INNOVATIVE IDEAS FOR MANAGING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

2015-2016 Connecticut Town & City Compendium
April 2016

Dear CCM Member,

We are pleased to present Innovative Ideas for Managing Local Governments: A Connecticut Town & City Compendium – our 29th annual compilation to help municipal leaders run local governments more effectively and efficiently. These ideas save taxpayers money while providing municipal services that enhance community life.

The ideas are reprinted from Connecticut Town & City, the bi-monthly magazine of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM).

Connecticut Town & City developed these stories from many sources, including visits to Connecticut local governments; suggestions from municipal officials; newspapers and magazines in Connecticut and other states; publications of the National League of Cities; and publications of other state municipal leagues. We would be happy to hear from readers about any ideas we should publish in the future.

For further information on any article, please contact Managing Editor Kevin Maloney at (203) 498-3025 or email at kmaloney@ccm-ct.org.

Good Reading!

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CIVIC AMENITIES

Ample Parking

Pomfret Library gets much-needed parking expansion

A snip of land – about three-quarters of an acre – was recently donated to the library by Pomfret School. Library officials say it is more than enough to make a huge difference for both safety and convenience.

“We have 12 spaces right now — nine if all three staff members are here,” Library Director Laurie Bell said. “It gets challenging when we have children’s programming or two programs going on simultaneously.”

Patrons have had to park on the road or across the street at the Pomfret School and then have to navigate crossing what can be a busy Route 44 at times. In some cases, especially for after-school activities, visitors have had to park on the grass. When the small lot is full, some library-goers have opted to bypass the library completely and drive to neighboring Putnam or Killingly.

The donated land abuts the library, eliminating the need for patrons to cross the road.

Town officials say the extra space will allow for the library to nearly double the parking capacity. The land donation was approved by Pomfret voters at a special Town Meeting in December.

“We’re very appreciative to the Pomfret School,” First Selectman Maureen Nicholson said.

The land donation capped a rewarding year for library staffers and the town. The small, 103-year-old library earned two awards from the Connecticut Library Association in 2014. Librarian Bell said the library was recognized for its new woodcut-style logo that captures the historic character of the building and also for its updated website, an improvement for virtual visitors.

And fortunately for “real time” visitors – also a parking lot to call their own.

Saving Time And Money

Park by phone app pays off in Greenwich

Paying to park your car may not qualify as fun, but it just got a whole lot easier in Greenwich where drivers can now pay to park with their mobile phones, thanks to a new app offered by the town.

The town of Greenwich recently partnered with Parkmobile, a leading provider of on-demand and prepaid mobile payments, to provide the option of paying by phone for on- and off-street parking including several municipal parking lots and garages.

Customers will be able to use their smartphones to pay for parking using the new mobile application with iPhones, Androids, Windows, and Blackberry phones.

The new app expands the current pay by phone transactions so residents, businesses, and visitors will be able to conduct their parking transactions by mobile phone throughout Greenwich, making paying for parking easier and requiring less effort.

Greenwich officials say the new parking app is the first step in expanding mobile payment transactions throughout the Town of Greenwich.

It represents an easier way to pay because once registered, customers may use the mobile app, internet, or call a toll free number to pay for parking.

After setting up their account, they can immediately start using the system with their mobile phone. The app allows customers to receive alerts when their meter time is about to expire or to extend their time remotely without returning to the meter. It also will allow customers to utilize credit cards in locations that do not offer manual credit card payments, and to print and keep parking receipts.

All of these parking-related functions take less time with the new app, and since time is money Greenwich residents can save on both.
Lost & Found
Brooklyn reclaims wolf heads stolen from statue

What once was lost has now been found and that means two pieces of Brooklyn’s storied past are right back where they belong -- in the center of town.

Two original wolf heads on the massive statue of Revolutionary War hero Gen. Israel Putnam were stolen 30 years ago. When they appeared recently in an auction catalog, local residents were quick to take action.

One resident alerted members of the historical society and First Selectman Rick Ives that the wolf heads were listed in the auction catalog. The auction house was contacted and took them out of the auction. An anonymous Brooklyn resident paid for the auction house’s cost and has given the heads to the historical society.

“It’s nice to have the real things back,” said Elaine Knowlton, curator of the Brooklyn Historical Society Museum. “We were afraid they would end up in different places and a long distance away from the state. Now they will be right here.”

Designed by Karl Gerhardt, the bronze statue of Putnam on his horse in full army uniform commemorates Putnam’s contributions to the Revolutionary War and the founding of the country. It was Putnam who famously commanded at the Battle of Bunker Hill, “Don’t fire until you see the whites of their eyes!”

Gerhardt also wanted to highlight the episode which created Putnam’s reputation for fearlessness, when he crawled one winter night into a wolf den and killed the wolves that were ravaging his livestock and the livestock of his neighbors.

During the mid-1980s, the two wolf heads were pried from the statue and it remained “headless” until 2005 when the town contracted with a sculptor to make replicas. The originals are in need of restoration and once they are restored and repaired, the historical society will display them in the museum rather than replace the replicas on the statue.

“It may take us a while, but we may have a little ceremony when we can finally unveil them,” Knowlton said.
Showstopper
Iconic Norfolk Library secures major preservation grant

Founded nearly 130 years ago, the Norfolk Library was carefully planned to reflect the refinement of the village that had become a summer enclave for the wealthy—right down to its bright red tile roof. The tiles eventually gave way to asphalt shingles now bearing the wear and tear of time. Fortunately, an initiative to restore the iconic building to its original luster has received a major boost in the form of a $200,000 state historic restoration grant. The first item on the to-do list: replace the roof with replicas of the original red tiles.

“It will be a showstopper,” said Library Director Ann Havemeyer. On the National Register of Historic Places, the library is one of several remarkable buildings and monuments designed by famed 19th Century Irish-born architect George Keller. Among his most notable designs is the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch in Hartford, where his ashes are interred.

Library officials say the application process for the grant was extensive. The library had to include financial and budget documents, site maps, construction schedule, photos of the original and current buildings, the organization’s statements on human rights and non-discriminatory hiring practices, letters of support from the community, and a certificate of endorsement from the Norfolk Historic District Commission. When all the information was compiled, it filled a binder nearly 2 inches thick. The library’s high visibility on Route 44 was also a consideration for the grant award, which is administered by the State Historic Preservation Office. The grant stipulates that it will cover only half the cost of the project. The roof restoration is estimated at $470,000. To come up with the balance, the library has launched its first major capital campaign in nearly 30 years.

“The last generation’s project was the children’s wing,” Trustee John Garrels said. “This is our generation’s project.” The roof restoration is expected to be completed by November.

Old Is New Again
Old Science Center gets new life as fitness center

It’s a classic two for one. Guilford is renovating the science wing of the old and now empty high school for use as a new community fitness center.

The science wing was a new addition to the old high school in 1999 and although the rest of the school is being demolished, local officials saw a silver lining in saving it. The science wing is a relatively new, still useable structure and demolishing it would have cost the town $600,000. In addition, the adaptive reuse of the space means the community will have a new facility that will offer a variety of fitness activities and programs.

“When we voted to tear down the old high school, there was some concern that we added this science wing in 1999 and they didn’t want to see it go to waste while it is still functional,” said Guilford First Selectman Joseph Mazza.

“Superintendent Paul Freeman has laid out twofold plan for the building, said Mazza. “Number one is to renovate the first floor for a community wellness and weight room. The second part is to use the second floor for town storage,” Freeman said.

Rick Maynard, Guilford’s Director of Parks, Recreation and Seniors, said the new fitness center will use existing equipment from the old high school and won’t have to purchase new weights, spinning bikes and other equipment which represents a further cost savings. He also said the center may offer fitness classes to the public once it opens early next year.

“It’s great that we are preserving this building and putting it to town use rather than demolishing it,” said Mazza. “It will be a great addition to our Parks and Rec programs.”
On The Trail

Foot and bike path would extend long-planned trail in Ridgefield

A
n ambitious and long anticipated walking, running, and bike path is moving forward in Ridgefield.

The project is seen as a key link in a larger long-term project that would eventually connect three areas of town: The Copps Hill area to the village area, and then to the Branchville section via the existing rail trail.

“It could be a good 10 miles, round-trip,” First Selectman Rudy Marconi said.

“It’s a very good plan to get kids and people to move throughout town without cars — and it’s healthy,” said Parks and Recreation Director Paul Roche. “The whole goal is to develop safe places to ride for families.”

The proposal to appropriate $1.25 million for “planning, design, acquisition, and construction of Farmingville walk/bike path” was approved by local voters in May. Much of the work is being covered by a state grant, so the cost to Ridgefield taxpayers will be $150,000 for design work.

The project won’t complete the entire trail, but it will connect some key dots. The rail trail currently exists, as does the bike and walking path around the starting point at the Recreation Center in the Copps Hill area.

“The path will connect the Copps Hill and village areas and then connect with the rail trail, so ultimately you’ll be able to go from the Rec Center all the way to Main Street and all the way down the rail trail to Branchville — without a car.”

The project also includes construction of an elevated wooden bridge into the state’s Great Swamp property. The bridge will be an elevated boardwalk that will follow a route over dry land through the swamp property.

Jacquie Dowd, one of the leaders of the 250-member Ridgefield Bicycle Sport Club, says she is very supportive of the trail project, which she calls a “multi-use path.”

“Connecting neighborhoods, connecting our town resources, making it possible for people to recreate and get around town without getting in their cars,” Dowd said.

“Walk, run, push a stroller, ride a bicycle. Go take a walk around the Rec Center, let the kids play in the playground, take an exercise class, walk back to town — without ever getting into your car. Go have lunch, meet a friend, enjoy nature, enjoy the turtles — all those things you miss when you’re in your car.”

Still Relevant

Glastonbury library adapting to fit the changing times

Glastonbury Library officials are thinking big without going big.

The town is studying new uses of space for its 120-year-old library, which is “landlocked” by wetlands that would stifle any major future expansion.

