

2008 STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS

Fairfield - Vibrant and Secure

BY FIRST SELECTMAN KENNETH A. FLATTO

January 28, 2008

Good evening fellow citizens, officials, and friends. It is an honor to stand before you tonight to share accomplishments we have achieved for Town and to outline key priorities. I am pleased to report the State of the Town is vibrant and secure and our quality of life is strong and stable.

We have worked very hard to provide Fairfield citizens with a government that is conscientious, compassionate, and ready to meet every challenge ahead. Given the troubled state of national policies and the turbulence facing America, communities like Fairfield must stand united with common goals and vision. Fairfielders always come together in times of need to sustain our town. We preserve our close knit special sense of community through volunteer action. So many residents give their time and dedication to town projects, local not-for-profits and to fellow Fairfield neighbors whenever needed. Fairfield is blessed in its caliber of residents who make positive and long lasting contributions to our town. I commend all those who do so much for our citizens.

We should be proud that Fairfield serves as a model for other communities. Fairfield continues to be a standout example when it comes to fiscal results and financial responsibility. We constrain spending, find new revenues and bring additional grant monies to town to earn Fairfield's AAA rating which helps taxpayers. My top priority is to keep producing lean budgets without hurting town services. We must hold off on extras when fixed costs squeeze the budget.

I can assure you that despite much uncertainty in our world, Fairfield government works effectively for every resident and every neighborhood. We are successful in meeting the needs of this community because we listen, we empathize and we care deeply. In this new term, we continue to provide positive leadership and a common sense government you can always depend on.

As 2008 begins in earnest, we have to help Fairfielders who face financial hardships and the rising personal cost of living that affect us all. This RTM is about to review town's tax relief program. It is imperative that you ensure we continue to provide the best senior tax relief program in the state. I believe the

RTM should seek to increase the income eligibility levels by raising the cap on annual income from \$52,000 to \$70,000. With rising personal living costs, we want all older residents to be able to stay in their Fairfield homes as long as they desire and cherish. Let's give these middle income seniors the help they need.

2008 brings new initiatives and goals to create investments for town. A key part of this is our acquisition of precious open space for active and passive uses. I have always promised as your First Selectman to preserve and protect open space. Our administration has acquired more acres of open space than any other since the 1960's and that is something I am deeply proud of. This year brings unique opportunities for the Town that are invaluable. Thank you for supporting the recent purchase of land on Hoydens Lane. The Pansy Road purchase which the Board of Selectmen now recommends is an opportunity to buffer the strategic Osborn Hill school property. Our Town can add to the "fields" in Fair field with this acquisition and I urge approval. With this approach, we strive to curtail overdevelopment in neighborhoods and reduce burdens on town services. Open spaces enhance our quality of life and provide needed recreation opportunities.

Fairfield is also a model for public safety. We have been recognized on a national level for our public safety efforts and this year received the largest grants ever for DUI enforcement and to better equip Eagle One helicopter. It is one of my top priorities to continue to be on the cutting edge of innovative, top-of-the-line public safety programs. I have been working closely with Chief Peck and Chief Felner to seek new community oriented results. Over the next few months both department Chiefs will be spearheading new innovations and giving proposals to their Commissions and town Boards to strengthen key Police and Fire services using technological and operational advances as efficiently as possible for our community's welfare. I will support and help their efforts wholeheartedly. Our dedicated, brave public safety officers and firefighters ensure Fairfield will always remain a well-protected, ultra-safe community.

Fairfield is also a pioneer in education as schools embody the highest standards with top-notch dedicated faculty and staff. Our school facilities are the best equipped, cleanest, most energy efficient and technologically advanced in town's history. We followed through on the promise to establish a building committee for Stratfield Elementary School so major work can be performed on this aging building. The committee is underway addressing needs of this school with phased work planned as soon as possible when school is out of session. I know it is the right time now to create an overall plan to carefully examine elementary school

space needs. I have now established the Elementary School Space Task Force comprised of representatives from the BOE, BOF, RTM, TFC and BOS. The Task Force has begun examining space issues and reviewing the latest demographic projections which demonstrate school population will be dropping. We must address this situation factually and comprehensively to seek effective solutions where necessary to reduce a reliance on portables. Recommendations will be complete by mid-Spring to forward to town bodies.

