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The short legislative session was rife with activity. Though the session started out remote, it felt like a throwback to the days before COVID, while still navigating our new normal. And that means that our policy team had their eyes on a lot of bills.

They had their eye on every single committee under the dome, and working with our members from around the state, we worked to make sure that municipal priorities were met and that negative outcomes could be avoided wherever possible.

We are providing full write-ups of the budget recap, car tax, and firefighter cancer presumption bills, but here are additional legislative items that you should know about.

**HVAC School Construction Reimbursement**

$75 million in funding for school HVAC upgrades and allows HVAC projects to be eligible under the school construction grant program. Funding will be available in FY 23.

There is established a working group to study and make recommendations related to indoor air quality within school buildings, which will include optimal temperature and humidity levels, among other things.

**Excess Cost Grant for Special Education – HB 5506**

The budget modifies the Excess Cost Grant formula when the grant is not fully funded, by creating three tiers of reimbursement based on towns equalized net grand list - similar to tiered PILOT. Current law reimburses every municipality at 66%, now towns will be reimbursed at 70%, 73% or 76.25% depending on which tier the town or city is placed in.

In addition, the budget requires SDE to study modifying the Excess Cost Grant threshold of 4.5% to a tiered system of either 3.5% - 3% - 2.5% dependent on districts wealth. This was originally proposed in SB 232.

**Contingency Fees and Appraisals – HB 5506**

CCM began the session with a prohibition of contingency arrangements in tax appeal proceedings and a requirement that within 90 days an appraisal be filed. After negotiations and various iterations, the bill adopts an appraisal requirement for properties at an assessed value of $1 million or more within 120 days of filing an appeal.

**Police Department Accreditation – SB 135**

The bill modifies the police accountability act to allow police departments to become POST accredited rather than CALEA accredited. The bill establishes three tiers of POST accreditation and provide a timeframe when departments need to achieve each, with tier three being the highest obtainable certification. This would provide needed relief and flexibility for local governments to comply with the police accountability act by needing to become either CALEA or POST accredited by 2026.

**Solid Waste Management – HB 5506, HB 5118 and SB 277**

HB 5118, among other things, sought to make permanent the Sustainable Materials Management grant that was recommended by the Connecticut Coalition for Sustainable Materials Management last year and for which DEEP has since received over $10 million in project proposals. The bill also sought to fund the grant by redirecting Class II Renewable Portfolio Standards Requirements compliance payments into the fund. The bill died in the Environment Committee but was resurrected in the budget implementer (HB 5506), along with $5 million in surplus funds for the current SMM grant.

SB 277 - Establishes a working group to study and make recommendations related to solid waste management in the state, including, but not limited to, recommending a strategic plan for both short-term and long-term management and disposal of solid waste. The working group includes an appointment for one CCM representative.

**Shared Clean Energy - Public Act 22-14**

The bill, among other things, increases the yearly capacity amounts in megawatts for the Net Metering successor programs - the zero-emissions Non-Residential Energy Solutions (NRES) projects from 50 MW to 100 MW. It also increases the megawatt capacity for Shared Clean Energy Facilities (SCEF) projects from 25MW to 50MW. It also increases the eligible project size for these programs – N-RES 2MW to 5 MW and for SCEF from 4MW to 5MW.
**Opioid Settlement Funds – Public Act 22-48**

Creates an advisory committee responsible to address the opioid crisis and develops a mechanism to allocate a majority of the opioid settlement proceeds. Specifically, the proposal creates a 32-member advisory board, with 16 members representing municipalities, including a municipal co-chair. They are responsible for creating proposals to address opioid prevention, treatment and recovery strategies, in addition to having the authority to allocate (with some oversight) the funding to implement their plans.

**Cancer Presumption – Public Act 22-139**

Due to CCM’s lobbying efforts, we were successful in getting the legislature to reject the original bill proposal that would have created a rebuttable presumption for firefighters bringing a worker’s compensation claim for cancer, which would significantly change existing workers’ compensation laws thereby imposing crippling costs to municipalities.

CCM worked to amend the bill so that it maintained the integrity of the Cancer Relief Fund. The new negotiated bill requires the Connecticut Fire Services Organization to develop a plan for maintenance on turnout gear and requires municipalities to contribute to the Firefighters’ Cancer Relief Account in the amount of $10 per firefighter. The municipal contribution begins after July 1, 2024, and only applies to firefighters that are eligible for the Firefighters’ Cancer Relief Fund and have the “interior structural firefighter” rating.

**Pension Offsets – SB 212**

CCM successfully advocated for the General Assembly to reject SB 212, which would have prohibited pension offsets regarding permanent partial disability benefits under workers’ compensation laws and enable an individual to collect full workers’ compensation benefits and full pension benefits. This unfunded mandate would have circumvented/prohibited municipalities from collectively bargaining these pension offsets, which is current practice.

**Group Homes – Public Act 22-73**

The bill, among other things, expands the types of group homes owned by charitable organizations that are eligible for a property tax exemption, regardless of the length of stay. Current law only provides an exemption for those homes that provide housing on a temporary basis of no more than 6 months. The House Majority Leader and House Planning and Development Chair did work hard to provide PILOT funding in the budget ($3M) to offset the fiscal impact that is anticipated – OFA estimated it at $1.9M based on numbers from 2017, however they were not successful.

**Motor Vehicle Tax Cap – See page 7 for details.**

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**Budget Review**

**FY 23 looks a lot like FY 22 with few exceptions**

Reviewing the budget proposals, there are many areas with zeros – towns and cities shouldn’t expect to see any more money, but there won’t be any reductions either. Except for a few key areas, municipalities can expect Fiscal Year 2023 to look at lot like Fiscal Year 2022.

Municipal Aid, comprising of over $3.4 billion to towns and cities in FY 22 will likely see a small increase for FY 23.

Here’s how it breaks down:

For education aid, the law essentially mirrors Governor Lamont’s proposal, with the Appropriations Committee proposal providing some additional funding for adult and bilingual education.

In comparison to FY 22 education aid, the budget continues the phase-in for increases in Education Cost Sharing. An additional $39.6 million would be added to ECS over FY 22 funding.

The FY 23 budget provides significant increases in Magnet Schools and Open Choice Programs.

The overall change for Education Aid under the Appropriations Committee proposal is just 2.5, or $67 million, versus FY 22.

And finally, for non-education aid, that figure is a 14.4% increase over last year. That number is misleading, however, as $100 million of the non-education aid would come in the form of a reimbursement for revenue lost due to the cap on motor vehicle property taxes. The budget reduces that cap from the current 45 mills to 32.46 mills. The Governor had proposed a cap of 29 mills and a corresponding reimbursement of $160 million.

Aside from some minor adjustments and the car tax reimbursement, most non-education funding remains at FY 22 levels, though additional PILOT funding is provided.
In 2019, CCM was part of an effort to work with key stakeholders on an agreement for first responder PTSD benefits. All parties were brought to the table to work on an agreement, and when one was reached, it was a major bipartisan victory. This session, we worked hard to negotiate a for that same kind of compromise with the firefighter cancer presumption as it became clear that Senate Bill 313 would pass.

The way bill was worded before we interceded, it created the assumption that certain cancers are contracted through work, regardless of outside factors. A study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) did find that certain types of cancers are higher in firefighters, but stopped short of saying that the cancers were directly related to their service. This would have created a situation where a disproportionate number of claims would be covered through the workers’ compensation system, while at the same time creating a burden on municipalities by imposing a higher burden of proof onto them, limiting defense, and narrowing the cases where they’d be able to rebut the presumption.

We are committed to helping firefighters, but the bill was not financially feasible for municipalities. Rather, it would have prolonged an ongoing struggle to address the important issue at hand which is verified work-related diseases.

Studies by the Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) have shown that a single cancer claim may exceed $1 million over the life of a claim in similar proposals, while not including many aggravating factors like additional health care and pension obligations that would push that estimate higher. One could easily see why any additional claims through this system would add burdens to towns and cities, to be pushed onto property taxpayers.

CCM worked to amend the bill so that it maintained the integrity of the Cancer Relief Fund and rejected the original proposal to create a rebuttable presumption for firefighters bringing a worker’s compensation claim for cancer.

The new negotiated bill requires the Connecticut Fire Services Organization to develop a plan for maintenance on turnout gear and requires municipalities to contribute to the firefighters’ cancer relief account in the amount of $10 per firefighter.

SB 313 was not a bill that works for everyone. CCM for its part had addressed this in testimony, through op-eds, and directly to key stakeholders on this issue. Ultimately those concerns were heard, and we were able to negotiate this bill (Public Act 22-139) down to something less harmful to municipalities. We will continue to ask for a seat at the table not just to strike something down, but like with the PTSD bill, to make something that will actually work for everyone.
Among the biggest problems with the highly regressive property taxes in Connecticut is the motor vehicle tax. Until major investments are made to mass public transit, cars are necessities for work, childcare, and more. And even if you don’t own any residential property, it’s likely that you are paying the motor vehicle tax. CCM therefore supported a reduction in the motor vehicle tax cap provided that towns and cities are made whole.

By most estimates, this tax accounts for more than $1 billion in local revenue. The current cap is 45 mills, and municipalities are reimbursed for revenue lost due to the cap. That reimbursement totals about $32 million. Governor Lamont proposed a cap of 29 mills. This would require a reimbursement of $192 million. The Appropriations committee did release a counter proposal capping the tax at 32.46 mills, which would require a reimbursement of $100 million, which ultimately prevailed.

The revenue lost to this cap would be reimbursed through the Municipal Revenue Sharing Account. This is where concerns about this proposal creep in.