Established in 1895 with a $200 appropriation from the town, the library underwent its last major change with an 18,500-square-foot addition in 1998. That construction project needed two referendums before it was finally approved. It included a two-story addition, a community room that seats 200 and a parking expansion that accommodated 60 more cars. Now there’s not much more space to work with.

“What we have to do is look inside,” Library Director Barbara Bailey said. “People are still taking out books, but we see less and less of that. The library is kind of becoming like a Starbucks where people gather and work on projects. They are bringing their laptops and hunkering down.”

The Library’s Second Century Fund donated $50,000 to the town to pay for an architectural study to evaluate future use and space reconfiguration to bring 21st century programs and services to the historic library. Officials say the fund is there to ensure “that our library remains relevant to our community.”

A recent survey pointed to the need for more comfy seating and more general meeting and study space.

“We are living in a knowledge-based economy and a digital, highly technical time. We need to allocate space for that,” Bailey said.

There may also be opportunities for outdoor seating and smaller buildouts, Bailey said.

“We have some exciting times ahead for the library,” Bailey said. “Public libraries aren’t what they used to be.”

A final report from the architectural study is expected to be presented to the town by August.
The next stop on the information superhighway may just be a city-run news service for Danbury.

Mayor Mark Boughton has more than 2,000 followers on his Twitter and actively uses social media as one way to keep citizens informed of what’s going on in town. Now city officials are considering creating a community news site and hiring a part-time reporter.

The news site would be in a reader-friendly format, not as formal as the city’s official website. The idea is to keep citizens abreast of everything from a new fire truck to a new police program or interesting school activities. Officials say it would allow the city to increasingly engage with Danbury’s growing population.

“We don’t tell our stories,” Boughton said. “We are trying to figure out another way to get the word out to people about what is going on.”

Local merchants and others could advertise on the site and the ad revenue would help offset the cost of hiring the report. On any given day in any community there is a lot going on so the reporter would have plenty of stories to tell and that would be a big help to the city.

“This is not meant to compete with newspapers, but to do community-oriented pieces about things we think people would like to know about,” says Stephen Nocera, director of Danbury’s Office of Project Excellence.

Nocera has been researching all the possibilities of the news site and plans to present his findings to the mayor and others by the end of summer.

So stay tuned!

The Wait Is Over
National Park designation for Coltsville, Hartford

By many accounts, the sprawling industrial complex was already brimming with new life – decades after the manufacturing operation it once housed closed up shop and closed another chapter of Hartford history.

But loft-style apartments followed the closure, lots of them, and then a waiting list as more were being added. New businesses occupied space inside, employing about 750 people and a popular magnet school also took root there. New life for an old building. What could be better?

How about a long-awaited National Park status designation? For more than two decades preservationists and politicians have been working to turn the sprawling 260-acre site, topped by its iconic blue onion dome, into a national park.

Former Hartford Mayor Pedro Segarra called it “an incredible, monumental win” for Hartford, the region, and the entire state. City officials expect the park to create 1,000 jobs over the next five years and generate $150 million.

“To have a federal park designation here is just an incredible opportunity for our city in terms of growing jobs, in terms of attracting more tourism,” Segarra said.

An active manufacturing site from 1855 to 1994, Coltsville is home to the armories where the famed revolver was created and mass produced. It also includes the home of Samuel and Elizabeth Colt as well as worker housing.

When complete, the park will feature a 10,000 square-foot visitors’ center and is expected to attract 200,000 visitors annually. Supporters say it will strengthen the region’s appeal as a heritage tourism destination, which already boasts a number of historic attractions such as the Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Noah Webster houses, the Old State House, the state Capitol, Old Wethersfield, and many historic cemeteries.

“Connecticut is the cradle of our industrial revolution,” said U.S. Rep. John Larson, who helped shepherd the legislation through Congress. “The designation made possible by this Act would not only honor the groundbreaking work of Samuel and Elizabeth Colt, but provides Connecticut greater and much-deserved representation in our National Park system.”
A Touch Of Technology
Guilford goes interactive with heritage visitors

For visitors, shoppers, and history buffs, the best of Guilford is literally right at their fingertips.

The town recently unveiled a new interactive Visitor Information Kiosk and that features a touchscreen computer monitor that offers information on town restaurants, shopping, historic venues and town events.

The kiosk represents the culmination of three years of hard work by members of the Guilford Preservation Alliance who compiled much of the information and are pleased with its centralized location near the popular Community Center.

“It’s close to a lot of the resources. Close to three house museums and close to the shopping and the dining and, also, the Green,” Alliance President Shirley Girioni said. “It just seemed extremely logical to place it as close to the (community center) as possible.”

The kiosk is part of the Alliance’s heritage tourism plan to encourage exploration of Guilford’s historic, cultural and natural resources. Organizers cited a recent study that showed that most “heritage travelers” want trips that combine culture, nature, exercise and shopping. More than 70% of those surveyed said they want to be able to visit places that still retain their historic character and most want their travel to be educational.

Funding was provided through the state Bond Commission, the Connecticut Humanities Council, Guilford Preservation Alliance’s Marjory Schmidt Fund and the Guilford Foundation. The computer monitor will be available year-round, 24 hours a day, while the kiosk will be staffed by volunteers during the summer.

Town officials say the visitor kiosk could mean a boost for businesses.

“If we can make it easier for people to come to our town and find various places to go and support, that’s very helpful,” Guilford Economic Development Coordinator Brian McGlone said.

Light At The End Of The Tunnel
Effort to rebuild historic North Canaan station nears final phase

The path to recovery may not have been the shortest, nor most direct, but one thing is certain: a historic treasure in North Canaan is rising from the ashes.

The Canaan Union Station was believed to be one of the oldest continuously operating train depots in the nation when it was partially damaged by fire in 2001. Enough of the 1871 structure remained to keep its place on the National Register of Historic Places, but the depot could no longer operate.

Over the past 14 years, support to rebuild it has never been derailed but the logistics of funding and miles of bureaucratic red tape had to be sorted out.

Because the station was privately owned at the time of the fire, it didn’t qualify for grants. Enter the Connecticut Railroad Historical Association, which bought the station in 2003 and because of its non-profit status was able to secure some needed grants.

The group has worked with the local women’s club to hold fundraisers and use in-kind projects to bring the rebuilding project along. One of the final and largest pieces of the puzzle is about to fall into place.

After much red tape, a $1.7 million federal grant, awarded several years ago, is being released to finish the final construction phase. The last phase includes painting and landscaping. Plans also call for the addition of a railroad museum in the signal tower.

Town officials say the state Department of Transportation has one of the final reviews on the paperwork before the project goes out to bid. Once the bids are awarded, work on the station will commence and it could reopen in 2016.

“I don’t think we’ve lost momentum,” says Selectman Charlie Perotti, who was among the volunteer firefighters battling that 2001 blaze. “There are very small things to be resolved.”
Get Out And Play
Milford making more room for youth sports

Respecting the growing participation in youth sports, the city of Milford is moving forward with plans to build two new athletics fields that can be used nearly year-round. Part of those plans included a crucial land swap with the local YMCA that aldermen recently approved.

After original designs had the city fields encroaching on YMCA property, aldermen approved swapping some 2.7 acres of city land for about 2.5 acres of YMCA property bordering the parcel where the fields will be constructed.

The turf fields will be 210 feet by 360 feet and should be ready for use next summer, said Recreation Director Paul Piscitelli, who worked with City Planner Dave Sulkis and YMCA representatives on plans for the field. The project also will include a loop trail for biking and walking.

Piscitelli said the new turf fields will help address several important concerns – availability, safety and maintenance costs.

Local youth coaches have expressed the need for more capacity to help alleviate scheduling conflicts. Turf fields have also improved in safety over the years resulting in fewer ligament injuries than on grass fields. They are also easier to maintain.

Maintaining a quality natural grass recreation field means limiting its use to 15 to 20 hours a week. It should also be dormant for a full season, Piscitelli said, citing industry standards. Irrigation, re-seeding, fertilizing among other upkeep duties could cost $20,000 a year per field. The average field in Milford is in use almost 30 hours a week with the only down time in the winter. The entire maintenance budget for all grass fields is less than $20,000. The new facilities will allow the city public works staff the opportunity to repair other fields.

“One of the most dramatic changes is that individual sports — football, baseball, soccer, lacrosse — are played year-round rather than being played only during their traditional seasons,” Piscitelli said. “This has negatively impacted not only the availability of fields but also the quality of fields, which jeopardizes the safety of all players.”

A Bravo From Business
Milford making room for more parking

Milford merchants are hailing the city’s latest purchase that will bring more visitors and shoppers to its busy downtown.

The city recently acquired just over 2 acres of land along River and High streets and Railroad Avenue to ultimately add more than 200 parking spots, with the first 100 spots available within the next few months.

The purchase was made possible by $5 million in state funding that enabled the city to purchase the site of an old grocery store near the train station. The city will also use $150,000 in state funds for a market analysis and a site plan.

The business community says the parking will be “an incredible boost” for the downtown.

“This is such an important piece of the puzzle,” said Tracy Bonosconi, president of the Downtown Milford Business Association. “I’m very happy to be in downtown Milford – it was the best decision I’ve made.”

Chris Carveth, chairman of the Milford Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee, called the purchase a “feather in the cap for the city of Milford.”

Milford Mayor Ben Blake said a city development committee will be appointed to oversee parking designs and help develop parking regulations and fees. Officials also are working to attract an anchor-type store downtown. The development is expected to be consistent with the area’s quaint character.

The Mayor said the project builds on the city’s economic development momentum over the past few years. Since 2011, the city has averaged more than 300 new businesses a year and its unemployment rate is now below 5 percent.

“We intend on enhancing the business climate to ensure we retain our existing business and create new opportunities for job growth, capital investment, and new business opportunities,” Blake said.
Paws For Thought
Pups getting their own play patch in Guilford

Dog owners in Guilford may soon have a place to call their own.

The town’s Parks and Rec Commission recently approved a proposal that would section off about an acre of land at its 23-acre Nut Plains Park for a dedicated dog park.

