storm about Flood Insurance, FEMA and Building Codes.

We held a FEMA and Town Building Department Panel Public Session at Riverfield School to get further Questions & Answers from our residents.

We facilitated the FEMA office set up in town initially at Veterans Park and then later at the Senior Center with SBA Disaster Loan office putting these resources close to our beach neighborhoods.

We have updated our Hazard Mitigation Plan with funding from the Greater Bridgeport Regional Council (GBRC) including workshops for stakeholders and public sessions for feedback. This Hazard Mitigation Plan will assist in qualifying Town and Residents for Hazard Mitigation Grants from State – we currently have 70 applications from residents entered to the State.

Hazard Mitigation Plan will also qualify the Town and Residents for the Community Rating System (CRS) program allows residents to obtain discounts on Flood Insurance.

We held an additional Public Session on Hazard Mitigation Grants with State and Town officials.

We facilitated the establishment of an Intake Center set up at the Senior Center for Owner Occupied Housing Grants for repair costs not covered by other programs for Storm Sandy damages. Again, the goal was to bring these resources closer to our Beach residents.

The outpouring of generosity of our community allowed us to set up a donation program through the Town and Operation Hope for Storm Sandy victims with over \$200,000 in contributions. Special thanks to the Robin Hood Foundation and the Fairfield County Community Foundation.

We have ongoing projects in dredging, installing new and improved tidal gates, and Beach Sand Replenishment.

Based on the new Hazard (Flood) Mitigation Plan, we will be evaluating additional and longer term measures: from improving protection for the Waste Water Treatment plant to raising the height of the Pine Creek dike to expanding the dike system. This is all part of the longer term plan to improve flood mitigation in the beach area.

Parks and Recreation

Our Parks and Recreation Department continues to provide an extensive array of opportunities for our residents. Our youth sports programs are establishing a reputation for being some of the best in the country.

- Our American Little League team again competed for a national title.
- One of our Pop Warner Cheerleading squads also competed for a national championship.
- We had several teams in baseball, softball and football win their league and state titles.

Thank you to all the parents, coaches and volunteers that make these programs special.

Our Parks and Recreation Department also initiated an innovative lease strategy that achieved the complete renovation of our tennis center and bubble at no cost to the town.

Our Libraries

I really believe we have an incredible resource available to our residents. We have the Fairfield Public Libraries and the Pequot Library. Both are much different today than the libraries were when I grew up. They both provide so much more than just a place to find and read books. They are true community centers, sources of inspiration and knowledge. And as we saw a few times, a refuge from the stormsand a real source of “power” – a place where we can go to be cool ...or perhaps, if needed, warm.

I can't think of a better initiative for getting us all on the same page than the One Book/One Town program sponsored by the Fairfield Library and shared with the Pequot Library. This program is all about generating a common experience and conversation for everyone in our town – this is all about bringing us together. I encourage everyone to take part.

Communication and Technology

We are using technology to improve our communication and information flow with our community. Our goal is to have more people both involved and informed.

- We will have an updated Town web site in the next few months. It will have a much improved format and be easier to use. It will have a lot more content and user friendly features to be more responsive to our residents.
- Our Facebook page continues to become more popular. In fact, we really have a Facebook community with pages for Fire, Police, the Senior Center and other Departments – all aimed at improving the timeliness of information and feedback for our community. During Storm Sandy the Town, Police, and Fire Department Facebook pages were a major source of information.
- FairTV has grown and expanded with town financial support. It now offers live telecasts on many of our board and commission meetings. The Video-on-Demand continues to allow those that missed a meeting to view it at their convenience.
- We are enhancing our GIS system and capability. This Geographical Information System will help the town and our residents in day to day activities with better available information and maps. It will also be a big help during storm events. This is a project that is funded by the Greater Bridgeport Regional Council so there is no additional cost to our taxpayers.
- We have implemented the Code Red system for our Reverse 911 calls. This updated system allows cell phones, texting and emails to be sent. This has proven far more valuable than the older generation that used primarily land lines. If anyone hasn't registered their mobile phone or any other phone line

they wish, I encourage you to either go to the town website or call our Police Department to sign up now.

Looking Ahead -

On Schools and Security – We will have safe and secure schools. We are committed to excellence in education.

On Town Security – We will also work to ensure all of our public facilities are safe and secure.

On Energy Conservation – We will continue to take the lead on energy conservation and lowering our costs/usage.

On Seniors – We continue to enhance the living experience of our seniors here in Fairfield. They have been an important part of our past. We want them to stay here to enjoy the present and the future.

Parks and Recreation – We will continue to offer programs for residents of all ages to maximize their enjoyment in our town.

Arts and Culture – We will work towards keeping Fairfield “the place” to come for shopping, dining and entertainment while we celebrate our 375th Anniversary!

Communication – We will work on improved use of technology and our website to provide residents with more responsive and easy to use tools for improving our service levels.

On Financial Stability – We are working on managing our expenses and our investments. This is and will continue to be a major focus for this administration.

On Flood Mitigation and Resiliency – We will continue to work to protect our beach area from storms and flooding.

On Tax Appraisals – We are beginning work on the 2015 Re-Valuation. It will be more extensive than the last few. We will make every effort to insure it is as accurate as possible.

On Technology – We continue our work to improve service levels and productivity with the use of technology – from new tax collection systems, to school bus cameras, to new parking ticket systems, to our new Senior Center membership system, to our new GIS system, to our new website.

We do have our challenges ahead. We will have our speed bumps to get over but working together we will find our way.

I do want to repeat as I have said in the past - As First Selectman, it is my intention to serve all the people of our town, from the students who need a safe environment for an excellent education, to the seniors on fixed incomes who wish to stay here, to the taxpayers who want quality service and reasonable taxes. I am committed to keeping Fairfield as the best value in our State for residents and businesses.

Thank you Fairfield for your involvement, your volunteer spirit and your support of our town.