Provided that the cap was funded to make up the lost revenue, we agree that there will be enormous benefit to urban and distressed communities. But there will be an immediate and obvious impact to the financial well-being of towns and cities if that reimbursement is not provided like in so many other areas such as PILOT or ECS, which are not fully funded.

With towns and cities still required to provide essential and mandated services such as education, public safety, and infrastructure maintenance; then those funds will have to come from somewhere – likely through an increase in the property tax burden to residential and commercial taxpayers if the promise to reimburse is not kept.

The state cannot renege on its commitment to reimbursement and still proclaim it is doing something good for taxpayers. The flaws in this are obvious and contrarian to the kind of sustained growth Connecticut needs. Despite these concerns, we support these changes because of the nature of our regressive property tax: this car tax cap would provide necessary relief to local taxpayers at a critical time.

But as always, there continues to be important tax reforms that our state can look into. Diversifying local revenue, allowing municipalities greater ability to reduce costs, and regional collaboration. Until we see true property tax reforms like these, our state will continue its overreliance on the property tax.
Good education is the foundation of a good life. Connecticut has one of the best public education systems in the country, but disparities still plague our schools because of the regressive property tax. CCM joined with the Connecticut Council of Small Towns, the School Finance Project, and the faith-based advocacy organization FaithActs for Education to call on the Governor and state legislators to enhance education equity. We urged support for HB 5283, which would have accelerated the phasing in of additional Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding, while not negatively impacting those towns that will eventually see a reduction, as well as fully funding the state’s Special Education Excess Cost Grant (SB 232).

The ECS grant is the largest for public education, and it is the principal mechanism for state funding of local schools. Today it remains underfunded by tens of millions of dollars. Accelerating the grants would have injected crucial funds where they belong – educating our children.

One of the most underappreciated aspects of education funding is special education costs – currently, more than one out of every five dollars spent on Pre-K – 12 education goes towards delivering special education. For towns and cities, the spike in delivery of special education represents one of the largest cost increases annually. These swings can be in the thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars per student, and yet the Excess Cost Grant that supports special education has been level-funded and capped for years.

Most importantly, this disparity is directly rooted in the way we fund public education in Connecticut.

“The state’s funding shortfall disproportionately impacts Black, Brown and low-income students, yet equity is an issue that impacts all Connecticut students,” said Jamilah Prince-Stewart, Executive Director of Faith Acts for Education, which has 80-member churches and 5,000 committed voters across Connecticut.

“ECS and special education have been woefully underfunded for years, undermining the quality of public education for students,” said Betsy Gara, Executive Director, COST. “The state must take steps to fulfill its constitutional obligation to provide funding to ensure that all students have access to quality education.”

CCM, along with its partners, will continue to fight for full funding of ECS. It is in the best interest of our students, the future of our state, and therefore in the best interest of all of us.

“A first-rate education system – and education finance system – is vital for Connecticut’s prosperity and quality of life,” further noted DeLong. “When Connecticut municipalities do not receive adequate state education aid, they are forced to raise property taxes, cut other vital services, or lay off employees. Local property taxes cannot continue to shoulder the lions’ share of local public education costs. For Connecticut to compete economically with its neighbors and the world, the State needs to increase its financial commitment to local public schools for FY 2022-23.”
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Waste management for many years was a sure and obvious thing. Waste went to landfills, and there it stayed. With the introduction of recycling and waste-to-energy plants, things began to change. Even these methods have grown outdated, and Connecticut, once a leader in solid waste management and recycling, has fallen woefully behind. The State must bring innovative ideas and fiscally responsible, environmentally sustainable solutions to reduce the flow of waste and manage its disposal.

With the imminent closure of the Materials Innovation Recycling Authority (MIRA) plant, dozens of towns and cities are being forced to reckon with paying exorbitant tipping fees and unsustainable practices like shipping waste to out-of-state landfills.

During its useful life, MIRA facilitated the incineration of trash, which created energy for more than three decades. Today, 80% of the member towns (by tonnage) have now opted out of their services – with no great alternatives.

CCM is in the position to say that we do not believe we can continue to call on MIRA to develop all the forward-looking solutions called for here. We believe the state must take the lead on the remediation of this site after the closure of this plant so that this 100-acres doesn’t remain a desolate space with no economic activity.

And we need the same kind of forward-thinking that made Connecticut a leader in this market in the first place. A new waste-to-energy plant can be created, and now so many years after the MIRA plant was built, there must be more energy efficient technologies that are more in line with modern, sustainable practices. If the state alone cannot provide these alternatives, then this area is ripe for a public/private partnership.

Construction and supply chain delays have plagued all manner of projects, and with the projected closure of MIRA, this will leave a gap in service for municipalities to find alternatives. That is why it is imperative that the state act as soon as possible on an RFP.

Similarly, we need to make sure that this is a viable solution for municipalities. With tipping fees rising in all areas, we must look to innovative solutions that are competitive with the cost of shipping material out-of-state. We need to restrict shipping out-of-state and creating new landfills, which is environmentally unfriendly.

Towns and cities around the state are innovating in waste diversion efforts – composting, reuse programs, pay as you throw, and more. We need greater State support and leadership to help. As with so many environmental efforts, we need to work on solutions now, rather than trying to fix problems caused by inaction later. That is why we are calling on the state to help ensure a cleaner, greener municipal solid waste system.
With the regulatory requirements of the municipal small separate storm system (MS4) permits, it’s important to understand and address local flooding issues. CCM will be contracting with a consulting engineering firm to conduct a comprehensive study regarding the increasing frequency and severity of flooding, both coastal and inland.

This work will see members and CCM staff working with the consultant firm to develop and conduct a study that would look into four areas of concern: 1) The causes of the recent increase of flooding; 2) at risk areas; 3) infrastructure shortfalls; and 4) commonalities among similar municipalities, i.e., urban, suburban or rural that increase the occurrence and impact of flooding.

We will need the participation of our members. The selected consultant will work with CCM staff in gaining local feedback regarding these concerns, so it’s important that we hear from as many municipalities as possible.

The data will then be reviewed, and through in-person meetings, we will formulate and introduce recommendations to reduce the impact of flooding on municipalities. These recommendations will include issues like identifying statutory or regulatory obstacles that limit the implementation of flood mitigation measures and provide specific changes to reduce identified impediments; develop a plan of action to remedy local flooding; securing state or federal funding to implement flood mitigation efforts and; providing direct assistance to municipalities through contracted engineering services.

A Request For Qualification (RFQ) has been sent to possible vendors. Especially since Connecticut has seen record rains in 2021, this is an important topic that we will need as much information as possible. Through this process, we hope to arm ourselves with good, smart recommendations that we can bring forward.

If you have any questions, please contact Randy Collins, Advocacy Manager, at (860) 707-6446 or rcolli ns@ccm-ct.org

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The unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by the Russian government has had a global impact. Citizens across Connecticut see the unfolding tragedy and want to help the people of Ukraine. The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) and the National League of Cities (NLC) have partnered to provide a mechanism to make donations to assist with Ukrainian humanitarian efforts.

The impact is both personal and systemic. From the rise of cyber threats to global supply chain issues and inflation – towns and cities across the globe have felt the aftershock. Many towns and cities in Connecticut have large Ukrainian populations, while many more will be coming to America as refugees.

According to the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Center for International Disaster Information, there are over 500,000 refugees and more than 6.7 million people who have been displaced by the conflict.

There are many ways that municipalities and/or their residents can help. For one, many have taken it upon themselves to fundraise for the war effort. The town of Monroe has been collecting items that will help Ukrainians not just on the front lines, but those seeing collateral damage. They’ve collected basic first-aid kits, diapers, batteries, and other items that will see supplies constricted throughout the conflict.

In Cornwall, CCM was told of a fundraiser sponsored by a new restaurant, Frank’s, which has thus far raised over $10,000 to support the World Central’s Kitchen efforts in Ukraine. At one event in New Haven at St. Michael’s Ukrainian Catholic Church, they had to stop accepting donations because they ran out of space.

CCM is compiling your local efforts, so please send us information about fundraisers in your community, charities to whom your municipality is sending funds, and other actions you are taking to aid the people of Ukraine. Email your information to AidToUkraine@ccm-ct.org.

If your municipality is interested in helping out, here are a few suggestions on where to start.

1. **Advocate for an End to the Crisis, and for Support of Ukrainian Cities**

   CCM and NLC believe strongly in the power of local elected officials to influence and lead their communities and the Country. As you would on any issue, you may choose to make your voices heard regarding the importance of standing up for local democracies across the world. This may mean passing a local resolution, hosting an event, or speaking to your Congressional or state leadership about the issue.

2. **Reach Out to Your Local Ukrainian Community**

   Some Connecticut towns and cities have a sizeable and active Ukrainian community. As local leaders, outreach to this group of people during such a difficult time could be a good step toward building a stronger civic network. There may also be direct opportunities to support Ukrainian organizations in your community who are assisting with direct humanitarian support.

3. **Encourage Contributions to the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund at the United Nations**

   The United Nations and global and local humanitarian partners are committed to delivering direct assistance to the people of Ukraine, and you can support that work directly. While cash donations are strongly preferred, the United Nations can coordinate the donations of in-kind goods and services.

   For more information, towns and cities should contact Karen Smith, with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) private sector engagement advisor.

   CCM has developed a landing page with all of this information. Click here to access that page, or type it into your url at https://www.ccm-ct.org/Resources/How-You-and-Your-Community-Can-Support-Ukraine

   Please feel free to post the page on your town website and mention this effort at town meetings/gatherings, include it in your newsletters, and share across social media.
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As an organization, CCM is doing the important work of making sure that everyone has a seat at the table. Government doesn’t work properly when there are folks or groups that are ignored or underrepresented. We believe that for municipalities, and we believe that for our communities of color who have often been left out of the rooms where legislation happens.

