

## 2006 STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS

by First Selectman Kenneth A. Flatto

Good evening. Thank you for your tremendous commitment and service to our town. By joining us to help lead our town's vibrant democracy, you and I protect the people of Fairfield and nourish high hopes for the future.

Dedicated anew to serving the public with honor and integrity, we do our best to move Fairfield forward in positive ways. This Administration will continue to lead the way, with respect and civility toward all.

Just as we strive to help the public, thousands of Fairfielders help the town by volunteering throughout our community. The wonderful level of volunteerism evident represents one of the true reasons Fairfield is a successful community. Fairfielders have proven we care for each other and help protect each other. The evidence is abundantly clear. Fairfield is ranked one of the safest, most financially sound and top quality communities in the nation. But for me, the daily proof truly comes from residents and local civic organizations. This proof can be counted by donations of goods and funds for those in need...and the good will seen when local families facing severe illness get outpourings of help from neighbors.

The excellence of Fairfield's school system is demonstrated in superlative results by students. Fairfield's town management and financial results are praised by national rating agencies. And the town has achieved an extraordinary historic event, unparalleled in this region, as our school and library rebuilding program successfully comes to completion this winter. Seven major town buildings were built or renovated and managed so well

that overall under-budget surpluses remain, while all facilities were completed on time. With construction costs of wood and steel up dramatically, many other communities have faced severe overruns or delays on projects. Here in Fairfield, all large town buildings are now state of the art and finished, caught up after two decades of inaction, with no more large new buildings or vast funds required for decades to come. Town debt costs will actually start declining in two years.

Our job is to strengthen and sustain the fabric and quality of life that distinguish our town. Tonight I have the pleasure of summarizing goals and plans for 2006. Alongside all the wonderful activities and accomplishments around town, there are outside pressures buffeting local communities. With much less state and federal aid as a percent of budget today, town governments must achieve savings and moderate future property taxes by limiting increases. Most residents worry about the cost of commodities and insurance, just as I do. Essential programs for seniors, children and residents must be absolutely protected. Yet we need to contain future expenditures.

We have accomplished and managed exceptionally low town-side annual spending costs. Within my six budgets, overall departmental operating expenses rose only 3.2% per annum on average, well below spending rates by the State and most other communities. Controlling costs at 3.2 %, while health and utility costs went much higher, has been a difficult feat. Finding savings and grants has been an integral part of my effort. Providing tax relief to those in need is another essential component I have promoted for our community. By improving town's senior and disabled tax relief program so much, our program has helped enable a number of long-time residents to

remain in their Fairfield homes. But since many low and middle income Fairfielders are still stretched to the limit, tonight I recommend a new resident benefit program. My proposal is innovative but fairly basic: For joint households with annual gross income below \$50,000, and individuals earning less than \$30,000, I ask town agencies to establish a new “daily dollar fee permit” pass in lieu of the normal higher charges for two of town’s important services, residential trash drop off and use of town recreation fitness center. Thus qualified residents over 21 years of age, who use such services, would pay only \$1 per visit. In addition, I will ask if the Chamber of Commerce could work with local restaurants to possibly offer special dining discount cards. This effort to assist fellow Fairfielders living on limited incomes will hopefully help them afford other essential expenses.

As you know, next fiscal year’s budget will be tough. As a start toward saving money, I am proposing a second initiative tonight. I seek a broad combination and consolidation of various contracted maintenance functions between schools and town to accomplish efficiencies in service and scope. The Superintendent indicated to me that she agrees with this plan and I will implement this town strategy as part of my next Budget. By transferring a number of maintenance

budget lines from the education budget to the town-side, we will reduce costs commensurately and save money. Consolidation should include field and site maintenance, snow removal, building façade work, roof repairs and garbage collection. Management of such services will be headed by DPW, with assistance from the BOE manager of construction and safety. Last year, I negotiated a success as we established a government-wide shared IT Director, saving taxpayers over \$100,000 per year while service was significantly upgraded. My 2005 advisory Site Facilities Management Committee recommended pursuing more shared services and I wholeheartedly agree.

As we protect the community's pocketbook, we work tirelessly to preserve the environment and to protect the town from overdevelopment. I set up a blue ribbon Planning Task Force to spearhead proposals

for strong improvements to town zoning regulations. Proposals next month will include efforts to reduce overbuilding on small lots, to preserve greenbelts buffering residential neighborhoods, and ideas to shape commercial revitalization to benefit community interests. I am committed to asking elected land use boards to implement such proposals as soon possible. I hope RTM members support such proposals and speak to TPZ and ZBA members about their concerns.

A top preservation goal for Fairfield is to save historic and special landmark structures in our town. I have been working with preservation groups and the Land Acquisition Commission to focus on these unique properties. We endeavor to save historic properties through government and non-profit action. I am hopeful the RTM will support such initiatives. Simultaneously we jump-started restoration of

premier historic structures such as the Sun Tavern, Bronson Windmill and the Powder House.

Another particular structure that town should fix is Penfield Pavilion. I recently applied for a \$500,000 grant to rebuild the entire east wing of Penfield One, planning to maintain the existing footprint and character of this building. I know town bodies will support completing a newly renovated Penfield for minimal town cost.

It takes hard work and teamwork to get the job done right. I particularly applaud the men and women who dedicate their careers working for the people of Fairfield. Town and school employees serve all residents and protect our daily lives. They get the job done as well as any community in the nation.

I also thank all elected and appointed officials for your service. It is a pleasure to lead and shape

representative town government. Selectman  
Dougiello and I feel strongly about accomplishing the  
goals outlined tonight. Town bodies will have  
exhilarating moments in 2006. Whatever events come  
along, we recognize that the people of Fairfield  
expect town officials to do our best and to remember  
their concerns. We govern in a common sense  
approach that exemplifies Fairfield's tradition of  
excellence. As we embark upon 2006, I know our  
entire Board of Selectmen, Denise Dougiello, Steve  
Elworthy and I, all thank you for helping to protect  
Fairfield's future. Thank you and on to the work at  
hand.