A community group, Friends of the Guilford Dog Park, spearheaded an enthusiastic grass-roots effort to establish the dog park. The group will handle most of the necessary maintenance and fundraising.

“We have been on this for over two years so it has been a very long process and we are excited that the Parks & Rec Commission saw this as an opportunity to provide a real service to the town,” said group member Jo-Anne Basile.

She said the benefits extend beyond providing Fido with an opportunity to romp with other four-legged friends.

“It gives some of our senior citizens who might not be able to take their dogs out on long walks an opportunity for them to get exercise for their animal in a controlled safe way,” she said.

Parks and Rec Director Rick Maynard says the park, which is pending approval from zoning and wetlands officials, will keep many of the large trees currently on the property. Unlike some dog parks that are wide-open spaces, the Guilford park will offer plenty of natural shade.

“With the tree canopy, there’s not a lot of undergrowth and that will make maintenance low,” Maynard said.

The park will also be sectioned off – one area for small dogs and another for larger dogs.

Friends of the Guilford Dog Park say once the park gets all the necessary approvals they are hoping to break ground in spring 2016.

Better Beach Utilization
New paint, new patterns means more parking for Greenwich residents

Greenwich is creating more parking at two local beach parking lots without increasing the size or footprint of the lots. A recently initiated parking lot reorganization plan at the town’s Island Beach and Horseneck Lane lots will result in better utilization of existing space.

Better separation of the permit and daily fee spaces and clearer markings will end confusion and create more use at the Island Beach lot, freeing up space in the Horseneck lot which means more permit parking will be available.

“My goal is to maximize the use of each parking lot in town,” Parking Services Director Rita Azrelyant said. “There’s a potential to pick up 15 to 20 spaces in each lot and we have about 17 parking lots, so that’s a significant amount if you pick up 20 spaces per parking lot.”

New painting has been added to the pavement at the Island Beach lot, clearly marking that the west side of the lot is for daily fee users. The spaces for the daily fee users have been painted yellow with yellow numbers to use at the payment machine, while the east side of the lot is now painted with white markings indicating that the area is reserved for permit holders.

Azrelyant said the old configuration of the Island Beach parking lot was “scattered all over the place with white stalls for permits right next to yellow stalls for daily parking.”

“We looked at parking trends and we saw the section of Island Beach where the permit spaces area was very underutilized,” she said.

As part of the reorganization, the Horseneck Lot has been changed to permit parking only.

“By reorganizing Island Beach, we’re preparing for the people from the daily fee spaces from Horseneck to come over,” Azrelyant said. “That frees up the 45 spaces in Horseneck for more permit holders.”

The reorganization was initiated by the town’s Parking Services Department and Department of Public Works.
Attention to detail and a passion for the past are helping the Greenwich Library preserve the story of the town one digital photo at a time.

History Librarian Carl White and other staff members are using digital technology to scan old negatives and fragile photos and turn them into archival treasures. And the public is invited to help fill in the blanks. The Library encourages people to view the images on the Library’s special local history web site and enter comments that might help flesh out the who, what and where. Getting the public involved is also part of the Library’s strategic plan to enhance the accessibility of the local history content.

The Library has been hastening the digitization of its archival photographic collection, especially in light of the 375th anniversary of the Town. The process of digitization, which follows best archival practices, scans the items at high resolution so that every detail of the original is preserved. Information about the images is captured and attached to the permanent record of the new digital item.

“You learn so much about Greenwich history,” White said. “I had no idea William ‘Boss’ Tweed – the infamous leader of Tammany Hall – summered here, and even had an estate on Milbank Road. Once you start to look at these photos, you want to research the stories behind them.”

There are a lot of stories to tell, in fact. The Greenwich Library has about 2,500 photographs and negatives from the late 19th to 20th centuries. They are images of prominent people, historic events, and landscapes. White says the photos of Greenwich Avenue graphically document how the thoroughfare has changed over time.

The Library is working to scan as many old images as possible to have them available as part of the 375th anniversary of the town this year. Library officials say the public input is essential to help fill in the gaps.

“We are hoping that residents can help us improve these records, and with it, enhance our knowledge of the history of Greenwich,” said Joseph Williams, the Library’s Deputy Director.
CIVIC PRIDE

A Family Affair

Stamford Mayor Martin’s charity mentors high potential children

Long before David Martin was elected Mayor of Stamford, he held another title: champion of mentoring. In 2008, Mayor Martin and his wife Judy founded the “Starfish Connection,” a 501(c)3 public charity with the mission of helping academically talented youth from low income families reach their potential and achieve their dreams of attending college.

Starfish Connection is a comprehensive, 10-year program for high potential children from high risk socio-economic groups beginning in the 3rd grade that provides mentoring, advocacy, educational support, enrichment, and extracurricular activities throughout their elementary, middle, and high school years. The program currently enrolls 49 Stamford youth from ages 8 to 17. The goal is to ensure that each Starfish Connection student is ready and able to attend a college of his or her choice after high school graduation.

Judy Martin runs the Starfish Connection and Mayor Martin is a member of the board, a public spokesman for mentoring, and serves as its treasurer. Starfish is an all-volunteer organization with no paid staff and the Martins pay overhead and operating costs as all donations go to fund enrichment activities.

“While Judy and I founded Starfish Connection, the real credit goes to my wife Judy and the mentors, who commit their time and support, often for a decade or more, and to the Starfish themselves, who prove to us the value of mentorship as we watch them grow and learn and succeed,” Mayor Martin said.

Mentors meet with students on a regular basis, help advocate for them at school along with their parents, enroll them in enrichment activities which are paid for by the Starfish Connection, take them to local background-enriching activities and ensure that students have and use tutoring support as needed.

“Mentors make sure that the children receive some of the same kinds of opportunities that other kids are able to experience in the rich environment of Stamford,” Judy Martin said. “We make sure they get to go to museums, shows and musical performances, play sports, and take music lessons. Each student is signed up for an enrichment activity every season and attends summer camps and programs.”

Mentors “are there for the children every step of the way, helping them overcome obstacles and identify opportunities to grow and prosper, even helping with family issues,” she said.

Last year for example, Starfish siblings were being evicted from the home their parents had rented for 10 years when the bank foreclosed on the owner. Faced with no affordable housing option for a family of seven in Stamford, they thought their only option was to move to Bridgeport – a move that would have been disruptive for the students. But the older sibling’s mentor stepped in, arranged an extension of their lease, located permanent housing, and helped with the application and lease signing.

Some enrichment activities for the program’s 21 elementary students and their mentors last year included:

- An autumn walk at Stamford’s Nature Center
- A visit to the Historic Hudson Valley, and Washington Irving’s homestead
- Science experiments at the Challenger Learning Center in Ramapo, New York
- A trip to Norwalk’s Silvermine Arts Center in April

The one-on-one time with mentors ensures that the children get the most out of their experiences — one-to-one interaction that the Martins say makes all the difference.

Starfish Connection partners with several local youth organization’s programs to provide both after-school and summer enrichment for the children. The combination of mentoring and enrichment over a 10-year horizon is what makes Starfish Connection so successful. Children in the program regularly achieve B averages and better in school, and are well poised for attending college after high school graduation.
CORPORATE CITIZENS

Let The Sun Shine In
77 year-old manufacturer goes solar

They may be old school, but that doesn't mean there's nothing new under the sun.

The D.R. Templeman Company, a family-owned manufacturer of springs and wire forms, has been in Plainville for nearly eight decades. Founded in 1938, the company realizes “the importance of preserving the environment,” said company president Richard Williams in announcing the installation of a 360-panel, 111-kilowatt (kW) solar photovoltaic (PV) system on the roof of its manufacturing facility.

“We are committed to doing our part by controlling the usage of resources in our manufacturing processes,” Williams said. “Our decision to go solar directly reflects our company values by actively promoting sustainability through the efficient use of clean, renewable resources.”

The company's new rooftop solar photovoltaic (PV) system will generate 127,000 kilowatt-hours of power per year and will cover 100 percent of the manufacturing facility's energy needs.

“We’re environmentally conscious and it reduces greenhouse gases,” said Williams. “The government incentives make it sensible to do and it adds economic value to the building.”

Williams said while the solar system will generate 100 percent of annual energy usage “we don’t go off the grid. In the summer we’ll over generate. In the winter we’ll generate some but not everything we use. But we’ll generate as much as we use over a 12-month period. That’s what it’s designed to do.”

The system is designed to generate power for a 20,000 square foot building.

The company utilized a 30 percent federal tax credit and the Eversource Zero Emission Renewable Energy Credit (ZREC) program, Williams said.

D.R. Templeman serves a wide range of industries including medical devices, electronic devices and switches, security and fire protection devices, and hardware and tools.

“Our decision to go solar directly reflects our company values by actively promoting sustainability through the efficient use of clean, renewable resources.”
Raging rivers ripped away the heart of downtown from Winsted some 60 years ago. Now town officials now are banking on them to give something back.

By making the natural beauty of the rivers a focal point of a revitalization plan, the town is hoping to attract more businesses and visitors to a downtown ravaged by the Flood of 1955. Officials are reviewing existing zoning regulations and developing new ones to ensure they meet the needs of the downtown plan and encourage foot traffic.

A recent study by the Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce concluded that the town “has the infrastructure and assets to become a very vibrant downtown and destination in Northwest Connecticut.”

The study also recommended the hiring of an economic development consultant and town recently allocated funds to do just that. The consultant was hired this past summer and, among other duties, will assist in applying for Small Town Economic Assistance Program grants, meet with merchants, promote real estate opportunities in town and help implement recommendations of economic development studies the town has commissioned.

The consultant, Craig Stevenson, told officials that the rivers and historic mill buildings are tremendous assets and building blocks for the town’s vision.

“I think the thing that you have going for you here, that a lot of towns don’t have, is all of those mill buildings are all right on the river,” Stevenson said. “They all have waterfront views. It needs to be manicured and taken care of a little bit, but that’s a huge advantage.”