Representation Matters: Are You Ready To Run For State Office? our two-day training with The Campaign School at Yale University sought to change that. We brought together experts and folks from government to unlock those doors and we are proud to say it was a great success.

Thank you to CIRMA, the Parent Leadership Training Institute, and the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity for making this event a great success.

And of course, thank you to all who participated, we hope that many of you take that leap to public service. It won’t be easy, but it is work that matters.

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Kids are open to a whole host of influences, they are an open book ready to be written. From their parents to their schools to the social media trends, who gets to influence what gets written is important – we want to instill values like perseverance and strength through adversity. Will Kirkaldy had no other choice but to persevere, and from his lived experience he told his story to students throughout the state.

As part of the continuing partnership between CCM and Dalio Education, schools around the state participated in the speaking tour “Sheer Will,” where Kirkaldy encouraged students to find the right path. More than 2,500 students heard Kirkaldy’s message that was presented in 15 venues across the state - from public high schools and middle schools to after-school programs and social service providers -- from May 16-20.

A former NBA prospect, he first picked up a basketball to get away from bullies in his neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. Wearing jeans and not even having a pair of suitable sneakers, he made the team in 4th grade, setting up a path of success.

But adversity didn’t stop there. Despite a promising high school career, he would stand accused of rape that occurred during a recruiting trip to Syracuse. Though offered a plea bargain that would force him to admit guilt, he proclaimed his innocence and, eventually, all charges were dropped.

Unfortunately, his largest battle would still be to come. He struggled to find a spot on a college basketball squad before being accepted by West Virginia University. His freshman year he was travelling back to campus when he fell asleep as a passenger in the car. The next time he woke up, he was told by doctors that they would have to amputate his leg.

After telling the doctors they needed to do everything they could to save the leg, he went through months of excruciating rehabilitation before an infection necessitated amputation. Determined more than ever, he got up and running on a prosthetic leg as soon as he could.

Today you can see him teaching the sport that saved him from going down the wrong path, keeping up with people half his age.

And he’s passing that info to students around the state. With engagements in Bridgeport, Hamden, Hartford, New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Stamford and Waterbury, Kirkaldy spoke to the struggles that so many children have at this critical crossroads in their life.

Sometimes the path you choose is your own, sometimes you are guided, and this is why knowing who your influences are is so important. What values they instill and how they can help in troubling times. Will Kirkaldy has experienced it all, and through him, Connecticut students will know how to decide if they are on the right path.
It has been two years since we last met for the annual Connecticut Emergency Management Symposium (EMS), and there has been lots to learn in that time. More than 400 local government and emergency management officials gathered together at Aria in Prospect on April 27 to hear from and share with each other.

This day-long event is brought to public officials for free by CCM, the Connecticut Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS), the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), and the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH).

The day began with opening remarks from Brenda Bergeron, the Deputy Commissioner of DESPP and Ron Thomas, Deputy Director of CCM, followed by remarks from Dr. Manish Juthani, Commissioner of DPH on the ongoing COVID response in Connecticut, and William Turner of DEMHS on Emergency Management.

Over the course of the day, participants were able to take in educational sessions on collaborations, school security, responding to disaster, hazard mitigation and more.

In addition to CCM, DPH, and DEMHS, the event was sponsored by Everbridge; FirstNet, Built by AT&T; Call Before You Dig; Ashbritt, Inc.; Juvare; and T-Mobile. There were 40 vendors for attendees to browse, with the newest technology and services for emergency management.

Like with our 2021 Convention, this event was held at a new location, which we feel allowed us to get back into this important gathering of the experts on the right foot.
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Nieves Elected President Of HELO
Bridgeport Council President leads Hispanic constituency group

A local Bridgeport leader is once again sitting in the president seat of the Hispanic Elected Local Officials (HELO), a constituency group within the National League of Cities (NLC), as Council President Aidee Nieves was elected to lead for 2022.

HELO was established in 1976 to prove a space for Latino/a/x elected officials to share ideas, develop strategies for improving municipal governance, and help shape public policy for municipalities.

Today, HELO has a membership of over 100 elected officials, consisting of councilmembers, Council Presidents, and Mayors come from towns and cities ranging from populations of 10,000 to over 400,000, including our very own Bridgeport.

“We’d like to congratulate Aidee Nieves on her election to president of this group. At CCM, we know that representation matters, and the work that HELO does is important. We are glad that a dedicated local Connecticut official will be able to have a national impact in this role.”

-Joe Delong, CCM Executive Director

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How can municipal employers keep top employees from being poached? And how can they attract talent?

A good place to start would be presenting benefits in dollar-value terms. Municipalities understand the value of their total compensation packages. But the dollar value of benefits is not always visible to employees.

Just how much is a compensation package worth? We examine total compensation for a specific employee group across 30 cities and towns in Connecticut. We find that total future pay and benefits is worth as much as $3 million in present value for a new hire and up to $2.4 million in present value for a seasoned employee with 10 years of service.

As Figure 1 shows, total compensation ranges across municipalities. For the average municipality, the total compensation package for a new hire is $2.6 million. Already a large number, this is expressed in present value. The $2.6 million package represents $5.3 million worth of future paychecks and expense payments for benefits that will be made over the employee’s lifetime.

All future pay for both new hires and seasoned employees is calculated based on contractually guaranteed step-ups for longevity and education and a 2.5% annual increase in base pay. For contracts that require less than 2,080 hours of work, time-off is valued as pay that could be earned at a 1.5x overtime rate. For benefits, we estimate the employer’s going-forward contributions to health care and all past and future payments to Social Security and defined contribution pension plans, since these fund future benefits. For OPEB and defined benefit plans, we measure the present value of required employer contributions needed for benefit payments using a 5.5% discount rate. Medical cost inflation is included for OPEB and where contractually provided, COLAs for pensions.

The benefit mix is similar between new hires and seasoned employees. For new hires, health care is the most expensive benefit, followed by OPEB and then time-off. Defined contribution plans are smaller than defined benefit plans, and Social Security is worth as much as $100,000 (Figure 2).

The public sector offers another source of value—job security. Over one’s career, the chance of being unemployed for a year or more is 22%! a statistic that is significantly reduced for a public sector worker. The private sector worker not only has both a greater chance of lost pay but one’s wage profile once re-employed is diminished.

Municipalities offer good work-life balance, generous benefits, and job security. Like many employers, they face challenges attracting and retaining talent. A tangible compensation summary, sketched out in Figure 3, would help cities and towns address these challenges.

Passwords
A Gaping Security Hole You Can Easily Plug
By Joe Howland, VC3

Before you start reading this story, take our short password self-assessment.

1. Do you have your password written down somewhere on your desk to help you remember it?
2. Do you use a simple, easy-to-remember password (such as your kid’s name, your pet’s name, or your birthdate)?
3. Do you use the same password for many websites and applications you access?
4. Do you share your password with co-workers just to make things easier?
5. At work, do you save your passwords on your web browser so that you can log in without typing your password?

If you said “yes” to any of these questions (or feel as a supervisor that your employees would answer “yes”), then you’ve got a security risk on your hands.

So, what do you and your employees need to do? Implementing the following best practices will help plug these security gaps.

1. Do not write passwords down and leave them visible.

One tool that can help eliminate this problem is a password manager, which enforces the use of complex passwords, stores them securely, and automatically enters them when you log into applications. A reputable password manager can help employees avoid the temptation of writing down their passwords on sticky notes.

2. Use a password on all devices.

Many employees often use passwords on their desktop computers but it’s easy to forget to set up a password on laptops, tablets, and smartphones. Mobile devices are perhaps even easier from which to steal information. A thief or disgruntled employee can steal a smartphone in seconds and quickly gain unauthorized access to municipal email and applications. Protect all devices with passwords.

3. Do not use simple or obvious passwords.

Instead, use strong passwords such as long phrases (like “The brown fox is 2fast!”) or complex passwords consisting of a mix of letters, numbers, and special characters.

Strong passwords go a long way toward preventing hackers from getting into municipal applications. And if your password is one of the top 25 worst passwords below (according to NordPass), change it NOW!

4. Do not save passwords to websites and applications.

You may do this so that you can easily stay logged into your favorite websites and applications. However, if someone gets access to your device, then they can gain access to unauthorized information without even needing to crack a password. As stated above, we recommend using a password manager that stores and encrypts passwords much more securely than a web browser.

5. Change passwords regularly.

The longer a password is in use, the more likely that hackers will be able to crack it. The more you change passwords, the more difficult you make a hacker’s job. Many cyber criminals focus on user credentials as the key to their cyberattacks. Once inside your systems, they can then attack you in more complex ways. By changing passwords regularly, there’s more of a chance that a stolen password’s value has a limited lifespan.

6. Do not use the same password for all systems you access.

Let’s say an employee uses the same password for five different software applications that give access to confidential information at your municipality. If a hacker or disgruntled employee gets one password, then they have access to all five applications. Mitigate the chance of a data breach by requiring different passwords for each application.

7. Use multi-factor authentication whenever possible.

Many applications now offer the option of setting up multi-factor authentication (MFA), the process of adding another layer of protection to your security in addition to a username and password. For example, MFA may require you to first enter your username and password as normal. Then, you will get a code to your phone and input that code into a field that appears after you log in. In other words, you’ve added another “factor” of authentication that makes it more difficult for hackers.

About Joe Howland

Joe has been in the IT industry for over 20 years and has extensive IT management experience that spans multiple industries. A UCLA grad with a degree in Mathematics Computation with a Computer Specialization, he worked with Computer Sciences Corporation for 10 years supporting defense and financial sector contracts. Joe joined VC3 in 2009 and during his time with VC3, Joe has performed in the role of Virtual CIO for some of VC3’s largest government customers. Joe is currently VC3’s Chief Information Security Officer and is responsible for VC3’s IT security as well as advising on security for VC3’s customers.

