

State of the Town Address

By Mike Tetreau, First Selectman

January 23, 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on our town.

What a year it has been!

Let's look at just the past 6 months....

We certainly had our share of challenges and learning experiences.

We have also had some tremendous successes!

We overcame a host of obstacles to complete the work on the new Fairfield Metro Station –

- But we did finish it and now have a huge opportunity for commercial growth and new tax revenue.

Our sense of security was tested by Tropical Storm Irene. More than 600 trees were knocked down while many in our community were left without power for 9 days or more; others suffered traumatic flooding.

- Thank you to the many Fairfield Businesses who graciously provided free services to those in need.
- Through it all, we found a renewed sense of community spirit. We not only learned how to live without the Internet, TV and, phones but also were reminded of the value of our neighbors.
- Our Police, Fire, DPW, Health departments did an outstanding job.
- As did the many volunteers and Town employees going above and beyond to help protect us and recover from this natural disaster.

On the financial side, Moody's and Standard & Poor's reaffirmed our AAA Credit Rating.

- This allowed us to sell Bond Anticipation Notes this past summer at historically low rates.

- More recently, we were also able to refinance a number of our outstanding bonds and save the taxpayers \$3.7 Million in interest payments.
- Both these events make a strong statement on the health of our town's finances.

We do face the ongoing challenge on how to better manage our Debt and our use of Bonding.

- In this spirit, the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance along with representatives from the BOE and RTM came together for a 2nd Annual Capital Planning Workshop. This continues our commitment to have our town live within its financial means.

We are living in a Challenging Economy – our downtown saw the departure of Borders- but the dawn of a new day with the arrival of the Fairfield U Bookstore - literally cementing the bond between Town and Gown – we are opening a new era of cooperation and shared goals with both Fairfield University and Sacred Heart University.

Fairfield continues to be recognized as a Destination. Our town is where people want to come for shopping, dining and entertainment.

Connecticut Magazine named us among the Top 2 towns in the State in our size class, Again!

A second magazine – *Fairfield Living* – chose our town to make its home and its mark. We have an exciting story to tell!

Our Town came together for 9/11 and Veteran's Day ceremonies. We remembered and we honored those who protect us. More importantly, we are teaching our children to value the sacrifices of generations past.

This year we went "high tech" in the interest of improved communications. We established a Facebook page! So if you are using social media, please take time to become a Fan of Fairfield!

Looking ahead –

Support for Arts and Culture -

I want to reaffirm Fairfield's focus on Arts and Culture. I am establishing a New Arts Council made up of volunteers for better planning and guidance to continue Fairfield's commitment to be a center for the Arts. We know the value the Arts bring to our Downtown and our entire community.

Coming this September, let's all look forward to Fairfield's First Restaurant Week and Celebrate Fairfield Day – just around the corner we will be planning for Fairfield's 375th Birthday in 2014.

March is Celebrate Diversity Month. Our Cultural Diversity Task Force has taken the lead in helping understand, appreciate and celebrate all that makes us different, all that makes us special and all that makes us better. Fairfield is a much different town than many of us grew up in and we are all the better for it.

Improved Financial Strength -

I am looking to setting specific financial goals for our town. While we have a AAA Credit Rating, one agency has given us a Negative Outlook for the past two years. One very specific goal is to take steps to remove the Negative Outlook.

I am going to host a Budget Planning Workshop in the fall. This is a workshop to review and suggest improvements on this year's approved budget. The goal is to have a hands-on workshop in preparing our Town's budget. What would you like to see changed? How would you fund your changes?

More Senior Friendly -

I want to provide more benefits for our seniors – there is a new directory of Senior Services available. We are also surveying our Seniors to see what they value in the services we currently offer and what services we can add to enhance their experience in town. We value our seniors and want them to stay active in our town.

As the RTM takes up the review of the Senior Tax Relief program, I look forward to working with their committee to see how it can be expanded. I also will initiate a program to more fully explain and educate our Seniors about the tax relief options that are available.

A More Sustainable, Green Fairfield -

Fairfield has been recognized as one of the leading Towns for our accomplishments in lowering our carbon footprint and making major strides in sustainability. We want to make this part of our culture, part of every project we consider.

The Final Stage of cleaning up the former Exide Plant and Mill River is about to begin. Finally, this Post Road site will be on the road to recovery and productivity for our town.

Better Communication -

A New and improved Town Website has been too long in coming. This year it will get its much awaited facelift. It is too important to communicating all that is going on in town.

FairTV has become an important foundation for our communication. All citizens can see many of our Town Boards and Commissions in action – seeing and hearing for themselves the deliberations of their elected leaders. Hopefully soon, we will see the newest feature from FairTV – live broadcasting of our board and commission meetings. There is nothing more important to democracy and our form of government.

Better Teamwork -

I want to congratulate this RTM on leading by example – by establishing bi-partisan leadership on this session's Sub Committees. Thank you.

I also want to recognize the steps that the Board of Education and Dr. Title have taken to work with the Board of Finance, the Board of Selectmen and the RTM in evaluating changes to how we approach Non-Recurring Capital projects, how we approach Building projects and how we approach funding our Workers Comp and Health Insurance program.

Dr. Title and the BOE have continued to provide the high quality education system that is a hallmark for our town. It provides value for every one of our citizens.

There are six town labor contracts that have not been settled. These contracts are 18 months past due. This is not fair to our employees or our citizens. I pledge to do everything possible to get these settled in the shortest possible timeframe.

In Summary -

The last six months has gotten me more excited about leading our town and looking forward to the challenges ahead.

I want to thank our Department Heads and their teams for their dedication and commitment to our town.

The most distinguishing trait about our Town for me is our spirit of service and volunteerism. Someday, we have to figure out a way to count all the hours that our citizens donate to our town.

It is all of us together that make Fairfield special – Together we make Fairfield work.

While there is much to appreciate and savor about the wonders of our town, there is also much that we can improve on.

As a friend reminded me recently, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

Please join me as we continue on that journey and look forward to the adventures ahead!