

State of the Town

February 3, 2015

By First Selectman Mike Tetreau

Thank you Madame Moderator, members of the Board of Selectmen, members of the Board of Finance, members of our Representative Town Meeting, other elected officials and members of the public for the opportunity to provide this update on our town. We have accomplished a great deal in the past year. We also have a lot to look forward to in the next year and beyond.

I want to thank all those that have contributed so much this past year: my colleagues on the Board of Selectmen – Kevin Kiley and Cristin McCarthy Vahey. I also want to welcome our newest member Selectman Sheila Marmion who is replacing State Representative McCarthy Vahey.

I want to give a big thank you to all the volunteers serving on our Boards and Commissions who give so freely of their time and are dedicated to helping our town be the best in the state.

I want to especially thank the Town Department Managers and employees who have helped raise service levels and manage our costs to keep Fairfield a great value for all.

We would not be the town we are if we didn't have our top quality school system. Thank you to the Board of Education, Central Office, our Teachers and our Administrators. Year after year, you manage to keep our students engaged, learning and reaching new heights. Our schools are one of the leading contributors to making Fairfield a great value.

Economic Development

Let's first take a look at Economic Development. This is critical for local job growth and for providing balance to our tax revenue. We have really made some great progress. We are working with businesses in five business centers – Downtown, Southport, Greenfield Hill, Black Rock Turnpike and Grasmere. The Fairfield Chamber of Commerce has new leadership, a renewed energy and is a welcome partner to our Economic Development team.

We have expanded our Summer Sidewalk Sales in Downtown Fairfield by adding other neighborhood centers. We also maximized the draw by holding it the same weekend as Pequot Library's famous summer book sale and the CT Challenge Annual Bike ride. All these events work together to promote Fairfield. Between all three, there is truly something for everyone. We have added the similar sidewalk sales events throughout the year – our Holiday Shop & Stroll along with our Spring Shop & Stroll. Each of these has added features and entertainment to attract even more shoppers for our retail merchants who have been enthusiastic supporters. Let me give a special thank you to Mark Barnhart, our Director of Community and Economic Development, for his leadership and creativity.

Our Restaurant Week in only its third year has been a sensational hit and has already developed a statewide reputation. While visiting with US Senator Chris Murphy, one of his staff came up to me to point out that the word on the street is that “Fairfield is the place to open a restaurant in Connecticut.” Thank you to all the sponsors, restaurants and merchants that have made this one of the best weeks of the year.

A key building block in making Fairfield an Arts and Culture Center is the Fairfield Theatre Company. FTC is a phenomenal draw to people throughout the region to come dine and shop in Fairfield. They are in the midst of a major expansion to add a 600 seat auditorium next to Stage One. They are doing their part to keep our town as “the” place to visit. This expansion project is being privately funded through their ongoing Capital Campaign. Thank you to the FTC Board and Executive Director John Reid for their vision and leadership.

Our town is the envy of the region. Fairfield needs to keep moving forward. As the famous baseball pitcher Satchel Paige was quoted when asked about the secret of his pitching skill and his longevity – “Don’t look back, something might be gaining on you”.

While much of our town has been built out, we have two major commercial development opportunities: the former Exide Battery factory and the Fairfield Metro Center.

The clean-up of Mill River is well underway. This is a two to three year project and is the critical first step to the development of the Exide factory site on the Post Road. Once this clean-up is complete, there is a developer waiting to get started on making this long term brownfield a productive part of our town and tax base. This clean-up is proceeding under the watchful eyes of our Conservation Commission, our Harbor Management Commission, our Shellfish Commission and the neighborhood group FairPLAN who all worked together to review and improve the proposed clean-up plan.

The Fairfield Metro Center development has been stalled for several years. I’ve reached out to the developer to discuss what is needed to move this forward. His view is that the current plan won’t work in today’s market. He would like to take a look at a revised plan. Importantly, he also wants to make sure that he has community support. We are discussing an approach that would involve key stakeholders and members of the community. It would involve getting interested parties engaged in the process and having input during the planning process. We will have more updates in the months ahead.

We are working with the Fairfield Museum and History Center on a vision for our historic Town Hall campus. Fairfield is unique when compared to many Connecticut towns. We have significant historic sites within walking and biking distance from our downtown center and train station. We are currently applying for grants to fund a planning study for this campus. We have a tremendous opportunity to promote our heritage. We have plans to update Old Town Hall and Burr Mansion. We are in the midst of updating the Sun Tavern – where George Washington dined and spent the night. Yes, George Washington slept here! The Old Academy Schoolhouse was recently updated by our Eunice Dennie Burr Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. All these sites surrounding the Fairfield Museum and History Center create a critical mass of opportunities to promote our Town.