A third area to be proud of involves town's clean energy and environmental initiatives. Fairfield is a leader at the forefront of these important issues. We have engineered diesel free school buses, a natural gas fuel cell, and energy efficient lighting in town and school buildings. This Administration pledges to keep making progress toward town green, clean energy and to show ways to reduce greenhouse emissions. I look forward to presenting specific proposals next month to the RTM Public Works committee regarding limits on light illumination at night through incentives and requirements. This could be a first in the nation effort and other community representatives are already contacting us to seek similar efforts. We can be a pioneer at reducing electricity costs and reducing greenhouse emissions.

With eleven special local historic properties listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and dozens of 1700-1800 era houses still in existence around town, Fairfield is strongly invested in our past. We must preserve our history for current and future generations to learn from and enjoy. With town's help and support, the newly relocated Fairfield Museum and History Center proudly opened its doors on the historic green last fall and over 5000 members of the public attended the weekend festivities eager to learn about their town's past. Fairfield just received the grant approved by this body to do an updated survey of all homes of historic significance and we look forward to working with the History Center on this endeavor. On another front, renovation of the easterly half of Penfield Pavilion will be complete by summer, with classic improvements to be enjoyed by thousands of Fairfield families. And tonight the RTM is approving the resolution to confirm our Board of Selectmen effort to bring ownership of Penfield Reef Lighthouse under the security of town's umbrella of historic landmarks so it can take its place alongside others like Bronson Windmill and the Sun Tavern.

While we take care of historic properties, we simultaneously seek to continue creating housing that moderate income citizens can afford. Our goal of keeping many senior citizens in Fairfield is helped by the new senior affordable apartments being built at Greenfield Commons along Villa Avenue. Senior citizens in need of

low rent housing will be living there by late this year. We must continue to support affordable housing opportunities for all residents living on modest incomes.

One more priority I would like to report on is the ongoing enhancement of key business area corridors. A Sherman Green beautification committee comprised of officials, residents and business representatives is going to help keep one of our most visual and recognized sites clean, beautiful and enjoyable. I am also helping spearhead a new TPZ effort to create a planning strategy to guide appropriate mixed use development along Commerce Drive. Our Town must be pro-active in making the best zoning decisions for underutilized parcels. This is why we have taken the lead to revitalize the former Bullard's foundry and are turning it into a 3rd town train station, with new open space and an office park. Due to this effort, the vital easterly gateways to town are already attracting quality businesses and creating new revenues for town's grand list growth. Fairfield is also witnessing removal of the last adult video store along Kings Highway much to neighbors' delight. I am supporting the effort to turn the former Miller dealership into quality stores and residential units with exterior characteristics matching the brick facades of our downtown area. With revitalizations at the third train station, the Whole Foods site and other locations, Fairfield will enjoy the biggest commercial grand list revenue boost in history generating millions for budgets starting in 2 years to keep future taxes low. The cleanup of these last unsightly brown fields improves the environment. And from these benefits, local mom and pop businesses are attracted and flourishing along these corridors amidst anchor stores. I am thrilled that more and more quality stores and restaurants thrive in Fairfield for all citizens to benefit from.

Fairfield is a truly special community. The tremendous vitality of Fairfield and the vigor of our government are made possible by the hard work, commitment and support from many outstanding town officials. I would like to take a personal moment to thank my energetic dedicated colleague, Selectman Denise Dougiello, my hard working town hall staff and volunteer helpers, and my committed and hard working family. Your support makes it all possible. The list of volunteers in town is endless but I would like to single out our superb state delegation, the elected and appointed local officials on boards and commissions, and our hard working town and school employees. You do it all. Some of you are assembled here tonight and you are among the finest of Fairfield.

With an exciting year before us, let's move forward together and keep this outstanding community and government an inspiration for town residents and for area communities. I wish you all a healthy, happy and successful year. Thank you for your crucial role in making Fairfield one of the best places to live in the world.