About VC3

VC3 is a leading managed services provider focused on municipal government. Founded in 1994 with offices across the east coast, VC3 forms partnerships with municipalities to achieve their technology goals and harness their data. In addition to providing comprehensive managed IT solutions, VC3 offers cybersecurity, website design, custom application development, and business intelligence services. Visit www.vc3.com to learn more.
“If community wins the day, the day is ours.”
- David Demchak, ARM, CIRMA President and CEO

Thanks to all who joined us for this year’s CIRMA Annual Meeting of Members. Check out the next issue of Connecticut Town & City for our event spotlight.
The Town Council of Clinton chose to adopt an Ordinance that would prohibit a dispensary in Town after a Public Hearing was held by the Planning and Zoning Commission. It was apparent from the testimony at the Public Hearing, not only from the public but also from members of the Planning and Zoning Commission, that a regulation change to allow a dispensary did not have sufficient support to move forward. There was talk of a moratorium, but that would not prohibit an application from being submitted to request the opening of a location in Town during this time. The input from Partners in Community also played a major role in the decision-making process as they were able to provide information as it related to drugs, alcohol and vaping trends and usage among the youth in our community. It began apparent after hearing the testimony and comments at the Public Hearing that the Town needed to make a strong statement regarding this issue. I suggested the idea of an ordinance to the Town Council members, based on the comments and information we received, and it was unanimously approved by the Council. The decision we made in Clinton was based on input from our community and was made in the best interests of the people in our Town. Not all may agree with the decision we made in Clinton but I think we did a great job in educating the public regarding this issue and made a decision that I hope everyone can understand and know that we will always put our community first when making these tough decisions.

Christopher Aniskovich
Chairman, Town Council
Town of Clinton
When Connecticut adopted Public Act 21-1, the Brooklyn Planning and Zoning Commission already allowed medical marijuana dispensaries under existing zoning regulations pertaining to licensed health services. Sale of recreational cannabis was thought to be generally consistent with a medical dispensary as well as substantially similar to a package store. Planning and Zoning Commissioners commented that the proposal would generate tax revenue and not be detrimental to the town, especially since only one retail store could locate in Brooklyn. While some residents had concerns, it was felt that these concerns were generally alleviated when they learned how regulated cannabis would be. Effective March 11, 2022, retail and hybrid sale of cannabis was permitted as a Special Permit use in Brooklyn’s Planned Commercial Zone and micro-cultivation was permitted as a Special Permit use in the Industrial Zone. There was recognition that being an early adopter might put Brooklyn at an advantage in the eastern part of the state. If people come to Brooklyn to visit the cannabis store, they may be inclined to spend money in other places, having a beneficial impact on the local economy. Brooklyn is located at the intersection of Route 6, an east-west artery, and Scenic Route 169, a national scenic byway and state-designated scenic road. The potential addition of a cannabis retail store could be an economic development driver for the community.

Jana Butts Roberson, AICP
Director of Community Development/Town Planner
Town of Brooklyn
Wellness at Work; How Does Your Entity Measure Up?

The adoption of workplace social and emotional health programs has skyrocketed over the past two years. This phenomenon has attributed to heightened visibility during the pandemic when remote and high-risk work environments caused or exacerbated employees’ psychological and behavioral health issues. The month of April is dedicated to Stress Awareness Month, which presented the perfect opportunity for CIRMA to focus on raising awareness about the importance of social and emotional health and well-being.

As lines continue to blur between work and home life, personal stressors such as financial strain, childcare concerns, and other obstacles can also weigh heavily on the minds of your staff and colleagues. Furthermore, the effects of stress and trauma can be significantly compounded if an individual does not have stable, positive relationships at work.

Providing social and emotional health programs and resources or enhancing your entity’s existing offerings can make a world of difference. Employees who actively foster social and emotional health within their organizations can help nurture an inclusive and positive culture that will yield significant benefits over time. Below are a few examples to consider.

Recommendations for Improving Social and Emotional Health at Work

1) Be a model for the social and emotional culture you want to see in your organization. Some of your coworkers will prefer to remain private and keep to themselves while managing difficult situations. However, if welcomed, take an active interest in your colleagues’ lives and overall well-being. Engage in routine wellness checks and provide appropriate levels of support when needed to help build trust and provide an emotional safety net for future times of crisis.

2) Make it easy for employees to know whom to talk to or where to go to access social and emotional health resources. Time and time again, studies reveal that what employees want the most in the workplace is training and more easily accessible information about where to go or whom to ask about mental health support. Ensure that all employees understand how they can access emotional support tools and resources within your organization; resources can include an appointed delegate who is equipped to guide personnel to these resources.

3) Establish an employee assistance program. Organizations will typically utilize an employee assistance program to support workplace social and emotional health. Extending these benefits to immediate family members can increase utilization and enhance effectiveness for employees. Form a working group to help identify needs for more tailored solutions that will best serve your entity’s needs; members of this working group can also assist in implementing these resources, serving as program stewards.

4) Establish a peer-to-peer program. Peer-to-peer programs have proven effective in providing employees with a productive outlet to discuss social and emotional issues they might be dealing with. Peers can often empathize with their colleagues’ feelings because their experiences are often similar.

Many of us spend a significant percentage of our lives at work—and if someone is struggling with social and emotional concerns, it can be challenging to put them aside and try to ignore them while on the job. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this article, you can help your colleagues and staff be the best versions of themselves—in the office, at home, and beyond.
CIRMA Welcomes New Staff

We’re excited to welcome this impressive group of professionals to CIRMA. It’s our staff who help create our innovative solutions and deliver on the promises we make our members, every day. The CIRMA team makes a difference,” said David Demchak, President and Chief Executive Officer of CIRMA.

Matthew Yaqoob joins CIRMA’s team in the position of Workers’ Compensation Claims Representative. In this role, he will be providing prompt and courteous service to the CIRMA-member employers and their injured employees by conducting a timely and thorough investigation of each claim assigned.

Matt, a resident of Cheshire, has a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from Southern Connecticut State University. He is currently attending the University of Connecticut working towards his MBA. Matt joins CIRMA with over four years of experience in Workers’ Compensation. Prior to joining CIRMA, Matt held the position of Workers’ Compensation Claims Examiner for Sedgwick Insurance Company.

Angela Caroso is the latest addition to CIRMA’s Claims team as their newest Senior Workers’ Compensation. In this role, Angela will provide prompt and courteous service to the CIRMA-member employers as well as their injured employees.

Angela, a resident of Cromwell, earned a Master of Business Administration from the University of Hartford. She joins CIRMA with over 29 years of experience in workers’ compensation claims administration. Prior to joining CIRMA, Angela held the position of Workers’ Compensation Claims Manager for Otis Worldwide Corporation, located in Farmington, Connecticut.

Amy Garbedian recently joined CIRMA’s Claims team as a Workers’ Compensation Representative. In this role, Amy will be assisting CIRMA-member employers and their injured employees by conducting a timely and thorough investigation designed to establish and document the material facts with respect to each claim assigned.

Amy, a resident of Cromwell, joins CIRMA with over ten years of customer services experience. Prior to joining CIRMA, Amy was Claims Adjuster for Memic located in Glastonbury, Connecticut.

Christian Tolman will be working with CIRMA’s Underwriting team in the position of Technical Underwriter Trainee. In this role, Christian will be responsible for providing technical assistance and exceptional customer service to the Underwriting department and CIRMA members.

Christian, a resident of Simsbury, recently graduated from the University of Connecticut earning a bachelor’s degree in Business. Christian joins CIRMA with over four years of customer service experience.

Christian Tolman

Angela Caroso

Matthew Yaqoob

Amy Garbedian

Kyle Tamulevich

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Before the internet, before television, before movies, there was the theater. Plays and orchestras from around the world could be seen in theaters and opera houses in your own hometown. Then modernity happened and they fell out of favor. But the buildings that housed them still stand, and the Ansonia Opera House might just have a future.

Built just after the conclusion of the Civil War, the Ansonia Opera House was for decades the jewel of the area. Those with an interest in music could go see a show right at 100 Main Street.

Though Enrico Caruso and Maria Callas could still sell records, Opera began to fall out of fashion. But the building had other uses. According to some sources, graduations and boxing matches all took place under the same roof.

That wasn’t enough to keep the Opera House open and functional, and ever since a Fire Marshall closed it down in 1971, it has remained dormant.

Thanks to the power of social media though, interest has been revived in this old building along with its counterpart in Derby, the Sterling Opera House. Many people were seeing pictures inside for the first time because a few enterprising individuals with a spooky side to them decided to go looking for ghosts in these halls.

While some looked for specters, others saw the beauty even amongst the decay. Cracked plaster and peeling paint aside, the bones were there and could be restored once again.

Or “recharged” might be better. Already discussed in the pages of CT&C, Ansonia Recharged is a full-fledged economic development program with a theme song to go with it. With so much growth in the town, Mayor David Cassetti – a music lover himself – felt the time was right to get a place to see a show in town.

After months of work between the corporation counsel, the Mayor, the Board of Alderman, and the current owners, the town of Ansonia is officially leasing the building for $1 a month for the next 30 years.

They know that the building is going to need perhaps millions in repairs, but they hope to get grants to bring this once majestic building back to life.

At some point, the future of the building was certain – although some retail was available on the first floor, the building was soon to have more in common with the ghosts that are said to walk its halls than the revitalized center outside.