I have also had the chance to begin conversations with several members of the Historic District Commission about a longer term vision for preserving Fairfield's historic districts and our historic homes. During a recent visit to Charleston, SC, I observed a community with a proud heritage, great restaurants, lots of culture, beautiful historic homes, located on the coast and a booming tourist economy. Sound similar? Two things stood out to me that we are missing here in Fairfield. One, Charleston formed foundations to purchase and maintain select historic homes. These homes are open to the public, providing a source of revenue and a way to keep their heritage alive. Second, they have hotels and Bed and Breakfasts that allow people to visit longer, enjoy more amenities and spend more money. I will be continuing these conversations with the Historic District Commission and others about how to develop a plan to help property owners preserve their homes and keep our history part of our future.

Fairfield has been clearly established as the location of the first airplane flight. Fairfield First in Flight – has a nice ring to it. We have formed a Gustave Whitehead Committee chaired by Andy Kosch to meet the challenge of planning a way for our town to honor the accomplishments of Gustave Whitehead here in Fairfield. I have asked that the Committee also work with Bridgeport and Stratford to integrate our efforts into an initiative called the Whitehead Trail to boost tourism and economic development throughout the region. Fairfield First in Flight. This is historic. This is an event that should make us all proud.

We really want everyone in town to join in promoting Fairfield and this milestone. I would love to see Fairfield University and Sacred Heart University competing for the right to challenge the University of North Carolina to a debate on the topic – Gustave Whitehead was really the first to fly an airplane. I would love to see our high schools – Ludlowe, Warde, Fairfield Prep and Notre Dame competing for the right to challenge Kitty Hawk High to a similar debate—all as part of our ongoing efforts to promote Fairfield and have some fun.

We want to continue to build on our Town/Gown relationships with both universities. Sacred Heart University proved to be a very generous and gracious host for our town's 375th Anniversary Grand Gala. Fairfield University created a small business incubator called FAME which stands for Fairfield University Accelerator and Mentoring Enterprise. This is a joint venture between the University, Kleban Properties and the Town. This is a very significant initiative to help provide entrepreneurs with the resources and skills they need to survive the early years of product development. One of the critical needs in our state is more jobs. For years, it has been shown that the majority of job growth comes from small business development. Here in Fairfield, we are doing something about it. FAME is part of that solution.

We just finished our year-long 375th Anniversary Celebration and what a great time we had! So much happened:

- The painted Fire Hydrants standing guard in our town. Thanks to Jeanne Harrison.
- The Chamber of Commerce Birthday Cake Contest to select the baker for the Official Town Birthday Cake for the Grand Gala.

- The Town-wide Food Drive which was supported by everyone in town and collected almost 20,000 pounds of food. Thank you to Probate Judge Dan Caruso for his inspiration.
- The Spring Shop & Stroll throughout town.
- The Memorial Day Parade and the Award Winning 375th Anniversary Float.
- Fairfield's First Family Fun Fest hosted on the Town Hall Green by the Fairfield Museum, the Fairfield Theatre Company, the Economic Development Department and the Chamber of Commerce.
- Another great Fairfield Fourth of July Fireworks hosted by our Parks and Recreation Department.
- Our Summer Sidewalk Sales Day combined with the Pequot Book Sale and the CT Challenge Bike Ride – all the last weekend in July. What an amazing weekend!
- The 113th Anniversary of Gustave Whitehead's first flight. We even had a replica of his Condor airplane displayed on Sherman Green.
- Beth El's Kosher BBQ that fed 2,000 people a kosher meal.
- The first ever town employee Wiffle Ball Tournament honoring Fairfield as the birthplace of Wiffle Ball – won by our Public Works Department.
- Our always tasty Restaurant Week with almost 40 restaurants joining in the celebration.
- Our 375th Grand Gala held at Sacred Heart University's William Pitt Center that was transformed for the evening – a truly historic event.
- And special thanks to the Fairfield Museum and History Center that seemed to have Anniversary events every week celebrating our heritage.

Every one of these events helped promote our town and helped us all enjoy our town's 375th Anniversary. Special thanks to Co-Chairs Betsy Browne and Bob Hojnacki. And another big thank you to Grand Gala Co-Chairs Julia DeMeo, Marlene Battista and Lee Crouch.