Community engagement has also been enhanced with the return of police foot patrols to the downtown. Newly hired Chief William Fitzgerald implemented the foot patrols as a way for the town to connect with merchants and meet face-to-face with the public.

A museum founded by one of the town’s most famed residents, consumer advocate and former presidential candidate Ralph Nader, is set to open this fall on Main Street. Nader hopes the American Museum of Tort Reform will be “a major educational opportunity and tourist destination” in town.

The improvements are intended to bring back to Main Street what the flooding of the Mad and Still Rivers dramatically changed six decades ago. About 170 of 200 businesses were destroyed and Main Street – once a busy hub of commerce – was torn apart. In rebuilding, the state installed a four-lane highway through the downtown.

“I guess you might say that what the flood has done, is it’s brought a major highway right up our Main Street. And the traffic doesn’t slow down,” Town Historian Milly Hudak said. “I would like to see it slow down, so the merchants on Main Street are patronized.”
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Downtown Reimagined**

Bethel aims to make train station center of activity

Bethel is moving forward with plans to make its train station the centerpiece of a vibrant new district that will offer something for everyone.

Taking advantage of the lifestyle changes of empty nesters who want to downsize and live affordably near more services and the “millenials” who gravitate toward transportation hubs and city lights, the town is working to encourage more transit-oriented development around its downtown station.

More and more professionals are choosing convenience over suburbs, said First Selectman Matt Knickerbocker. Millennials, he said, “want to be in the middle of it all.”

The vision is to transform the 133 acres surrounding the station into a vibrant mixed-use development district – from old warehouses and factories to shops, attractions, and housing.

Planning Director Steven Palmer said integrating the station into the historic downtown is the key to attracting more people and ultimately more commerce.

“We can help strengthen the businesses that exist there today while attracting new businesses to the area,” Palmer said.

The town is using a $100,000 state grant to conduct a study and help develop the plan. Officials say reviewing and changing zoning regulations will allow development of projects that will conform to the historic downtown. The study is expected to be completed this year.

Economic Development Director Janice Chrzescijanek said the study is building on earlier efforts that provided a concept of a reimagined downtown. This new study will fine tune those concepts, giving officials a better definition of architectural considerations and the type of density mix and public spaces best suited to complement the existing buildings.

First Selectman Knickerbocker said public input will help inform the process every step of the way.

“We want to hold several public hearings on the proposal to discuss the vision and see what it is that the people of Bethel want,” Knickerbocker said.

**First Impressions**

Putnam putting best foot forward with beautification projects

Putnam officials believe that first impressions count -- and they are targeting two of the main entries to their historic downtown by beautifying a pair of bridges. Plans are underway to enhance the appearance of a railroad trestle near the Bradley Playhouse, as well as a town bridge. Both spans are near the antique shops, art galleries, boutiques, and restaurants that are making Putnam’s downtown area a regional destination for visitors.

Economic and Community Development Director Delpha Very said the railroad trestle has been an area of concern for some time, so the town and the Putnam Business Association worked together on a plan for an aluminum track sign system on the trestle which would hold a sign welcoming visitors to Putnam and cover the graffiti and rust on the trestle. The town hopes to have the sign in place within six months.

A flower bridge has been proposed for the town bridge by Mayor Tony Falzarano, which would require an automatic watering system for the flowers. Again, the town is teaming up with the Putnam Business Association to identify an economical watering system for the flowers and recruit volunteers to maintain the bridge.

Falzarano said he believes both projects are important as Putnam works to build its reputation as a destination location in the tri-state region.

“The first impression is what sticks with people,” he said.

Town Administrator Douglas Cutler added that towns trying to attract visitors and promote tourism need to think about beautification opportunities.

“Beautification efforts represent a huge component of trying to attract people to your town,” Cutler said.
Always Thinking

Bristol hopes seed money will grow new business

Bristol says it is serious about economic development – and it is talking the talk, walking the walk, and yes, putting its money where its mouth is.

The city recently announced a new program – “StartUp Bristol” – that will give new and emerging businesses a chance to obtain a municipal grant to help their new companies achieve lift-off. Designed to encourage out of the box ideas from businesses that are willing to call Bristol home, the grant program offers $15,000 to help new companies turn innovative concepts into reality.

“We want to do a competition that is Bristol-focused,” said Justin Malley, the city’s economic development director. “It’s an opportunity to try to get our hooks into an emerging company.”

Officials point out that successful companies like Yarde Metals and ESPN started off as unique ideas that saw dramatic growth after being given the chance. Malley said there are no restrictions on the type of business that can apply for the grants, except that they must be new companies willing to operate in Bristol if selected.

Mayor Ken Cockayne lauded Malley for “always thinking,” and called the grant program “a way to encourage growth in Bristol.”

Malley said he is not aware of any municipalities in the state that are offering a similar program. The program is unique in that it accepts greater risk in the underwriting of the applicants’ financials in order to try to find that “diamond in the rough.”

The grant money can be used for rent, buying property or equipment, and other purposes. A business awarded a grant must establish a location in Bristol within six months of receiving the money and would have to stay at least three years.

Malley said the competition will achieve the twin goals of marketing the city and identifying new businesses that have the potential to be “the next best thing” in Bristol.

Buying Local

Wethersfield hoping residents will ‘Woogle’ their way to local merchants

Buy local – that’s the mantra of Wethersfield’s newest online initiative. To help promote the nearly 400 businesses in Wethersfield, the town has added a new online directory to its website.

The directory is similar to the Yellow Pages but is all Wethersfield when it comes to its name. Dubbed “Woogle” not Google, the “W” is for Wethersfield. It allows users to surf a database by entering key words, such as “restaurant” or “insurance” and then produces a list of options, including the merchant’s address, phone number, and website. The intent is to turn those virtual visits into an increasing number of actual customers walking into Wethersfield stores.

Best of all, the price is really right for merchants to list with “Woogle.” It costs nothing to have their businesses included in the searchable database.

Economic Development and Improvement Commission Chairman Mark Trahan called it a win-win for everyone.

“You have free publicity for the businesses and also a great service to the town,” Trahan said.

To really hit home and encourage awareness of buying local, the town locked into the URL “shop-wethersfield.biz” that takes users to the landing page of the “Woogle” search tool. Consumers can choose to view the entire list in batches of 10, 25, 50, or even 100 businesses on a page at a time.

“It kind of goes back to our shop local initiative, to improve awareness,” said Planning and Economic Development Director Peter Gillespie said. “Hopefully, it provides additional customers to these businesses.”

Officials say there was little cost in creating the site, which will continue to be tweaked to ensure all the listings are up to date. So far, however, Wethersfield merchants like what they see.

Businesses, said Trahan, “are very content with it. It’s been very good so far.”
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**History Reborn**

Torrington brownfields have a story to tell

Torrington officials hope to tell the story of the city’s rich industrial past through the rebirth and redevelopment of its former factory and mill sites.

Building on the momentum of $1.4 million in federal and state grants in 2014 for its brownfield reclamation program, the city recently played host to a symposium that covered everything from best practices to financial strategies for turning what once drove the local economy back into engines of commerce.

Dubbed “Where There’s A Mill There’s A Way,” the symposium was organized by the Torrington Historic Preservation Trust and brought together state, local, and federal experts on brownfield redevelopment, as well as realtors, property owners, and developers.

“The preservation trust wanted to do something that was more proactive as far as finding ways to reuse old industrial buildings, mills, and factories,” Trust Treasurer Mark McEachern said. “It is clear we are advocates for that position, but we wanted to understand more clearly what was involved with it and come up with positive ideas that people could use to do this.”

The city has a brownfield committee comprised of citizens and town hall staff charged with updating the inventory of potential brownfield properties and prioritizing eligible sites. The city’s federally funded revolving loan program offers below-market rate loans to help with the cost of remediation, allowing the city to provide incentives to interested developers.

“In most cases when an owner wants to revitalize a facility, there is usually a funding gap — meaning the amount of income that will come in won’t pay for the renovations,” McEachern said. “There are grants and other financial incentives that will help bridge that gap.”

Symposium panelist Kent Schwen-dy, CEO of the non-profit Corporation for Independent Living, told the audience to take a holistic approach and view the old properties not as a stand-alone building but as part of the community.

“Everybody has a story about the old mill in their town,” Schwendy said. “You have to tie people to the past to bring them to the future.”

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**No Less Than 10%**

Fairfield lands first transit-oriented development park

Lauded in a major regional study for making key zoning changes to accommodate transit-oriented development, the town of Fairfield is making good on those efforts.

The Town Plan and Zoning Commission recently approved plans for Fairfield’s first Transit Oriented Development Park, a five-story building on Commerce Drive near the Metro-North Station. The 2.5 acre development will provide a mix of residential and retail units, a fitness center, a barbecue grill and fireplace area, and other amenities.

It was the residential part of the equation, particularly the affordable housing component, that town officials stressed to the developer was essential.

New regulations that Fairfield adopted in 2011 require that “no less than 10 percent” of units must be affordable units. The developer had planned to designate 10 of the 101 proposed residential units as affordable. But the Commission pressed for 11 affordable units and had specific language to back it up.

When the Commission adopted the ordinance in 2011, the “no less than 10 percent was a huge factor in our decision,” TPZ Chairman Matthew Wagner explained.

The developer did agree to set aside 11 units and the commission unanimously and enthusiastically approved the application. There also was no opposition at a public hearing.

“I think it’s exactly the kind of building we’re looking for,” TPZ Commissioner Patricia Jacobson said. “I think it will be a nice addition to the neighborhood.”

The residential segment will consist of 73 one-bedroom units, 24 two-bedroom units and four studios, which will occupy a building that formerly housed a fitness center.

In 2013, the Regional Plan Association conducted a nine-month study of the 42 communities along the Metro-North New Haven Line to determine how they were tailoring their zoning laws to promote transit-friendly development. More than half the towns had made key zoning changes and Fairfield was among them. In addition to adopting affordable housing criteria, Fairfield also loosened parking requirements in areas where developers could incorporate amenities for bicycles and pedestrians.