Now it has a fighting chance like an underdog boxer that once fought here. Maybe there will be shows, or maybe there will be graduations here once again. What is for certain is that now it doesn’t feel so much like the Opera has ended, the curtains drawn. Now it’s just getting ready for its second act.
It’s A Great Day For Our Town
Chaplin play recreates the first town hall meeting on 200th anniversary

In municipal government, everybody has a role to play. With so many moving parts, everybody must be on cue to keep the show going. That is how Chaplin has run for 200 years now, and they’re celebrating with a reenactment of the First Town Meeting.

Just before it was incorporated, the town was formed around a church that was constructed because Benjamin Chaplin disliked the long travel to his church. From the official town history, he bequeathed $1500 to form an ecclesiastical society that would build a new church on one condition - that church must be built within a mile and a quarter of his home.

Within 10 years of this church being built, 25 homes, a tavern, and a general store were put up. And finally, in 1822, members of this growing community met with the towns of Mansfield, Hampton and Windham to negotiate the creation of a new town named in honor of the man who built that first church. On July 4, 1822, they had their first town meeting.

Fast forward 200 years and the town of Chaplin will be recreating that meeting in the same church that it originally took place in.

After putting out a casting call in February, Rusty Lanzit told me that this was not so much a reenactment, but a reenactment of a reenactment. At the 250th anniversary celebration in 1972, they put on this play of the original meeting. It features performers taking on the roles of Jeremiah Holt, Mr. Church, Pricilla Black, George England (to be performed by First Selectman Juan Roman), Father and Son from Hampton, Captain Erastus Hough, Orin Witter, Reverend Andus, and Lois Robbins.

But the most interesting aspect of the play is the role of the moderator who will be played a person who attended that first performance in 1972 as a child.

Each town and city in Connecticut has an interesting foundational story in it. Because Benjamin Chaplin didn’t like having to travel so far, there is now a town named in his honor. This play reenactment might be a fun part of the bicentennial celebrations, but it’s also a way to honor where came from and the importance of local government along the way.

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CIVIC AMENITIES
Bristol Works
ARPA money will go towards workforce development

In order for economic development to take hold in our towns and cities, businesses must want to put roots down in our state. And one of the best ways to do that is through workforce development, a fact that the Bristol ARPA task force is hoping to build upon.

It’s been said for years that workforce development has changed dramatically since the advent of computer technology. In fact, a good definition of workforce development is to meet the needs of not just current businesses, but future businesses as well.

With support from the Central Connecticut Chamber of Commerce, Bristol is looking into areas that they can enhance these efforts throughout the city.

From an article in the Bristol Press, the Chamber’s CEO, Cindy Bombard, said that they would like to see programs to help jumpstart the workforce on basic manufacturing, information technology, healthcare, and early childhood development. These programs “are intended to provide skills and certifications so that would-be workers can jump into employment quickly.”

The other side of this equation would be getting people into education programs from local schools. They are looking to partner not only with Tunxis Community College but with the local public schools as well.

Like the famed “Silver Tsunami” that is affecting state government, a wave of retirements is going to hit many manufacturers and businesses who have long relied on a steady workforce comprised of individuals who were raised when these skills were more commonplace. Many times these jobs are now considered specialized.

In the same Press article, Bristol Mayor Jeff Caggiano describes this issue, and is quoted as saying:

“There’s a huge need for manufacturing, healthcare and IT. We know there are jobs out there that can’t be filled. We need a way to create jobs that will help.”

At the time of writing this article, the town had not officially voted on this use of the ARPA funds, but it seems as if there is widespread support for a workforce development program.

If we want our economic development to be sustainable, then we are going to need a trained workforce. Programs that bring in all the stakeholders like the one proposed in Bristol will make that difference in the future.
Despite the pandemic, towns and cities have been working tirelessly to make sure their economies grow. Since 2019, the Connecticut Economic Development Association (CEDAS) has been awarding towns and cities who have excelled in this area and have announced their 2022 certified communities.

They created this Best Practices Certification Program to help participating municipalities improve the overall quality of economic development services by creating process standards; to drive communities to pursue excellence in land use and economic development; to accelerate sharing of best practices among community decision-makers; and to encourage more transparent, efficient, community-engaged economic development throughout Connecticut.

In a press release on the certified communities, CEDAS Board President Kristen Gorski said, “I commend this year’s accreditation recipients. To become a certified community is an immense achievement, which is a tribute to each municipality’s dedication to reviewing existing strategies, determining areas where the community excels, recognizing areas of improvement, and actively focusing on advancing economic vitality.”

West Haven had put out a press release of its own citing work that had been done on Beach Street, the renovation of Allingtown Green, and the forthcoming opening of New England Brewing Co. as examples of projects that they believe led to their Silver Level accreditation.

Towns that want to participate in this program must look at their economic development and land use practices and policies through four key components: communications and marketing; coordination and collaboration; organizational capacity and strategy; and policies and programs.

Towns are awarded on a medaled basis similar to the Sustainable CT system, where the highest achieving towns are awarded a gold level, while towns that have gone above and beyond are awarded a bronze. Each correspond to how many points they’ve received in each of those four areas, plus an additional bonus points for community choice and presentation of application.

This year’s certified communities recipients are:

**Gold Level:**
- Town of Cheshire
- City of Norwalk
- Town of Orange

**Silver Level:**
- Town of Ellington
- Town of Guilford
- Town of Hamden
- Town of North Branford
- City of Torrington
- City of West Haven
- Town of Willington
- Town of Woodbridge

**Bronze Level:**
- Town of Berlin

CEDAS is a not-for-profit membership organization committed to advancing the practice and process of economic development in Connecticut. The organization provides a forum for the economic development community, hosts educational programs, fosters sustainable economic growth, and advocates to improve the Connecticut economy. CCM provides administrative services to CEDAS. More information is available at www.cedas.org
For many competitive high school teams, the ultimate goal is to win State. Truly elite teams get to compete in national championships, and then there’s the Shelton High robotics team that was able to compete in the 2022 FIRST Robotics Competition World Championship.

After two years away due to the pandemic, the Shelton team (which CT&C has covered previously for their world class efforts) has gotten back into the swing of things with their robot that has been nicknamed “Hawkeye.” The reference to the Marvel character that carries a bow and arrow who never misses a shot.

That’s because this year’s FIRST competition involved shooting balls into a goal that was suspended 8ft in the air, before it climbed on a monkey bars like course. Doing this is as a human is probably difficult enough, but to devise, create, and build a machine that can accomplish that in just a few weeks.

And then for that machine to be one of the best in the country.

Building robots is not cheap and the Shelton team, also known as the Gaelhawks, rely on sponsors and mentors to make the whole thing work. With nearly 20 sponsors, including major companies like Sikorsky, Raytheon Technologies, OEM controls and Hubbell.

One of the most important sponsors of the team is the City of Shelton itself. According to info in the Shelton Herald, the city made it’s largest donation to date to the Gaelhawks in the amount of $10,000.

Mayor Mark Lauretti, who traveled with the team to cheer them on in Houston where the world championship took place, said in the same article that he thinks it’s important for the city to do its part.

Many businesses look to the local schools, public and private, to see if they are creating a highly educated and capable workforce for the future. So it is crucial that towns and cities around the state support STEM programs like robotics teams.

While unfortunately they didn’t take the top spot, they were ranked as the 30th best team out of 3225 teams in the world, putting them in the top one percent of all teams.

Nearly 25 years after the town first robotics competition, the Gaelhawks are consistently champions. Members of the High School team actively recruit and mentor younger students in challenges. They aren’t just building robots, but an innovative future for all of us.
Many people see value in entering the healthcare field due to the large number of job openings or the rewarding nature of the work.

For those considering the field, there are a variety of options available not requiring a two or four-year degree. Gateway Community College’s downtown New Haven campus offers numerous certificate programs through the office of Workforce Development & Continuing Education. Current certificate offerings at Gateway include Certified Nurse Aide (C.N.A.) and Advanced Certified Nurse Aide, Central Sterile Supply, Community Health Worker, Medical Office Assistant, Patient Care Technician, and Pharmacy Technician.

Since fall 2020, 50 students have completed Gateway’s C.N.A. program. The program attracts a diverse mix of students; some are completing their C.N.A. training on their way to becoming a registered nurse, others are pivoting into healthcare later in their careers.

Students can complete the C.N.A. coursework in just six weeks, which includes 30 hours of clinical experience at a local nursing home facility. Most recently, students had the opportunity to train at Connecticut Hospice in Branford and Whitney Center in Hamden. The blended format includes an online component, making the C.N.A. certificate program accessible even to students who have experienced barriers preventing them from considering the training in the past. The shift to a blended format became necessary at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. For students, the change is welcome, allowing them to complete the first portion entirely online. Students move into a classroom equipped with mannequins to practice on and get hands-on experience, then to their clinical site. Students complete the program ready to fill job openings at a time when medical facilities have a tremendous need.

Gateway’s Community Health Worker Certificate can be completed in 21-weeks, which includes a six-week internship. Students learn non-clinical health assessment, advising, service coordination planning, and client-centered counseling. Positions in the field are particularly well-suited to bi-lingual speakers.

Whether a recent high school graduate or someone who wants to make a mid-career shift to healthcare, Gateway works with students who might not otherwise be able to afford training. SNAP Education & Training (SNAP E&T) program is open to students receiving SNAP benefits and offers free training to those deemed eligible. An added benefit of the program is the case management and support services provided.

Many students facing unemployment and underemployment can also qualify for training dollars available through the American Job Center (AJC). The office of Workforce Development & Continuing Education regularly refers students expressing interest in healthcare programs and unaware of the training opportunities open to them.