Energy Conservation and Sustainability

We continue to be one of the leading towns in the state in Energy Conservation and Sustainability. This is good for the environment, the economy and good for our expense budget.

In 2015 and in each year thereafter, our town will save \$2,479,000.

- \$1.3 million either by energy conservation or by generating our own electricity.
- Another \$900,000 from the change of heating fuel to natural gas.
- Other improvements will save an additional \$270,000.

To put this in perspective, this amounts to approximately \$25 million in savings over the next ten years.

As I have said before, Ed Boman from Public Works has made a real contribution to our town. Ed has become an expert at finding grants from both United Illuminating and the State to help pay for the capital improvements to achieve these savings.

Senior Center

We have our new Senior Center Director position filled by the very capable Julie DeMarco. She established her value right from the first day. We need the extra help. We have about 2,000 seniors now registered on our member database program called MySeniorCenter. This is up from about 500 two years ago. We have regularly scheduled daily activities plus some on weeknights and on most weekends. Pickleball anyone? This is part of the expansion of services requested in the 2012 survey of seniors.

With Julie helping keep the activities and energy at the Center, Terry Giegengack, our Human Services Director, can now focus on the delivery of social services and long term plans for our Social Services Department and Senior Center. These are the services we offer to those in our community most in need. I am thrilled with the progress we are making.

Financial Outlook

The clearest measure of our financial performance is to look at what one rating agency had to say:

- Strong budgetary flexibility.
- Strong budgetary performance.
- Very Strong Liquidity providing very strong cash levels.
- Very Strong Financial Management with good financial policies.
- Very Strong debt and contingent liability position driven mostly by the town's low overall net debt burden.

We have seen this consistent high quality feedback from the Rating Agencies since restoring our AAA rating with a Stable Outlook. Removing the Negative Outlook was one of the first goals established when I took office.

For the past three years, we have had a declining tax increase. We will continue to focus on tightly controlling our revenues, our debt and our expenses. This management effort is paying off. Bob Mayer has done an outstanding job as our Chief Fiscal Officer.

We are about half way through our Property Tax Revaluation. New Assessments will be mailed out in December 2015 and the corresponding tax bills will be sent out in July 2016. We continue to schedule information sessions for residents to review how this works and to answer any questions.

We have our Pension Board to thank for their careful and dedicated review of both our Pension Trust Funds and our OPEB Trust Funds. We are committed to fully funding the Annual Recommended Contributions for these funds to meet our long term obligations.

One of the areas we have focused on has been our Workers Compensation expense. We have reviewed causes, provided additional training and formed Safety Committees to improve our procedures. This has been a combined effort by both the Town and the Board of Education. We are experiencing fewer injuries, less lost time and a decrease in Workers Compensation expense for the second consecutive year.

We want to recognize and thank our labor unions for their help and cooperation as we negotiate to find new ways towards managing our future costs.

Parks and Recreation

Our Parks and Recreation Department had another stellar year. One of their big accomplishments was the completion of the new tennis and recreation center. It not only provides an all new tennis facility, but also a much needed replacement to the old rundown Beanery. Importantly, it was financed with private funds. This is a great success story for a private/public partnership. Again, thanks to Gerry Lombardo, our Parks and Recreation Director, for putting all this together.

Penfield Pavilion Rebuild? I guess this will be answered later tonight.

Improved Service Levels

We have continued to look for ways to improve service levels to our residents. We have a new website that was implemented by the team of Merry Mao from the Library staff and Kathleen Griffin from the First Selectman's Office. This has provided a much improved and user-friendly website with updated and more complete information. This allows our residents to find answers and obtain information 24/7.

In addition to new features, this website has a new Citizen Service Request component. This component allows for a resident to ask a question or tell us about a pothole 24/7. The question or issue is automatically routed to the correct department. The resident is updated by email, phone or text on the progress made to resolve the issue. This approach saves everyone time and raises service levels.

We have recently started sending out Town News and Announcements via e-mail. This is a no-cost way for our Town to push information out directly to our residents. Please go to the town website and add your e-mail to our mailing list.

By arrangement with Peoples United Bank, our residents can now pay their taxes at any Peoples United Branch. This expands the number of locations and hours of operation making it easier for our residents – all at no additional cost to our town.

We are working with the Greater Bridgeport Regional Council to enhance our town's Geographic Information System (GIS) capability and lower our costs. The GIS maps will be available to not only town departments, but also to residents through our web site. By having much of this system centralized, it saves us money that would have been needed to expand our existing system.