TPZ Commissioner Anthony Calabrese said the new Commerce Drive project is “exactly what we need as a town.”
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Phase One
Regional partnership helps fuel progress of Putnam tech park

One technical park, one host town, and three additional partner towns are adding up to a recipe for success in the Quiet Corner.

The town of Putnam has been making great strides with the first phase of its Regional Technical Park, readying it for tenants while keeping an eye on future development opportunities. The $7.7 million project got a huge boost this summer when it was awarded federal grants and loans totaling more than $900,000 for sewer and water work.

The nearby towns of Brooklyn, Pomfret, and Scotland each bought shares in the project and will benefit from tax relief from Phase One of the 62-acre park. The partnership also includes an advisory committee composed of members from each town.

Any expansion of the current footprint would require negotiations with abutting property owners, something Putnam officials say they have been prepared to do all along.

The Regional YMCA will be among the first tenants and will encompass 15 acres for the building and fields. It is scheduled to open in early 2016. Four more lots are available for phase one development and are undergoing appraisal in order to market them to prospective customers. Economic development officials say the town has been fielding strong interest on the four lots.

“We want to make sure when someone comes looking we have a lot for them,” Putnam Town Administrator Douglas Cutler said. “With economic development, the last thing you want is to not have a ready-made lot when someone has interest in your community.”

The Phase One partners certainly have interest in how the project is proceeding and so far, they like what they see. Brooklyn First Selectman Rick Ives is impressed with the pace of progress.

“We feel good about where everything is,” Ives said. “If they want to talk about having partners for phase two we might be interested in that as well.”
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Extreme Makeover

Madison celebrates major downtown development project

Hailed as one of the most significant initiatives in a century for this shoreline community, the town of Madison has broken ground on a major economic development project that will transform the look of its downtown with an attractive and walkable town center.

The recent groundbreaking of the “Madison Center Project” brought in dignitaries from near and far, including the Governor, state legislators, and members of Congress. The moment the ceremonial shovels hit the ground it represented thousands of hours put in by volunteers and town staff.

“For the first time in over 100 years the Town of Madison is making a significant financial investment in our main street,” said Economic Development Commission Chairman Ryan Duques. “It is my hope that this project, and our commitment to businesses in Madison, acts a catalyst for future growth and investment and new job creation.”

Planning for the project began 13 years ago and the final tab is projected at $3.4 million. The town used a combination of state and federal grants to fund the project, which is broken down in two phases. Most of the phase I work is expected to be completed by mid-November. In preparation, the town installed the utility infrastructure in 2012. A downtown Web cam will allow the public to watch the project unfold step by step.

The makeover includes:
- Clay brick paver sidewalks, crosswalks, and aprons
- Granite curbing
- Tree plantings with cast iron tree grates
- Irrigation system for street and median plantings
- Decorative LED luminaire streetlights with banner arms
- Decorative pedestrian walk signals
- Historic replica street signs
- Bicycle racks within sidewalks

“This project will ensure that downtown Madison is enjoyed by visitors and that it is something we are proud of as residents and business owners,” Duques said.

In Transit

Branford creating a new village from an old factory

Location is everything and officials in Branford are confident that a proposed residential development certainly has the “where” to succeed.

The “what” is the town’s first Transit Oriented Development that will ultimately transform a shuttered wire factory into a vibrant neighborhood with access to the train station, town center, and the shoreline. The “who” would be the mix of young professionals seeking easy access to transportation and Baby Boomers looking to downsize and live in a neighborhood with all the conveniences.

“People who live there can take the train to work to New Haven, or go to the city for the weekend, or invite friends from out of town to the area that will have hopefully some new restaurants and attractions,” Branford Town Planner Harry Smith said. “We’re excited and hope it will start additional development.”

The proposed “Atlantic Wharf” development would create a new 7.5-acre village. It received approval from the town Planning and Zoning Board in February and when completed it will be a mixed-use property with about 200 residential units as well as restaurants, retail, and office space, Smith said.

The site was the former Atlantic Wire company that opened in 1908 and was shuttered in 2008. Since then, a portion of the complex has been used as storage. A local windows manufacturer purchased the property in 2010 and a year later received approval from the P&Z to warehouse his products there.

The development will feature a walking trail that will connect to an expanded Shoreline Greenway Trail, which will stretch from Lighthouse Point in New Haven to Hammonassett State Park in Madison. Developers say the Branford project will have a quintessential New England shoreline character.

The town is working with a developer who has brought similar transit-oriented projects online in Connecticut, including a 400-residential unit development in Milford that capitalized on the proximity of the train station, the town Green, and the waterfront.
After The Bell
Norwalk’s program fills a need

A new after-school program in Norwalk is doing more than just keeping kids busy when classes let out. It’s also creating a much-needed sense of community.

The “After the Bell” program provides academic and enrichment activities for more than 60 children in South Norwalk. Because there is no elementary school in that neighborhood, students are bused to eight schools around the city.

A collaboration of the Norwalk Public Schools and the South Norwalk Community Center, the program was created to help those families whose children – in kindergarten through fifth-grade – can’t participate in their own school’s after-school activities.

“This is their first sense of coming together as a community,” said Kelly Robertson, executive director of South Norwalk Community Center. “Some of the students don’t know each other but they live in the same area. It’s nice that they get an opportunity to play with each other and meet each other in their own setting.”

There currently are two classrooms and a library and because of such high demand, program organizers say plans are underway to add a third classroom. Initially, 120 families applied and 62 students were selected through a lottery.

Catalyst For Improvement
“Virtual” desktops add up to real savings in Wilton

For Wilton Public Schools, the move toward using more virtual desktops could add up to real savings.

Schools Superintendent Kevin Smith explains that the district will not have to constantly replace outdated and out-of-warranty equipment and instead can extend the life of existing equipment up to five years.

The changeover begins with a pilot program of 80 virtual desktop machines that users can test out on different types of devices. Smith said the goal is to build a more “mobile, ready access” system and move away from large numbers of desktop computers. The virtual desktops can be accessed on any computer with an Internet connection.

The virtual desktops are among a number of cost-saving upgrades that the district is pursuing. The budget includes more than $820,000 for technology this school year.

Administrators note that bandwidth must also be significantly increased to accommodate the proliferation of mobile devices that now access the network. An estimated 3,000 wireless devices from the high school and middle school connect daily to the network – nearly triple the number from three years ago.

The upgrades will also allow the district to enhance an outdated phone system by switching to Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) technology, essentially phone service over the Internet.

In a recent report to the Board of Education, school administrators said the planned projects are part of the overall “vision for technology” designed to enhance and improve teaching and learning.

Smith, who is in his first year as Wilton superintendent, says the use of technology allows students to “stretch their learning as far as possible.”

“Technology, in my mind, is really one of the primary catalysts for improving instruction across the system,” Smith said.
**Energy**

**Burning Bright**

Woodbridge solar challenge nears record

What started out as a challenge to encourage more energy efficiency among Woodbridge residents has exceeded expectations. The town is now on the verge of breaking a record since the Solar Challenge began in the state in 2013.

Municipalities can earn free solar arrays depending on how many kilowatts of solar are installed. Woodbridge has already earned a free 5kW solar array for municipal use and now stands to gain a free 7kW solar array when the program ends on December 31. It would be the largest free solar array awarded through the statewide challenge initiative.

According to Solarize Connecticut, the average residential solar system in Connecticut is approximately 7 kW and produces about 8,400 kWh per year.

First Selectman Ellen Scalettar created an ad hoc Energy Advisory Task Force to help oversee the challenge and praised members for their effective implementation of the program that will ultimately help to maximize its use of clean energy.

“I am so glad that Woodbridge residents are taking advantage of this program to educate themselves about solar and to go green,” Scalettar said.

About 25 Woodbridge residents had signed contracts with the town’s vendor for 220 kW of new solar installations through October and 60 more households were considering it. There was an opportunity to add to that when the town hosted a final workshop in November. Woodbridge would get the free solar array if interest reaches 250kW before the end of the year.

Solar Challenge officials say the town’s response speaks volumes about its commitment to a cleaner environment and renewable energy.

“The Challenge has achieved significant results, more than doubling the amount of solar in Woodbridge in 24 weeks compared to installations over the previous seven years,” said CT Solar Challenge Director Maggie Treichel.

**Cow Power**

Manure to help keep the lights on in Putnam

Got milk? Then you could have electricity.

That’s what Putnam officials are working on this year to bring a new alternative power source online. They plan to plug into an anaerobic digestion plant that will be located on a 900-head dairy farm in nearby Woodstock.

Fairvue Farms, one of six members of The Farmer’s Cow, a Connecticut dairy cooperative, has been working for years on plans to generate its own electricity. The anaerobic digester has the capacity to power up the farm and then some. The process decomposes organic waste, turning ammonia and methane into electricity. The residue can be used for fertilizer. Because the entire process is in a closed container, any odors are largely eliminated. The process could produce as much as 40 times the 50 kilowatts of electricity the farm needs.

Cutler says Putnam is exploring all options, including the possibility of the school district saving some money on energy costs.
Connecting The (Open Space) Dots
Cheshire creates a greenway with latest land acquisition

The grass is always greener on the other side -- and that’s especially true in Cheshire where the town recently added more than 100 acres of open space to its inventory of preserved land with the help of a state grant that paid for half the purchase of a piece that is connecting all the dots.

The 109-acre Pulaski property, named for the owners of the expanse, is a mountainous, ridgeline parcel that borders other stretches of land already permanently protected, creating a greenway in the western part of town along the Cheshire-Prospect town line.

“There’s a lot of preserved open space up there,” said Town Council Chairman Tim Slocum. “A key objective in obtaining the property is that it extends what we already have up on the ridge.”

The property is home to diverse wildlife, forest lands, and wetlands and it is adjacent to the Roaring Brook open space property to the south and another preserved parcel to the north.

The land’s rocky terrain -- which includes cliff and ledge -- hindered its development but Slocum said three houses still occupy the property and they feature some period pieces like an old stone-lined pond built by the Pulaskis or their predecessors.