Outside the SNAP E&T program and the partnership with AJC, Gateway looks for alternative paths to help students. To that end, Erika Lynch, director of Workforce Development & Continuing Education, is managing the CT Statewide Healthcare Industry Pathway (CT SHIP), a grant that benefits several of the healthcare programs. The grant project period runs through January 31, 2025 and is expected to train students in over nine healthcare programs.

For information about healthcare certificates offered through the Department of Workforce Development & Continuing Education, please call (203) 285-2300 or email gw-thegreatcenter@gatewayct.edu.
Consistency Is Key
Branford gets $25k grant for future projects to build on success

C onsistency is key. One of the easiest ways to make sure your plans are successful is to be consistent and keep working at them. Recently, Branford won a $25k grant because their Clean Energy Committee has set clear goals for their town and worked towards them.

First created in 2019, the Branford Clean Energy Committee has helped foster a community of individuals and businesses with clean energy knowledge, that will help the state reach its greenhouse gas emission targets in the coming decades.

The grant, which was handed out by Energize CT and sponsored by Eversource and Southern Connecticut Gas, will go to helping small businesses with energy needs as well as municipal buildings.

Energize CT said that their “goal in working together is to better familiarize residents and businesses on energy efficiency programs and offers in support of efforts by the Sponsors for a broader reach of energy efficiency engagement and program participation across the state through the Partnership.”

Per their application form, community groups, non-profit organizations, and municipalities were able to apply to this grant initiative, and municipalities were encouraged to partner with a community-based organization. For Branford, that was the town’s Clean Energy Commission.

That commission is a big reason why they were able to successfully make that pitch. Readers of CT&C would recognize that they are often profiled in the Innovative Ideas of this magazine specifically for their work towards energy savings, alternative sources, and other programs that help their citizens and businesses save money.

One such program was the HeatSmart residential program. Branford First Selectman James Cosgrove spoke about this specific program in a Patch article, stating that it promoted clean energy while saving homeowners money by investing in clean, efficient heat pump energy systems.

Some of this grant money will go towards existing building solutions, new building solutions, equipment rebates and more. Businesses that are interested can find the information on the website Branfordcleanenergy.org.

The clear takeaway here is that to reach any of these goals, you have to be consistent. Over the last three years, the Branford Clean Energy Committee has shown that good work will lead to more good work in their town. At least $25,000 worth of it.

Branford aims to use 100% renewable energy by 2040

The path to 100% renewable energy comprises two complementary actions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall energy consumption</td>
<td>be decreased dramatically by a combination of conservation, energy efficiency and electrification of heating, cooling and transportation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity consumed in town</td>
<td>must come from clean, renewable sources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These complementary actions are visible in the declining overall consumption and increasing renewables in the chart below.

The key elements of this energy plan are:

1. Reduce our energy usage by improving the efficiency and performance of our buildings, both public and private.
2. Transition to high efficiency heating and cooling technology.
3. Promote the responsible development of renewable energy in town, including residential solar, community shared solar, commercial solar, carport and other types of renewable energy. For example, the CT Green Bank offers municipalities and public institutions a solar power purchase agreement (PPA) with no money down.
4. Pursue regional energy solutions partnerships through SustainableCT and advocate for a cleaner grid.
5. Promote public transportation and the transition to electric vehicles through various measures, including planning for sufficient charging infrastructure.
6. In collaboration with Eversource, modernize the local electric grid to enable higher levels of distributed renewable energy and storage.

The chart below is another way of visualizing Branford’s path to 100% renewable energy. The blue bars on the left side of this graph represent the town’s current energy usage, expressed in a common unit: gigawatt-hours. The red bars represent the potential reduction in energy usage through efficiency and electrification, resulting in a vastly reduced energy load. The green bars represent the sources of local and regional renewable energy to meet this need.

Energy Reduction Targets
As seen in these two graphs, Branford aims to reduce energy consumption by over half in roughly twenty years. Because these reductions will be accomplished in part through “fuel switching” (e.g., from gasoline to electric vehicles), we do not set reduction targets for each fuel type. In fact, we expect electricity usage to more than double over this period.

Branford’s 2040 energy target can be achieved through modest annual reductions of 2.3% per year after 2018. Based on our initial analysis, we are selecting a 3% annual reduction target for all town sectors: residents, businesses and municipality. Over a five-year period, the targeted reduction is therefore 15%. As our analysis of the town’s energy usage develops, we may differentiate this target by sector and year. Together with the Dept. of General Government Buildings and the Branford Schools, the Clean Energy Committee will monitor town energy usage, track renewable energy production and update this analysis annually using EnergyStar Portfolio Manager.
Knowledge Can Lead To Savings
West Hartford holds webinar for business owners on energy efficiency

With record inflation, prices are going up for everyone. And unfortunately, this includes energy costs. The Town of West Hartford held a webinar for local businesses to help them focus on energy efficiency and keep the cost of running a business down.

Held on May 5, the session was presented in collaboration with the town’s Economic Development Division, the West Hartford Clean Energy Commission, and the West Hartford Chamber of Commerce.

The idea was brought to the West Hartford Clean Energy Commission by commission member and local business owner, Steve Sack of Sack Energy according to an article in the West Hartford News.

Sack noted that a presentation by Environment Systems Corporation (ESC), another West Hartford based business, made “good business sense,” realizing that other business-owners could benefit from this information.

Quoted in the article is Kristen Gorski, Economic Development coordinator for the town, who said: “There are so many great opportunities out there to support local business with energy efficiency that can help offset or even reduce energy costs.

“We find that energy efficiency is often not explored or implemented because business owners are either not aware of this information or the task appears too daunting.”

Often lost in the mix is that spending money up-front can lead to long term savings over the life of a product. An EV car is a prime example of this counter-intuitive thinking. Often an EV is more expensive to own up-front, but over the life of the car, the savings on gas and other expenditures can be in the thousands of dollars – with improvements happening each day.

There are many similar ways that business owners can implement these changes for overall energy efficiency.

In addition to ESC, there were also presentations by Eversource and the CT Green Bank. All three aimed to educate and inform about modern solutions to rising energy costs through programs and incentives.

The secondary benefits after saving money for businesses in the here and now, is that over time, that saved energy will hopefully help us move into a greener economy. Not just in dollars, but in renewables and efficiency. West Hartford, alongside their partners, are helping businesses do both.
ENVIRONMENT

Feed The Community

How public gardens could add to your town or city

The concept of a community garden is as old as time. Agriculture itself was started by a group of people who decided they didn’t want to be hunter-gatherers anymore, and planted food to feed their community. In the thousands of years since, strikingly little has changed about growing your own food – you put a seed in the ground and through careful tending, food comes up. A small miracle.

Here’s how three municipalities handle community gardens:

**Bristol**

“The gardens are available to Bristol residents. Some people plant vegetables and others plant flowers. The gardens are great for people who live in apartments or condominiums and don’t have space for a garden of their own at home. Most people use the gardens for their personal use. We have some gardeners who grow vegetables for the various food pantries in the City. We are thankful to be able to offer the community gardens to the residents of Bristol as it benefits so many people.” — Patricia Tomascak, Executive Director, Department of Aging

**Torrington**

“The Bowman Gardens have been around since the 70’s but in the past 8 years they have grown from fields of rotor tilled in ground plots to 84 raised beds as well as in ground planting. We added a 40X20 pavilion and picnic area complete with BBQ grills and picnic tables, this has become a safe outdoor gathering place for seniors during the pandemic. The pavilion was a partnership with a local trade school and future Eagle Scouts. We added a storage shed last Fall for equipment & supplies and this year we had a permanent well drilled and a pump house built creating a stable water supply. We have been able to make all of these improvements buy enhancing our partnerships with local groups and business. Partners want their involvement to have a long-standing tangible mark on the community and its citizens, our Community Gardens hit all those targets.” — Joel Sekorski, Director, Services for the Elderly

**West Hartford**

“The Town of West Hartford is lucky to have not just one, but three distinct and beloved Community Gardens. Each of the three gardens is subdivided into 20x20ft plots and rented annually to residents for a low fee. This provides a unique opportunity for the citizens of West Hartford to grow their own fresh vegetables, fruits, and flowers. The gardens are managed as a joint project by the Department of Leisure Services and Public Works. The garden plots come with access to water and compost, and are worked by a community of like-minded gardeners. This community has grown so strong that at one of the gardens (Buena Vista), a group of gardeners joined together to form “year-round-gardening“, which is committed to no till, organic gardening. The Community Gardens have become a true source of pride for West Hartford, as residents from all walks of life come together to plant and grow.

West Hartford is also host to a large Plant a Row for the Hungry garden. This project, in conjunction with the Garden Writers’ Association, has been producing vegetables for the community since 1999. With most of the labor of gardening done by volunteers, school groups, and summer camps, the PAR garden has – over the years - given over 20,000 lbs of fresh, organic produce to the Town’s senior centers and local food pantries.” — Christy Page, Assistant Park Naturalist, Westmoor Park West Hartford
Most people would look at you kind of funny if you told them that you were thinking about keeping some of your trash every week. But, in a way, that’s what we are doing when we keep compostables out of the waste stream. New Canaan is the latest municipality to look into diverting food scraps through the Sustainable CT Community Match Fund.

As noted in the fundraising page, currently food scraps go right into the municipal waste stream and the problems associated with that are twofold.

One, Food that you throw out in the trash ends up with Styrofoam and plastic bits in landfills. These are “anaerobic environments,” which increases the methane gas in the air as the food breaks down over time. Despite being a natural byproduct, these situations exacerbate the production rather than through the natural composting of foods.

Second, the hauling of these foods has to be paid for by the tax payers. As with most municipalities that offer trash hauling, New Canaan pays a company to pick up residential trash each week an bring it to the transfer station who bring it to landfills or incinerators. Neither of these options are great, so the ideal situation would be to reduce the amount of waste.

