

2013 State of the Town Address First Selectman Michael C. Tetreau

Good Evening. Mr. 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 leadership and dedication to our town.

Storm Sandy

I really didn't think I would be standing before you talking about another major storm in my State of the Town remarks this year.

Sandy hit us much worse than Irene and as you know – knocked out power to over 22,000 homes and 98% of our town. I want to say thank you to everyone who helped. It was a real team effort by all town departments – Police, Fire, ECC Health, DPW, Board of Education, Building, Library, Finance, Parks & Rec, Human Resources and Social Services. Our CERT team of volunteers played a big role in managing our Emergency Shelter – home to almost 300 residents. Fairfield University and Sacred Heart University were both an integral part of our emergency plans. The Tax Collector's Department overcame adversity to service our residents and the same can be said for our Registrars of Voters who had plans B, C and D available to make sure everyone had the chance to cast their ballot.

A special thanks to all the businesses that donated their services and our new friends in the National Guard. Thank you to the residents that listened to our warnings to stay off the streets and to evacuate their homes. Their actions and cooperation saved lives.

How do you even begin to describe the generosity of the 1000 volunteers that Sunday on Jennings Beach who came together on short notice to help their neighbors? This really makes Fairfield a special town and a special group of people.

It's not over yet---

- We have conducted a complete Review of our Response to look for ways we can improve. Department Heads have reached out to other towns to see what we can learn and do better.
- We are still compiling the costs and documentation to make sure that we get the full FEMA cost reimbursement possible.
- We are reviewing the impact of the Flooding and identifying the improvements we need to make to minimize future flooding.
- I will be working with other First Selectmen and our State Delegation to get commitments from UI to address the lack of planning and failings in their response.
- We also continue to be concerned about how many of our Residents are not yet back in their homes. It will take many months for some of our neighbors to recover from this devastation.

School System

Our Town is known for our top quality school system. We have made education a top priority with 55-60% of our annual budget going to the BOE. We have invested heavily in new and improved school facilities. Our school system has been a cornerstone in supporting the premium property values Fairfield homes obtain by attracting buyers to our town.

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

The Newtown tragedy has given us all pause and made us rethink the definition of security. We owe our educators, staff, and students a safe environment in which to work and learn.

I want to commend our Police Chief, Fire Chief and Superintendent for moving on this initiative so quickly.

I also want to thank our Police officers and ECC Dispatchers who either assisted in Newtown the day of the event or volunteered over the holidays to give their Newtown counterparts a much needed day off.

Over the coming months, we have to develop a comprehensive plan 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 in the town budget.

We will also need to reflect on what changes we want in our laws.

- What type of guns do we allow?
- What types of ammunition and magazines do we allow?
- What type of background checks and reporting do we require when purchasing guns and ammunition?
- How do we provide for changes in mental health evaluation and data sharing?

These questions go to the heart of what we have long held as our rights and our concern over personal privacy.

In some respects in the months ahead we are redefining our society, our country. This is a critical time and everyone needs to be involved in these discussions.

Fairfielders have taken the lead in shaping our nation since colonial times. We need to continue to be on the forefront of making progress.

We all need to take a stand in the coming debates. While these issues will be decided at the State and Federal levels, Fairfield has been a town of activists, volunteers and contributors since our birth 374 years ago.

We are now faced with another call to action.

Get educated, get informed, get involved.

This is the time when our nation needs us!

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.

This past year, we:

- Installed over 200 LED lights at the Downtown and Southport train stations and along the Post Road.
- Installed lighting controls and LED's 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.
- Lowered energy costs by targeted purchases that saved \$500,000 in 2012 versus our costs in 2011. We need to give a Special Thank you to Twig Holland – Director of Purchasing.
- 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 38 new PV systems providing clean renewable energy for homeowners.

For next year, we are:

- 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.
- Planning 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.
- Planning projects at Independence Hall and the Town Garage to generate additional savings.

Annual savings means that we save this money every year going forward.

A special thank you to Ed Boman in our DPW department for leading these efforts.