The Quinnipiac Trail, part of Connecticut’s blue-blazed trail system, runs along the top of the ridge. Slocum said the town may add other trails in the future, an option made possible by the purchase of this parcel which creates a line of open space properties running along the town’s western border.

The town recently placed an information kiosk near the property to tell the property’s story, according to Slocum who said the town also wants to create a similar green belt in the eastern part of town.

Leading The Way
Torrington school goes green, saves money

When the Forbes elementary school in Torrington recently celebrated the unveiling of an installation of rooftop solar panels, school officials used the occasion as a learning experience for both students and adults alike.

Principal Joanne Creedon kicked off the program by welcoming the students, parents, and teachers to the event and then -- for the benefit of young and old -- explained how solar panels work.

Several speakers, including Interim Superintendent Lynda Reitman, offered their perspectives on the project. “I am very proud that the Torrington public schools is leading the way in helping to save the planet in our own little way,” Reitman said.

Each grade at the school then offered their own group presentation and interpretation through songs, rhyme, rap, and poems about the sun and solar energy before an attentive and approving audience.

The new solar array will provide about 72,000 kilowatt hours per year — a quarter of the electricity used by the school each year -- while the cost of the solar installation will be recovered in less than four years.

“If you’re doing a replacement to a system, or you’re doing an update to it, it makes a lot of financial sense, because long-term your payback is very quick, and your ability to regain energy for the citizens of the town, and the cost for the taxpayers in town, is significant,” said Board of Education member Daniel Thibault.

The panels were constructed as part of an energy efficiency upgrade at Forbes School, according to Thibault, which also included energy efficient replacement lighting in both the school and in the parking lot.
ENVIRONMENT

Preventing An Invasion

Voluntary boat inspection program aims to keep out invasive species

If the boats on Candlewood Lake in Brookfield look shiny and bright, it may be the result of a new, first-in-the-state, voluntary boat inspection and decontamination pilot program that aims to prevent the spread of invasive species into the lake.

“We’re trying to prevent the introduction of invasive species from boats and trailers from other water bodies,” said First Selectman Bill Tinsley. Tinsley said the greatest risk to Candlewood Lake is from zebra mussels, which -- so far -- have been kept out of the lake.

The voluntary inspection and decontamination program is a cooperative effort between Brookfield, the Candlewood Lake Authority (CLA), and the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. The program will run between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

Town officials and leaders of the CLA recently kicked off the initiative by gathering in Brookfield for a demonstration of the correct way to wash a boat.

During the boat-washing demonstration, officials were shown how to operate a Landa decontamination machine, which is a hot-water, high-pressure washer that filters the water it uses and collects.

To pass the inspection, boats need to be clean, drained, and dry. Boats that fail to pass inspection can be decontaminated for free using the Landa machine, which was purchased by the town. It takes about 20 minutes to decontaminate a boat and several minutes to complete the inspection, which includes looking to see if any invasive species are visible.

A questionnaire about where the boat has been and where it is housed is included in the inspection so lake officials can flag boats that are coming from water bodies that already have invasive species.

Brookfield’s decontamination unit may be used by boaters from other launches and the unit is also portable, so it can be deployed to other boating locations. For example, Tinsley said he hopes to use it at a fishing tournament this summer.

CLA Executive Director Larry Marsicano said a boat inspection program has been a goal of the CLA, but the costs of the program prevented it from moving forward. Marsicano credited Brookfield’s leadership for taking on that responsibility.

“I think it’s very exciting,” Marsicano said. “It’s very progressive on the first selectman’s part.”

Candlewood Lake covers more than 5,000 acres and has more than 60 miles of shoreline.

Down On Triple Creek

New Milford adds farmland

New Milford has added to its inventory of preserved farmland by acquiring the development rights to the Triple Creek Farm. The property is a prized acquisition that will preserve 53 acres of a local farm, including the farmhouse, barn, hay fields, and woods that comprise most of the property.

The farm’s owner Arthur Patterson said he offered to sell development rights to the land after a neighboring farm sold its development rights in 2011.

“Preserving this property is close to our hearts,” Patterson said. “I had an interest in doing this since the Harris Farm was working out its deal (to sell development rights of more than 80 acres).”

Steven Kleppin, chairman of the Farmland Preservation Committee, said the acreage has great strategic value and was targeted in the town’s Plan of Conservation & Development for preservation.

“It’s the southern link to a lot of land preserved in Roxbury and it dovetails nicely with the Harris property,” Kleppin said. “The area was targeted for farmland preservation in our C&D Plan, so we’re glad we’ve added this farm to our list of preserved properties.”

Mayor Pat Murphy called the addition of Triple Creek Farm exciting.

“It fits in well with our goal because of its prime soils,” she said. “It will support healthy crop growth and continued clean water into the future.”

Triple Creek Farm’s primary crop is hay. Patterson and his wife will continue to live on the farm, which they will continue to own.

The 53 acres bring the Farmland Preservation Committee one-quarter of the way to its goal of preserving 1,200 acres of farmland in this area of town. It is the third largest tract of farmland preserved since 2010 on Ridge Road including 93 acres in 2010, 80 acres in 2011, and 53 acres in 2015.
Bloomwatch
New Milford lifeguards kept eye on Candlewood Lake clarity

New Milford lifeguards helped the town clear up concerns about potentially toxic algae growth in popular Candlewood Lake this summer. Specifically, they checked to see if there were any algae blooms near the beaches.

For the past three decades, tests confirming the presence of blue-green algae blooms were done from water taken in the deepest part of the lake. But this past summer, lifeguards at the five town beaches sampled water in shallower areas where the beachgoers congregate.

“We continue to do testing for bacteria levels,” said New Milford Health Director Michael Crespan said. “The testing for water clarity at the beach is a good tool for us.”

The process tells health officials that if the water is murky, there may have been too much algae growing. Crespan said any blue-green algae detected near the beaches served as an early warning system for health departments.

Environmentalists say blue-green algae blooms are not new and are found in many lakes but high levels may be a health hazard to humans and animals. The algae releases toxins that can irritate the skin, eyes and nose and could cause liver damage if ingested in large amounts.

Town lifeguards used a fairly simple test and one that has been around for nearly 150 years. Town lifeguards used a fairly simple test and one that has been around for nearly 150 years. Testers lowered special disks, about 12-inches in diameter, into the water. The disks have alternating black and white patterns on each quarter. As they were lowered into the water on a rope or rod, the lifeguards would record the depth when they could no longer see the disk.

Candlewood Lake Authority officials say volunteers who live around the lake also use the disks to test the clarity. The information is made public through the Authority’s online postings.
The town of East Haddam has expanded opportunities for passive recreation while preserving a substantial amount of open space in the watersheds of the Connecticut and Eightmile Rivers.

The town partnered with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in the recent acquisition of two parcels totaling 130 acres of forest and wetlands.

The town will own and manage a 20-acre parcel that was the subject of a March 2015 referendum in which residents approved the acquisition. The town and TNC jointly applied for a state open space grant and received just under $80,000 toward the $127,000 purchase price.

A second and much larger parcel of 113 acres will connect the popular Devil's Hopyard State Park with the Burnham Brook Preserve. A state open space grant of $263,700 was awarded toward the purchase. This stretch of open space will be owned and managed jointly by the town and TNC.

The open space acquisition will provide a rich habitat that supports a multitude of wildlife – migratory birds, brook trout and other animals. Outdoor enthusiasts will have more opportunities to fish, hike and birdwatch now and for generations to come.

“These acquisitions were possible only because of the patience and commitment of willing land owners and of the conservation partners who played a role,” said Sarah Pellegrino land protection and strategies manager for the TNC. “We’re extremely pleased both of these properties will remain as natural areas.”

Town officials say citizens have shown an overwhelming support for open space preservation. Past referendums have passed by an average of 3-to-1 and the town continues to expand its open space inventory with the two newest additions. In 2014, the town won its largest-ever grant open space grant, $487,500 that went toward the purchase of a 207-acre parcel.
Litchfield has established a committee that will evaluate schools and town government buildings and develop a long-term plan for their most efficient use. The new Town Facilities Commission, an evolution of the former Town Hall Building Committee with an expanded charge, will “take a look at all the buildings we have and take a look at what we could or should do with the current facilities,” said First Selectman Leo Paul Jr. The committee will evaluate the most efficient use of the buildings and estimate costs for code compliance, maintenance, renovations, and new uses over the next 20 years. The scope of the review will include the Town Hall, the Town Hall Annex, the Litchfield Center School, Litchfield Intermediate School and Litchfield High School. The committee will weigh factors that include school enrollment projections and the opening of a new county courthouse in Torrington next year which will free up space in the Town Hall Annex. The committee will also utilize data from the town’s energy task force on recommendations forenergy efficiency in town buildings. “A lot of that data can flow into this,” Paul said. “I highly support it.” The committee includes one member from the boards of selectmen, education and finance and eight residents. An architect and design committee will also be provided and the hope is to get a report back to the town in 9 to 12 months. “It’s a pretty detailed study that we’d like to get moving,” said Paul.

The town of Plainfield has given a resounding “yes” to the future of farming. By a unanimous vote at a recent town meeting, the town approved the creation of an Agriculture Commission to serve in an advisory and educational capacity to the town. As a result, Plainfield joins a growing number of towns in Windham County to create an Ag Commission. Fourth generation farmer Dan Kapszukiewics said the committee was “long-overdue.” He and his wife, Jennie, helped spearhead the local effort to create the commission. Supporters had taken to Facebook to help get the word out and the large crowd that turned out for the vote indicated they got the message loud and clear.