Composting essentially solves both of those problems at the same time. Not only does taking out the food scraps from the waste stream lower the amount of waste that ends up in incinerators or landfills, lower the amount of methane that is created when it is left in anaerobic environments, but it produces good quality compost to be reused.

The idea is clearly worth exploring, and that’s where the Sustainable CT Community Match Fund came into play. Raising over $4000 from the community, the town of New Canaan received $8000 total, $7600 of which was used to pay the haulers, while $400 went to signage for the transfer station.

In the initial phases of the program 220 pounds were collected, but just two months later and over 800 pounds were collected.

The only drawback is that you do have to keep some of your trash. They recommend simple covered buckets to collect the scraps while you wait to bring it to the transfer station. And while in years past it might have been a bit strange to keep some of your trash, more and more people are saving their food scraps to begin composting. It’s something the community agrees upon.
Project Citizen
Bridgeport Students fight for equality in their schools

In the search for equality, we often lean on established leaders in the community. Their commitment and experience help guide the general public through difficult decisions. But sometimes, our leaders come from students, like those in Bridgeport who are helping their fellow students celebrate holidays without getting behind.

Part of a program called “Project Citizen,” the goal is to get students more involved in the democratic process. Each year eighth grade students in Bridgeport come together to effect policy change by tackling local issues they feel have not been addressed.

From the Connecticut Post, this year they reviewed the proposals and whittled it down to focusing on the Eid holidays, which include Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.

Celebrated by Muslim students, the Eid holidays would cause a large amount of absences by students who would then become behind in their lessons and even have a day marked absent against them.

Considering the state already has day offs allotted for practitioners of other religions, there was room to make an argument that those same rights should be upheld not just for Muslim students in Bridgeport, but to prevent non-Muslim students from having to repeat a lesson due to a large number of classmates being out.

Research was done and presented to the board of education, including the fact that upwards of 11% of students in the Bridgeport system identified as Muslim. They also circulated an online letter which garnered more than 2000 signatures.

Because Eid follows the lunar calendar, it does not fall on the same day each year. Students gave the dates for the holiday for the next 30 years, some of which will take place during summer vacation.

This follows a pattern of schools becoming more inclusive of religious celebrations.

School districts around the state have added Eid al-Fitr and the Hindu and Sikh celebration of Diwali to the calendar as day-off holidays.

This is in large part because the state is diversifying as whole. Although Christmas and Good Friday are already worked into the school schedule, many communities with large Mexican or Puerto Rican populations are adopting Three Kings Day as part of their school closures.

This includes Bridgeport where the Project Citizen helped students learn the civic process, getting involved, and doing the work that is required to affect change. These students presented their case and made a difference for their fellow students, as well as the general cause of equality in Connecticut.
Shoot Me A Line
Mayor Simmons makes case for Stamford

Caroline Simmons, Stamford’s new mayor, wants any businesses interested in the city to email her at mayorsoffice@stamfordct.gov.

Just four months into the job, Mayor Simmons has become the city’s number one promoter. She joined the Municipal Voice to talk about what drew her to local government, what she was able to accomplish in her first 100 days, and what she has her eyes on for the future.

With Class A office space, a 30% commercial vacancy rate, and only $44 a square foot, she believes that companies should be following the people who left New York City for Connecticut.

Already Connecticut’s second biggest city after Bridgeport, many of the city’s projects revolve around growth in the region.

“It’s really important to coordinate with our surrounding towns, so we’re looking at everything from making improvements on Metro North to making our city more bike and walk friendly,” she said, noting the possibility of a walk/bike path throughout Fairfield County.

But there are pieces that need to be put in place to sustain that growth. For one, the city is short a considerable amount of affordable renting units – a problem that has plagued many cities in Connecticut – as well as affordable senior housing.

Like so many other cities, they are looking to take advantage of their public transit options by bringing in transit-oriented development, which is increasingly popular with individuals just starting out in their careers. But Stamford is also looking at programs to help transition individuals into home ownership.

But those just starting out in their careers are crucial to Stamford’s future.

“I think it’s important that we have young people at the table because millennials now make the largest voting bloc,” the mayor said, who is part of that generation.

She also spoke to Stamford’s diversity as a selling point, and how important that was to governance.

But she wants people to get involved in local politics like she has – for those that don’t know, Mayor Simmons started in the federal government and worked her way to state representative, eventually landing as mayor.

“When we’re in a representative democracy, our governments are supposed to look like the people they serve,” she said, stating that she started with her cabinet and mayor’s office to make sure they were properly reflective of Stamford’s culture.

To that end, she placed a call for anyone interested in serving on a board or commission to email her at her mayor’s office email.

There’s much to be optimistic about Stamford – with so much growth and potential, one gets the idea that there’s almost too much to concentrate on. Fortunately, Mayor Simmons realizes that the position can directly touch people’s lives.

“And the key is to really seize this moment and making sure that we’re building more equitable, inclusive, vibrant city for everyone,” Mayor Simmons said.

“That includes making sure everyone has access to a good paying job, making sure everyone has access to quality infrastructure, making sure that people have the opportunity to pursue their dreams here, raise a family here.”
Red Light, Green Light
Automated traffic signals installed in Greenwich

With all of the technology available to us, someone had to be working on making traffic better. With new adaptive signals, Greenwich is making things a little better on city streets.

Everyone knows that sitting in traffic can be the worst part of their commute. And it seems that the Federal Department of Transportation agrees.

According to their resources: Poor traffic signal timing contributes to traffic congestion and delay. Conventional signal systems use pre-programmed, daily signal timing schedules. Adaptive signal control technology adjusts the timing of red, yellow and green lights to accommodate changing traffic patterns and ease traffic congestion. The main benefits of adaptive signal control technology over conventional signal systems are that it can:

• Continuously distribute green light time equitably for all traffic movements
• Improve travel time reliability by progressively moving vehicles through green lights
• Reduce congestion by creating smoother flow
• Prolong the effectiveness of traffic signal timing

Greenwich has installed the state’s first adaptive traffic signal system to help improve the flow around Arch Street, which include areas around the I-95 Northbound and Southbound ramps.

These highly trafficked areas would see increased amounts of congestion at specific points throughout the day, and given their proximity to parks and museums, it was crucial to keep cars moving rather than idling for long periods of time.

In a Patch article on these improvements, it was noted that it would take a year’s worth of data to truly understand the benefits of this installation, but there’s already some evidence that these new signals are alleviating congestion.

Surprisingly, there’s one benefit to this that might not be obvious at first glance – it could help improve air quality. According to the DOT, it could reduce the emissions of hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide due with cars idling less.

With 35,000 cars travelling through this corridor each day, there’s plenty of opportunity to reduce the amount of lingering pollution from vehicles. Recently, it was announced that Fairfield County had some of the worst air pollution in the nation.

Towns and cities can be leaders in improving air quality, but also quality of life with new adaptive signals. Because we can all admit it, no one likes being stuck in traffic.
“Passive activity” is a textbook example of an oxymoron. But it will be precisely these kinds of activities the newly minted open-space committee in Plainfield will be exploring.

The need for this committee became evident when the town became the owner of three contiguous lots that comprise 162 acres off of Kate Downing Road. The majority of which was given to the town by the state, with two private properties making up the last portions, which cost the town just $103,000.

With so much open space, it became clear the opportunity it had in front of them. The one thing that limits the use is the agreement with the state on their portion of the land that the parcel could only be used for passive recreation.

According to a state document, passive activities are those that refer “to recreational activities that do not require intensive development and prepared facilities like sports fields or buildings.

“Passive recreational activities place minimal stress on a site’s resources and as a result provide ecosystem service benefits and are highly compatible with natural resource protection.”

This is important because most of the land that was given over was wooded, and protecting those environments where they currently exist is crucial for ongoing green efforts.

But that doesn’t mean that there will be a limited amount of possible uses. The state offered examples like hiking, wildlife viewing, fishing, canoeing, picnicking, and even hunting.

Plainfield through their open space committee will be looking into all the possible ways that they can utilize this space.

According to an article in the Bulletin, there will likely be 10 or fewer members to this committee with individuals who are already serving on boards and commissions that deal with these sorts of things already volunteering to be on the new committee.

Alongside the committees work, the town is going to be consulting with the Army Corps of Engineers to discuss the possibility of trails being added into wetland areas. They also will be looking into grants, either from the state or federal government, to help make up the costs of adding these amenities.

Though “passive activity” might sound like an oxymoron, for the town of Plainfield, it means that the residents will have a place to enjoy the outdoors, walk a bit and perhaps have a little picnic. The committee that will help decide the future of this land will certainly not be passive in their decision making, but play an active role in Plainfield’s future.
When CCM says that the ARPA funds are going to be transformative for towns and cities, what we really mean is that they are going to make a difference in the lives of residents of this great state. New Milford has recently approved a plan that will prove the value of these federal dollars by helping their residents.

The Town Council voted at a recent meeting to approve funds from the American Rescue Plan to help folks who suffer from addiction. The total amount of approved funds will go to four recovery houses - Heritage Inn Recovery Residence, Phoenix House, Grace House, and Hope House.

During the pandemic, the need for addiction services went up, as did deaths from overdoses. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, nearly 100,000 individuals died over the course of 12 months from substance abuse, which is an all-time high.

While a death is the most severe outcome, the addiction affects many other areas of an individual’s life before it comes to that. They noted in an article on the issue that “Amid the pandemic, mental health and substance use disorders have worsened, in some cases significantly, including the use of alcohol and recreational drugs during the workday.”