We are also work with the Greater Bridgeport Regional Council to qualify for the Community Rating System or CRS. This is a longer term project, but it will allow for our flood zone residents to qualify for discounts on their flood insurance premiums.

We have an adjusted work week in the Marina. Our new Marina manager now works weekends as part of his normal work week during the summer boating season. This allows him to be down at the Marina when the boaters are there and has been a big improvement in communication. The adjusted work week means this is done on normal hours, not overtime.

Flood Mitigation in the Beach Area

We are improving flood mitigation in the beach area. We received a grant to help with replacing old tide gates. The new tide gates are considerably larger and more difficult to clog. We are evaluating adding permanent pumping stations to help remove trapped flood waters.

Much of our beach area drainage is below sea level at high tide. This makes any standing water difficult to drain by a purely gravity based system.

The long-term vision for flood control is contained in the draft report prepared jointly by Public Works and the Flood and Erosion Control Board. This has been presented to the Board of Selectmen. It is now going to be presented in a series of public meetings to help everyone understand what is involved in a comprehensive solution.

We have recently received \$5 million in grants to harden and protect our Water Treatment Facility allowing it to function in future flood events.

Many of our beach area residents are still struggling to recover from Storm Sandy. The financial impact of Sandy has left a lasting impression on our beach neighborhoods. FEMA recently began approving Hazard Mitigation grants for Beach Area families looking to raise their homes. A complete recovery is still years ahead.

Our Libraries

The Fairfield Public Library is in the process of updating its five-year Strategic Plan. I have learned so much about our libraries in the past three years. I am continually impressed by the broad range of services offered to our community. When you look at the popularity of both the Main Library and the Fairfield Woods Branch Library (the busiest branch in the state), you realize how much they do to bring our community together. I am looking forward to seeing the Strategic Plan to learn more about the future of our Libraries. They are an example of leadership at its best.

I was pleased to see our public libraries join with Pequot Library in the spirit of One Book/One Town to offer One Card/One Town. It simplifies life by making it easier to use all of our town's library services. On behalf of all of us, thank you.

The Main Branch of the Library is holding an Open House and Tour for members of the BOS, BOF and RTM this Saturday at 11am. I hope you will find time in your schedule to join us this weekend. I can promise you that you will leave with a new understanding of what the definition of a library is in today's world.

Our School System

Our School System has provided excellence in education year after year. This provides a major part of our foundation for maintaining our property values.

We continue to make our most significant financial commitment to our schools. Approximately 63% of our current year budget goes towards supporting education.

We continue to work towards providing a safe and secure environment for our students, teachers and administrators. We added more direct Police support this year. We are currently reviewing proposals for \$1.75 million more in capital costs for security funding.

Our school system is continually being recognized for its achievements. It seems like every month we receive another award for excellent performance by an elementary school, a middle school, a high school, a teacher or an administrator. This week seven of our elementary schools were recognized as being in the Top 100 statewide – including my alma mater Holland Hill. Congratulations to our teachers and administrators that made this happen. The Town may

provide the facilities, but it is our teachers and administrators who provide the education. Thank you.

The Challenges Ahead

We have a strong foundation comprised of our community spirit, our volunteerism and our commitment to work together to meet the challenges ahead.

Despite how well we have done and how much we have accomplished, there are significant challenges facing us. Look at what we have faced recently:

- PCBs in our schools
- Cell Tower installations in our neighborhoods
- Snow storms
- Potential hurricanes and flooding
- Ebola preparations
- UI and Tree Cutting
- Saving the Southport Post Office
- Affordable Housing options

And perhaps the biggest challenge facing us is answering the difficult questions: What services do we want to offer as a community? How do we maintain or improve our proposition that Fairfield is the best value in the state? How do we see our town in 10 or 20 years from now?

I am proposing that we develop a Strategic Plan, as a community, to answer these difficult questions. I will be including funding for this project in the upcoming budget. This will be our first ever town wide strategic plan.

This will take the involvement of key stakeholders and community leaders. This will take engagement by all our residents. This will not just be about who we are but where are we going and how do we get there.

We have a lot to accomplish to make Fairfield the best it can be – for all of us!

I do want to repeat as I have said in the past - As First Selectman, it is my vision 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 maintaining Fairfield as the best value in our State.

Thank you to everyone for your involvement, your volunteer spirit and your support of our Town.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you tonight.