Town officials say they recognize that increasing numbers of families are opting for locally grown products and the new five-member commission can help foster more opportunities for farming. Members would serve as a liaison between town boards and commissions and offer advice on legislative matters. The main mission is to serve as an educational and outreach source by supporting local 4-H groups. Members would be appointed by the selectmen and serve staggered two- and three-year terms. “This commission would be an educational tool, promoting open space and promoting a positive agenda,” First Selectman Paul Sweet said. “It’s not a regulatory authority.” Jennie Kapszukiewics says she is looking forward to more farm-based community events and more participation in farmers markets. “There are about 4,000 farms in Connecticut, half of which are less than 50 acres — niche farms that cater to the wants and needs of their consumers,” she said. “People want to know where their food comes from. They want to meet the farmers and in some cases even see the animals.”
Flying High

Municipally-owned airport reaps benefits for town

Plainville’s purchase of the oldest airport in the state has turned out to be a bargain. Robertson Field, opened in 1911, has long been a mainstay in town -- John H. Trumbull, a Plainville native and Connecticut’s Governor from 1925 to 1931, used the airfield enough to be dubbed “The Flying Governor.” Private owners renovated and expanded the runway in 1990.

In 2009 after the private owners of the airport offered the town the right of first refusal on its purchase, the Plainville town council conducted a feasibility study. Soon after getting the results, it was “wheels up” on the purchase.

“The Town Council felt it was important to keep the airport operating,” said Town Manager Robert E. Lee. “The feasibility study determined that the airport would generate enough revenue to support itself and that’s been the case every year.”

The airport generates enough revenue to cover the loss of property taxes previously paid by the private owner and then some. After all expenses, the airport is still earning a modest profit for the town. Most of the revenue comes from rent paid by Interstate Aviation, a private company which operates four hangers for 40 planes owned by individuals and 15 of its own planes that it leases.

The price tag for Plainville was only $100,000, with the remainder of the $7.7 million purchase covered by state and federal funding. Lee explained that the state and federal financial help was provided to make sure the airport would remain open. “If it was closed for general aviation, small planes would go to larger airports, and they want to keep the planes out of larger airports because they interfere with big planes,” Lee said.

The town has made a number of improvements since getting into the flying business. The runway was repaved two years ago and pilot-controlled lighting and precision markings on the runway were added. Currently, rehabilitation of the taxi way and main ramp is being completed and an instrument approach facility that assists planes flying in inclement weather is being implemented.

In addition to the jobs and revenue that Robertson Field provides to Plainville, the airport also hosts events like the annual “Fly In and Classic Car Show” that have become favorites of area residents and help to support and enrich the community.

This year’s event will be held in June and will feature more than 500 classic cars and antique airplanes driving and flying into town as well as airplane and helicopter rides, aviation experts and demonstrations, face painting, kiddie rides, bounce houses, live music, and food. The event raises funds for the Plainville Food Pantry and The Petit Family Foundation.

Survey Says

Simsbury survey shows it’s not just location, location, location

When the town of Simsbury took the pulse of its people, it learned among other things that the “what” is more important than the “where.”

Respondents of a recent survey indicated that the programs and events at a new senior center would be more important than the location. The current center needs more parking and upgraded handicapped access. The Board of Selectman voted this spring to consider a new site near the Simsbury Meadows Arts Center and wanted to poll residents on their thoughts.

Of the 400 residents who took the survey, 69.3 percent said location is important, but 78 percent gave programming and activities in the new center a higher priority.

“The end game is not a specific building or what it looks like. The end game is meeting the needs of our seniors,” First Selectman Lisa Heavner said.

Among the top priorities in the survey were open space preservation and creating more pedestrian/bicycle friendly areas. Respondents also gave the town a high rating for pursuing those initiatives. Simsbury’s emergency services, library, and parks and recreation also received high ratings in the survey.

Nearly 98 percent of the respondents gave the town a high rating for quality of life, showing a 10 percent increase in the number of citizens who rated the town “excellent” in 2008.

“These results give us some good insight into where we should be focusing our efforts in the future,” Selectman Sean Askham said.

For the full results of the survey please click http://www.simsbury-ct.gov under “Quick Links.”
How Dry We Were
Bridgewater paving the way for restaurants

Shedding its distinction as the last dry town in Connecticut in 2014, Bridgewater has now begun building on the opportunities that the historic vote ushered in. Specifically, the town is revisiting its zoning regulations to now allow restaurants, inns, and other establishments that can sell alcohol.

By a vote of nearly 3-to-1 last year, residents overwhelmingly voted in favor of ending a 79-year alcohol ban. But the town of 1,700 had no ordinances at the time that would allow for restaurants. That is all changing.

With the same high interest – a standing room only crowd at a recent Planning and Zoning meeting – officials approved regulations to allow restaurants and bed-and-breakfasts in a commercial zone by special permit.

Supporters call it a quality of life issue, saying it would help revitalize the town and attract more young families. First Selectman Curtis Read said restaurants would “give us a gathering place to get together and enjoy life.”

The revised ordinances will help the town direct the type of development that will fit into the fabric of the small town. Some residents voiced concern over the environmental impact of new establishments, but Read explained that the health department will require that a restaurant owner prove there is enough water and septic capacity to operate. Other ordinances will dictate signage requirements and noise levels.

Officials say the Planning and Zoning Commission will be deliberate and thoughtful in deciding the special permits. P&Z Chairwoman Jean Bandler said the permit process will also include a public hearing.

“It is a stringent look and it also is a look that has to be fair,” Bandler said.

Taking Stock
New Seymour committee evaluating town buildings

In an effort to ensure that municipal buildings get long-term TLC, the town of Seymour has created an advisory committee charged with creating a 10-year plan of action on the upkeep and use of the buildings.

The new Permanent Building Committee will evaluate Town Hall, the library, community center, police and fire departments, all five schools, and other municipal buildings to prioritize what updates and changes can be made. Officials say the committee’s work will allow the town to be more proactive than reactive with building issues.

The committee will evaluate with an eye toward energy efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Six residents, chosen by First Selectman Kurt Miller, make up the committee. Their early work has been to map out the process for evaluating buildings. The committee will meet twice a month at different town buildings to conduct walk-throughs. Some of their initial recommendations to the Board of Selectman may include hiring a contractor to thoroughly inspect the buildings in order to compile a detailed report on the work to be done.

Rising to the top of the list already are the library and community center for their immediate needs.

Committee member Alex Danka suggested the community center be evaluated for its potential to house town departments in a central location as part of the town’s long-term consolidation plan. Public Works Director Tony Caserta mentioned a new boiler for the center and a new roof for the library.

First Selectman Miller said the committee will start with town needs and then move to what the town wants. Ultimately, the committee will help the board create a 10-year strategic plan intended to be continually updated with the town goals.
**GOVERNANCE**

**Bigger And Better**

Griswold town departments move to new space, save money, and expand programs

Starting in June, Griswold’s Youth and Family Services and the Park and Recreation Department will have a new base of operations in the old Ashland Mill on Ashland Street. By moving the two town agencies into a town-owned building, the town of Griswold will save money on rent, expand services, and reach more residents with its programs. What’s not to like? According to local officials, “nothing.”

“This has been a long time coming,” Youth and Family Services Director Ryan Aubin said. “The move is only a few streets away, but it will make a huge difference for the staff and children.”

The department’s current location shares space with state troopers, the College Flea Market, and several local businesses. The rear of the property, a muddy field close to railroad tracks, is too dangerous for children to play outside so all activities have had to be held indoors.

Aubin said the new location will have “plenty of outdoor space,” noting that the new location is adjacent to the Ashland Mill Bridge and Veteran’s Memorial Park, where most of the department’s events already take place.

“I think there will be more kids coming because parents will be more comfortable with the area,” he said. “It’s probably one of the nicest areas in the city and now we’re in it.”

Once they are in the new space, more recreational programs will be added and enrollment in the youth center will increase. “We’re going to offer all of the programs we already do, as well as outdoor leagues,” he said.

Staff member Elizabeth Bentley has been working for the center for 14 years.

“It’s been a dream of ours,” Bentley said. “We’re really excited about the outdoor space, and excited about having our own building.”

The department’s move also has financial benefits for the town. The town spent $12,000 annually on rent in its current location – funds that soon will be able to be appropriated for other services.

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**In The Zone**

Brooklyn zoning crackdown cleans up business route

What a difference a day makes.

When the town of Brooklyn decided to enlist the help of a veteran zoning officer one day a week to help clear out an unwanted mix of temporary and nonconforming signs along the main business strip. Flapping flags, banners, and other out-of-compliance signage on busy Route 6 were an issue the town initially tried to tackle with repeated informational public forums to review regulations. The forums, however, were not well attended and officials had to take another tack.

Enter part-time Zoning Officer Martha Fraenkel. The town hired Fraenkel in the summer to help Land Use Officer Jana Butts Roberson one day a week. Fraenkel's experience as a zoning enforcement officer helped Brooklyn get results. For example, when two businesses ignored repeated orders to remove flag signs, Fraenkel called in the state Department of Transportation, which removed them because they were deemed road hazards.

“I think we’re seeing some great progress,” Roberson said. “I appreciate consulting with her. She’s taught me a lot and I think we work really well right now.”

Safety along Route 6 is a priority for the town, especially since the arrival of a Walmart store in 2013 increased the road use by pedestrians. The town had hoped to have sidewalks along a 900-foot stretch from the store to the rest of the Route 6 commercial area in 2014 but planning for that project along the busy state route took up most of the year. The sidewalks are now expected to be built this spring, said First Selectman Rick Ives.

Ives said the town will pay for the sidewalks thanks to a $500,000 grant from the Northeast Council of Governments.
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Year of Sustainability
West Hartford moves forward with “Complete Streets”

Building on the momentum generated in 2014 by what Mayor Scott Slifka called the “Year of Development,” West Hartford is now focused on the “Year of Sustainability,” the Mayor said.

A key factor of that theme is the town’s approach to transportation – all forms of it. As a result, the town is moving forward in adopting a “Complete Streets Policy,” which is based on research of best practices from the American Planning Association. Public input on a draft was sought earlier this year.

The “Complete Streets Policy” is an all-encompassing approach to ensure that a transportation network that includes roads, sidewalks, bike paths, curbs, handicap ramps, crosswalks, and transit shelters “will also be safe, accessible, and convenient for all transportation users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and motorists of all ages and abilities.” It is designed to improve and enhance access to housing, jobs, schools, businesses, parks, and recreation as the town pursues more transit-oriented development.