And as the economic recovery surges on, many of the protections that were once in place are being removed. Protections like the eviction moratorium ending pose a real threat to individuals who have struggled throughout the pandemic. These recovery residences are not run by the town, but the town does play a crucial role in the full recovery of individuals that need this help.

Justin Cullmer, who began work as the Community Care Coordinator just before the pandemic, works to make connections for these individuals. From a CT Insider article, they say his job evolved during this time into “keeping people in their homes - permanently.”

Through the Coordinated Access Network and other services, he helps these individuals seek out resources that are already available to them. Food banks, energy assistance and other state programs are noted in the Insider article.

As Town Council member Hilary Ram is quoted as saying in that article, “the work that the sober-living residences provides is what ARPA funding ‘is intended to do,’ which is help people who are struggling.”

It’s been a difficult two years for all of us. For many though, it has been triggering for past addictions or overwhelming. New Milford is providing that essential bridge from hopelessness to hope by providing these vouchers.
High Tech Prevents High Speed Chase

Newington police try out StarChase High Speed Pursuit Alternative

The device might look like something out of a James Bond movie. Instead of leading a life of danger like the Secret Agent Man, the StarChase High Speed Pursuit Alternative Technology aims to lower danger during high speed chases. Newington Police recently announced that they will be the first in the state to implement this technology.

It’s fairly common sense that high speed chases are dangerous. Worse than one car going over the speed limit is several cars going over the speed limit. Even with sirens blaring, each car added during a chase increases the chance that one will be involved in an accident.

So how do you eliminate the need for a high speed chase while still maintaining some semblance of control over the situation? You shoot a gps tracker out of the front grill of your police car, of course.

The StarChase technology employs a simple system of vehicle mounted launchers and GPS tracking tags that can be utilized during high speed chases so that police could back away from the chase while still monitoring the location of the suspect’s vehicle through an integrated tracking application.

By backing off, the pursued car usually slows down thinking that they are in the clear. This gives the police time to monitor the situation, gain an idea of where the pursued are heading and plan for a safe arrest of the individual.

Early on after the technology was first introduced, there were some concerns about Fourth Amendment compliance, and StarChase asked the American Civil Liberties Union to assess the technology, and they were overall supportive with few caveats.

In a press release from 2014, they said: “We don’t see any problem with this technology, assuming that it is used in the kind of way that everybody probably imagines it being used. In other words, that:

• It is used only in police chases that commence when a police officer has the equivalent of probable cause of wrongdoing (even if just fleeing a temporary detention like a traffic stop) and do not have time to get a warrant.
• The device is removed and the location tracking ends the first time the police catch up to the person they are chasing.
• The police catch up to the suspect as soon as they can (in other words, no letting them wander around for extended periods of time without pursuing them, in order to learn things about them).”

Newington purchased this device with a Justice Assistance Grant from the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management’s Violent Crime Prevention bureau, according to an article from the New Britain Herald.

The town has not changed any of their policies regarding chases, per that article. With the rise in auto thefts, it could prove to be a valuable tool in asset recovery, they said, while minimizing risk.
DIY HVAC

Coventry gets free stopgap air filtration units from UConn

During the COVID pandemic, the outdated state of our school HVAC systems have become readily apparent. While CCM and other partners work with the state government to secure funding to help repair these integral systems, schools have put temporary solutions in place. In Coventry, a partnership with UConn has shown how to DIY the air.

The need for clean air is perennial – no one wants to inhale smog or even allergens – but during the pandemic, this need has been heightened. Nearly every building manager began looking to their HVAC capabilities and many learned that they were outdated or insufficient to handle an airborne virus.

But a series of roadblocks prevented the costly repairs or replacements for these systems. Some simply needed new filters, but so did everyone leading to shortages. In other cases, it became evident that their system was near the end of their lifespan.

While there was some movement on working with the state for funding for these upgrades, many places needed some kind of stopgap measure that was affordable and could be installed quickly. Some places looked to commercially available air purifiers. Others looked to DIY culture, and that’s where the Corsi-Rosenthal boxes come in.

These boxes are unique in that they were designed in direct response to the pandemic specifically for areas like classrooms that needed a temporary solution. They are elegant in their simplicity:

Four simple air filters like you would use in a house furnace make up the walls and a box fan tops the system, which is sealed with simple duct tape to create a negative vacuum. No louder than your typical box fan which is used to cool a room, these have become a unique solution to a common problem.

Depending on the level of filter and sturdiness of construction, some have performed as good if not better than the costlier portable HEPA filtration systems that have become popular.

In Coventry, this solution was more special because it was a partnership with the University Of Connecticut School Of Nursing. University students built the Corsi-Rosenthal boxes to be distributed to schools.

It’s evident that filtration systems are essential outside of the pandemic as well. Filtering dust, smoke, pollen, and other irritants make for a better and healthier learning environment for all.

Corsi-Rosenthal boxes are a great solution for this need, but they are not an end-all-be-all solution. CCM will continue to work with its partners and the state to secure funding for our schools to replace or repair these systems.
In June 1969, a pioneering group of individuals stood up for LGBT rights at the Stonewall Inn bar in New York City. Considered a major turning point in the gay rights movement, it is the reason Pride Month is celebrated each June, which are taking place more and more across the United States including in towns and cities in Connecticut.

Many began official celebrations for Pride Month in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. Both the city of Middletown and town of West Hartford celebrated their first Prides in 2019, quickly becoming model celebrations in Connecticut.

In Middletown, the event was created by a committee whose express purpose was “to bring visibility and recognition to the city’s LGBTQIA2S+ citizens” and through partnerships with the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce and Wesleyan University, they launched on June 15, 2019. They drew over 15,000 people in that first year alone, becoming one of the largest celebrations in Connecticut and even New England.

These celebrations are still ongoing - in West Hartford where they also partner with local businesses and organizations like Blue Back Square and BeMindfulWeb.com, they are holding hybrid events throughout the month of June starting with a raising of the Pride Flag on June 1st.

Pioneering towns and cities like Middletown and West Hartford helped inspire individuals in other municipalities to recreate these events closer to home.

In Hamden, a town that has celebrated LGBTQ+ events before, plans to have annual Pride Month celebrations each June. This important celebration will help families connect with each other. Same-sex couples with young children often don’t see themselves represented, but as Jacky Forucci, one of the events planners said in a New Haven Register article, “We want to have something for the kids to do to Connecticut with other kids and families that are … within the LGBTQ+ community or allies of the LGBTQ+ community.”

It’s clear that these events are growing in popularity amongst the LGBTQ+ community and beyond. Whether a town or city has been holding them for years or are just beginning, we must recognize that we are better when everyone feels accepted in their community, and by doing so honoring the brave individuals who fought for those rights over 50 years ago.

Taking PRIDE In Your City
Municipalities across state celebrate LGBTQ+ residents
Don Stein, Barkhamsted First Selectman, remarked, “The town is very excited to work with Sertex on this very important project to determine how we can bring high speed internet to Barkhamsted and the surrounding communities. In today’s world, fiber optic broadband becomes critical to those who work from home, attend school from home or who use broadband for their entertainment.”

Right Down The Line
Broadband study will see if Barkhamsted has need for speed

With more and more constraints on home internet – computers, smartphones, TVs, and even refrigerators – households are interested in the limits of their Wi-Fi networks. The next big breakthrough might be right around the corner, but serious infrastructure is needed to get there. From a press release, representatives from Sertex Broadband Solutions said they are working with officials from the Town of Barkhamsted, Connecticut, to assess community interest in and costs associated with building a municipally-owned fiber broadband network to connect and serve the entire town.

The project will use SertexConnect, a planning platform that helps communities begin the complex task of building community-wide fiber networks, to conduct a customized broadband survey and develop an actionable deployment plan. The goal of the feasibility initiative is to educate residents and business owners about the opportunity for the town to invest in building an open access broadband network to give reliable, affordable high-speed internet connections to all properties.

Launching in May, the Barkhamsted online survey will allow visitors to run a speed test from their home or business, then take a poll that will gauge public interest in building and subscribing to a municipally-owned fiber-to-the-home (FTTX) network. Town residents and business owners will be able to access the survey from a link on the Barkhamsted website.

Concurrent with the broadband interest survey, experts from Sertex will conduct an FTTX Feasibility Study in the town. This financial and engineering analysis will provide high-level design requirements and costs for network construction, including aerial and underground fiber pathways, pole licensing, engineering, fiber drops, equipment and installation, and annual operating and maintenance expenses. The resulting financial information will be essential for residents in deciding to approve a municipal network, and for the town in applying for funding from the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Unlike fiber internet services from private companies, municipally-owned networks ensure universal high-speed broadband connections and offer more bandwidth at lower rates. The Sertex public/private partnership model empowers communities with 100 percent ownership control over end-user costs, service levels, and operational concerns. Taxpayer-approved projects are funded through long-term, low-interest municipal bonding. Infrastructure, maintenance, and operating costs are recovered through subscriber fees. With sufficient subscribers, future-proof fiber optic networks are self-sustaining with little to no budget impact.

CCM will be embarking on a similar study over the coming months in partnership with Great Blue Research to assess the interest on a statewide level. After two years of work from home for many, at the same time as the natural technological progression, households are looking into increasing their internet speeds without breaking the bank. Barkhamsted and Sertex are moving that conversation in the right direction.
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1. Schedule a no cost, no obligation energy efficiency evaluations with ESC to review existing facility conditions, analyze utility usage and summarize recommendations and associated costs.

2. Eliminate contracting hurdles by leveraging ESC’s status as a pre-approved provider of energy efficiency retrofits and cost savings services with the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services.

3. Capitalize on a variety of incentive programs offered by local utility providers working with ESC to support project implementation, including interest-free financing for up to one million dollars per municipality.