Improvements for Seniors

One of our objectives is to make our Town more Senior Friendly. Towards that end,

- 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. If you have read the report, you will be inspired with the quality of work this group of volunteers produced. This is all about improving services to our Seniors.
- The RTM has on its agenda an improved and expanded Senior Tax Relief program. My compliments to the committee and this body for taking such a comprehensive look at what our town needs to provide to help our seniors stay in Fairfield. This tax relief is a major component of keeping Fairfield affordable for seniors.

Financial Standing

We made significant improvements to our financial foundation.

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.

The market recognized our efforts by giving us historic low rates on our bond offering and saving us significant dollars on our interest payments.

We made significant progress on shoring up the town financial reserves in our Unassigned Fund balance and our Internal Service fund. We are making solid progress towards getting our reserves back to the level of other AAA towns.

We identified “key drivers” for our tax increases. These represent the multi-year commitments that “drive” our tax increases. We are faced with many of the same drivers again. With our continued focus and management on these expenses, they will have less of an impact after this year. This is the beginning of getting our year to year tax growth under control.

We are working hard to manage the growth in our Medical Insurance/ Healthcare costs with increased employee participation and looking at alternative providers. We are working to manage our Retiree Benefits both by offering 401A type options to new employees and increasing cost sharing in retiree healthcare. We also have a major education and training initiative to improve safety in the workplace and control our Workers Compensation expense.

STEAP Grant Projects

While we do expect to receive less State Aid in the future, we do want to give thanks to our State Delegation in their support for this year’s funding. Here are two of the projects:

- We have added canopies on the steps at the downtown railroad station making the stairways safer in all types of weather for our daily commuters and all other passengers. Special thanks to Tom Bremer for championing this cause.
- We will also be adding improved access meeting ADA requirements at Jennings Beach, the Marina and other areas along our shores to make these amenities available to all our residents.

Parks and Recreation

Our Parks and Recreation facilities 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 made these programs special.

Arts and Culture

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.
- We are continuing our efforts to find a tenant for the Community Theatre to bring this landmark back to life
- 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. 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.
- We held our first town-wide Restaurant Week. Thirty four restaurants participated with special prices and meals. Our passport feature led to special prizes for diners. The feedback has been extremely positive from restaurant owners and patrons alike. The number one comment---how soon can we do another? Connecticut Magazine has just recognized six of our Restaurants for being among the best in the State!

Special thanks to Mark Barnhart and Jennifer Carpenter for making this such a success.

Restaurant Week was the first step in the path to planning our Town's 375th birthday celebration in 2014. It is coming fast. There is much to do and we are looking for volunteers to help with the planning. Please contact my office if you would like to help.

Communication

Communication is certainly one of our key challenges. Our goal is to have more people both involved and informed.

- We will be updating our Town website this summer. It will have a much improved format and be easier to use. We have several new and innovative features planned. These features make for improved service level reporting and feedback to residents.
- Our Facebook page has become a vital source of information for our town. We saw during Storm Sandy that the Town, Police, and Fire Department Facebook pages were a major source of information.
- Fair TV 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.

I want to thank these members of this RTM and its leadership that have reached out in a spirit of renewed cooperation.

I know I can do better. I know together we can and will do better. Our town needs us to work together to solve the challenges ahead.

In Closing,

From Storm Sandy – We learned many lessons from Irene. We will also learn from Sandy. We will continue improve our response to future storms and mitigate the effects of flooding.

On School Security – We will have safe and secure schools. We do need everyone to take part in setting the direction for our nation.

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

On Seniors – We continue to take the lead in improving the services we offer our seniors and improving affordability of living in Fairfield.

On State Grants – We will continue to use grants and aid to invest wisely in our Town.

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

Arts & Culture – We will work towards keeping Fairfield “the place” to come for shopping, dining and entertainment while we plan a great celebration for our 375th Birthday!

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

On Financial Stability – We are working on getting our taxes under control and managing our investments. This is and will be a major focus of this administration.

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. We need to work together to find the most balanced approach to these sometimes conflicting needs.

I want to thank all of our Department Managers and their teams for their dedication and commitment to our town.

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