

STATE OF THE TOWN 2004
BY KENNETH FLATTO
FIRST SELECTMAN

Good evening RTM and Board members and citizens of Fairfield. The challenge of town government is to provide an improved quality of life and a plan for the future. This government can proudly point to numerous accomplishments benefiting our town and protecting Fairfield's future. We have one of the most beautiful, fortunate, well-managed communities on earth and we have faced up to our town responsibilities to make things work right. With effort by many, we have completed town projects professionally under budget and on time, from Ludlowe to McKinley to the Recreation center and town sewer plant. Fairfield Center is thriving again as we promote and enhance the arts and culture. Just as we negotiated and led the way toward revitalization of the former Fairfield store site, we will succeed with the revitalization plan for a 3rd train station and greenbelt along Ash Creek for public use. Work at high schools, the Library and new elementary school and new senior housing should be completed over the next two years. Our last remaining large capital project priority, Tomlinson School's renovation, is being voted on tonight.

Meanwhile we have saved taxpayers millions of dollars through cost-savings and obtaining grants for town priorities, from improved town emergency procedures to enhanced senior programs. Government is working effectively and openly. Our fiscal success has led rating agencies to highlight Fairfield's AAA rating as a national role model. My commitment to foster a strong tax base while nourishing town's residential quality of life remains focused.

Our top priority for 2004 is to seek legislation and zoning improvements to better protect the charm of our town and preserve the integrity of residential neighborhoods. Our townspeople overwhelmingly support the desire to save land in Fairfield from overdevelopment. I have long advocated for open space and field space because these programs help our environment and help avoid large scale developments that put pressure on school space, public safety and traffic congestion. This program saves taxpayers money as well. These open space efforts represent a long-term plan to preserve Fairfield's future. The parcels this RTM have approved and saved these past five years, including Miro farms, Mill Hill's Diocesan property, the Binger and Haydu properties, have added to public benefit and the aesthetic beauty of town. These town acquisitions prevented the building of

almost 200 new oversized homes from sprawling across Fairfield. The net cost of added children in such houses would have added about \$1.6 million annually to town costs versus the total of \$700,000 in bonded debt service for acquisitions – a savings to taxpayers of almost \$1 million per year. Good news for all Fairfielders.

Our Town TPZ Master Plan expresses the concerns well: "the pace of development for parcels has recently accelerated. Oversized yards are being subdivided, as are old fields. Once developed it is gone forever." Town officials should be doing everything in their power to help on this issue. This is a vital time to legislate effective zoning solutions. Last week we held a successful zoning summit involving land use officials and the Board of Selectmen. Ideas and proposals to better protect the quality of life in our town were discussed. This was a unique chance for town officials to hear from one another and from the public.

I asked the Zoning Commission a year ago to enact revised regulations to strengthen local laws to protect from overdevelopment and offered suggestions. The people of Fairfield now urge the TPZ Commission to move quickly to enact appropriate measures. With some new faces, this year's TPZ members have indicated their commitment and desire to move zoning improvements forward. It is time for them to succeed. To help this process, I propose change in four key areas:

1. Lower maximum height for residences in A, B and C zones to ensure space, light, privacy and consistency within neighborhoods. I strongly endorse the TPZ Subcommittee proposal to reduce allowable height and urge passage.
2. Broader setback regulations are needed for subdivisions and cul de sacs, including wider new road requirements and further setbacks from adjoining lots.
3. An ordinance regarding the demolition of buildings could assess impact fees for permits and to require public notice to neighbors and a waiting period before permits are granted.
4. Passage of a revised blight ordinance, improved by this RTM, would give town a policy to deal with unhealthy eyesores, while assuring homeowner rights.

Friends, while protecting town, we are working hard to protect taxpayers. By producing financial surpluses and passing tax relief for seniors in need, we help citizens. Our financial management approach and controls on spending kept town's

tax increase this year among the lowest in the region. However the next budget faces an austere picture due to heavily increased bills from health insurance companies and utilities and the costs for opening new schools our community supported and required. Unfortunately revenues are lagging. This combination poses a complicated challenge.

I have committed that we will have no more large capital projects from this point forward. Our town should not embark on new ventures now unless they are self-funded or of a critical nature. Yes, I support recreation programs for swimmers and teens and I believe such projects can be shaped to pay as you go. We will continue to pursue economic development opportunities and the cleanup of empty industrial sites like Exide and Handy and Harmon to improve town's tax base. I have been working overtime with department heads to constrain budget requests. We intend to do the same thing with school officials over the next few weeks. We have finished reviewing every budget line and made every tough choice possible to keep spending under control and programs sound. When this process is complete, I will ask Fairfielders to support those town and education needs that I believe are absolutely necessary. Selectmen, Finance and RTM members pledge to work with civility to make proper decisions and keep our fiscal house in order. Fairfielders, please be patient as we seek to do our best for you.

Town leaders work hard to bring you positive results. With Denise Dougiello and Steve Elworthy, our Board of Selectmen has operated collegially and effectively to make decisions for town. The public needs political leaders who are accountable and trustworthy. This is the main reason why I and a bi-partisan Town Ethics Commission have proposed an ethics disclosure law for officials. It is important to instill confidence. I vouch to our town that I have never used the First Selectman's position for any kind of personal advantage or benefit. My family and I believe in getting the job done right. I am sure most every official can say the same thing because we have many dedicated, honest town officials among us. People need to feel once again their political leaders are good, hardworking people like you and I. We care deeply about our community and our country. This is why we serve. Many residents help us accomplish good things for our community. I hope others join us and volunteer for town organizations. There are plenty of opportunities to do wonderful things for Fairfield's sake. Thanks to all who help. Thank you.