Mayor Slifka called the state’s recent announcement of bond funding for design of a rail station in West Hartford a “very good first step.” Under the “Complete Street Policy,” projects would be planned, constructed, maintained, and funded in accordance with the policy principals. They would also reflect the character of the existing built and natural environments in town and “fully consider neighborhood input and potential impacts.” The Community Service Department will be required to file an annual report with the Town Council to document the progress of the policy.

Collaboration and coordination with other agencies – both in town and outside – is essential to help leverage expertise and funding. Among the outside collaborators identified are the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the Capitol Region Council of Governments.

Effective implementation of a “Complete Streets Policy,” say town officials, will ultimately contribute to the health, safety, and quality of life that residents expect from their town.

“Bottom line is that people want to be here, they want to live here, work here, and also they want to visit here.” Mayor Slifka said.

Fore!
Woodbridge seeking public input on country club development

What to do with the town-owned Woodbridge Country Club has been a topic of passionate discussion for years. Now with a major proposal on the table, town officials have assured residents they’ll have ample opportunities to weigh in.

The town bought the 155-acre country club in 2009 for $7 million and operating it has been a strain on the municipal budget at times.

“Owning the Country Club of Woodbridge property has proven to be quite costly for us,” said First Selectman Ellen Scalettar. “In addition to the considerable debt service, in some years we saw significant losses and in one year they rose as high as $438,000.”

To help ease the taxpayer burden, the town is considering a proposal that would sell half of it to a private developer for $7.5 million. The committee says $6.5 million of the purchase price would go to the town and $1 million would be applied to refurbishing tennis courts, the pool and replacing the clubhouse with a new pool house.

The town would retain the country club portion of the property. The developer proposes to build nearly 100 townhouses for a 55-and-older community.

An ad-hoc committee that investigated the development opportunities said the current proposal would help generate $2 million in revenue, preserve open space, and provide a housing option that many residents have been asking for – an age-restricted community.

The proposal is also being reviewed by a number of town commissions. The First Selectman stressed, however, the most important input will come from town residents.

“I assure all Town residents that there will be many opportunities... to hear the proposal, ask questions, and voice your opinions,” Scalettar said. “I am very aware that this matter engenders strong feelings among the members of our community. I look forward to a robust, positive, and productive Town discussion over the next weeks and months.”
GOVERNANCE

Updating The Code

Brooklyn moving forward with ethics ordinance revisions

Brooklyn is moving forward with revisions to the town’s ethics ordinance. The town’s Board of Ethics has been working on the revisions for nearly two years, said Board member Michael Barry and the final revisions will soon be presented to the Board of Selectmen before going to town meeting.

The ordinance has been on the books for 25 years and Ethics Board Chair Pam Childs said the goal of the revisions is to have a clear and understandable document that provides behavioral guidelines for all town employees and volunteers and clearly defines acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Brooklyn is one of 131 Connecticut municipalities with a code of ethics. State law permits municipalities to adopt an ethics code, establish a body to review complaints of unethical conduct by municipal officials and employees, and impose fines up to $250 for violations.

Brooklyn officials say their code is in line with state guidelines including protecting the confidentiality of complaints lodged against town officials.

The Connecticut Office of State Ethics has submitted a legislative proposal for the 2015 session that would create a statewide code of ethics, but Board of Ethics members referred to a CCM memorandum that raises concerns about a statewide code, including the fear that a one-size fits all ethics code may be overly broad and may conflict with codes already on the books for many towns.

Chief among CCM’s concerns is the requirement for officials to disclose financial interests and a mandated mechanism that gives the Office of State Ethics investigative and hearing authority, which may discourage people from serving at the local level.

Since 2009, CCM has conducted 14 ethics training sessions for municipal officials with nearly 350 attendees. For information about upcoming sessions, please visit the Meetings, Events & Training page of CCM’s website at http://www.ccm-ct.org/municipal-training-events.

Foreseeable Future

Weston mapping out future of multi-building project

They’re not using a crystal ball but Weston officials can see into the future – and they are doing something about it now.

Projected drops in student population and the town’s debt service over the next decade are allowing members of the Global Facilities Committee to sketch out a project that encompasses a number of buildings that include schools, the Town Hall, and a police station.

Committee members and School Superintendent Colleen Palmer say the town anticipates a decline in middle school enrollment in about eight years. With some renovations, the middle school could be reconfigured to accommodate all school administrative offices under one roof. The offices are currently in the Town Hall Annex and at another site.

First Selectman Gayle Weinstein, who also sits on the Global Facilities Committee, says at the same time enrollments would be declining, the town debt service would also be dropping. The town could then bond for a middle school renovation project without making a significant impact on taxes. Weinstein called it a “real ‘ah ha’ moment” in the planning when school officials said they could consolidate the administrative offices and were willing to wait eight years to do it.

Weinstein says the town is taking a “global perspective” in its planning to account for demographic changes.

The committee also made some short-range recommendations for facilities. They include:

- Move a second grade from its current school to the intermediate school
- Renovate town hall
- Move offices that house social services and land use from the Town Hall Annex to the main building
- Build a new public safety complex near the firehouse
- Keep the senior center at its current location

Reaching a general consensus on all the moving parts, the committee is now preparing to present its proposed outline to the boards of selectman, finance, and education.
**Auto Delete**

Ansonia declares war on junked cars

Calling it an “epidemic,” Ansonia officials are preparing to give abandoned, junked cars the hook – at the end of a tow line.

The Board of Aldermen recently approved an ordinance that would allow the city to tow the rusting, unregistered heaps off private property at the owner’s expense. Failure to comply could ultimately result in a lien being placed on the owner’s property.

“The blight officer has been inundated with complaints,” said Corporation Counsel John Marini. “This is going to add a powerful new tool in our fight against blight.”

The proposed abandoned vehicle ordinance, which will be brought before a public hearing before it takes effect, would complement the tough blight ordinance that Marini dubbed the “Godzilla of blight bills” when it was enacted in Spring of 2014. Under that law, homeowners have three days to address issues and appeal any summons or face fines of at least $100 a day. That’s on top of paying the cleanup bill of an independent contractor.

Alderman Charlie Stowe said that while he does not necessarily favor the idea of entering private property, he voted in favor of the vehicle tow ordinance because the problem has mushroomed.

“You'll find, more often than not, there’s some good value to bring back,” consultant Steven G. Cecil said.

Old photographs of an old Main Street bookstore help underscore its uniqueness. It was once painted pink, said Planning and Zoning Commission Chairman Chip Stephens.

“We know that change is coming to Westport, and hopefully with informed guidance it will enhance the existing character of the town that we all love so much,” Henkels said. “I look forward to pursuing this with the Planning and Zoning Commission.”
GOVERNANCE

Filling In The Gaps
Avon expands open space network

Avon is connecting the dots. By designating three town-owned parcels as open space, the town is expanding existing open space around town, part of a long-term plan to create a network of preserved land with walking trails.

The three parcels total a little over thirty acres and all three were acquired by the town in recent years as part of agreements with developers who were building residential subdivisions. Avon rezoned the parcels from residential to a designation called “recreation open space.” The new designation allows walking trails and parking lots to allow access to the land.

“Some of these were critical missing links to larger parcels,” said Director of Planning and Community Development Steven Kushner.

The largest of the three parcels -- 22 acres -- brings the total amount of town-owned open space in that part of town to about 400 acres and connects two larger parcels of open space that the town already owns.

A second of the pieces will provide improved access to the Huckleberry Hill open space area of town and the third, an 8.8 acre parcel, abuts open space just to the north and connects to town-owned open space that was created as part of another residential development.

In addition to recently connected “dots” on the west side of town, Avon has also preserved a town-owned open space running along the Farmington River of more than 500 acres. Part of it is a playing field complex and another section is a farm, but much of that land has walking trails and is undeveloped.

Keeping Residents Happy
Farmington a good place to set up shop, set down roots

Seeking input on the direction their town should take, Farmington officials asked everyone.

Residents recently weighed in on a town-wide survey used to update Farmington’s strategic plan and gave high marks for the business climate.

More than two-thirds of the respondents said Farmington is an “excellent” or “good” place to do business. The survey also gave the town’s first responders – police and fire departments – a high rating.

Town officials update the strategic plan every two years and set goals based on a number of the survey recommendations. The survey proved to be overwhelmingly positive and was a source of pride for municipal officials.

“Ninety-six percent of residents rated the quality of life as excellent or good,” said council Chairwoman Nancy Nickerson.

Recommendations include enhancing public transportation to mitigate traffic and easier access to Farmington recreational facilities. Nickerson said there will be continued focus on making walking trails and bike paths more accessible for residents. Town officials are also working with the state to make improvements to main thoroughfares, such as New Britain Avenue.

Other top priorities continue to be extensive sidewalk replacement and a major upgrade of the Water Pollution Control Plant. Voters approved the nearly $60 million upgrade of the plant in a referendum in November. Built in the 1960s, the plant was last updated about 20 years ago. Officials say the upgrade is expected to meet the community’s needs for the next quarter century. It will be funded in part by a $12 million state grant and contributions from the UConn Health Center, Avon, Canton, and Burlington.

Overall, officials were pleased that satisfaction with the quality of life in town was relatively unchanged since the last survey was taken in 2005.

“People are happy,” Nickerson said.
Affordable Medicine

Killingly taking advantage of CCM prescription program

The town of Killingly has joined a growing number of municipalities that are benefiting from a partnership between CCM and a national program to provide significant discounts on prescription drugs and other medical services.

Killingly residents can save up to 45 percent through ProAct, Inc., which has bulk purchasing agreements with several local pharmacies. Endorsed by CCM, the program is offered at no cost to municipalities. The discount card is free to all residents regardless of age, income or insurance status and is designed to be used if an individual has no insurance or has a prescription need not covered by insurance.

“For ProAct, they get the advantage of the buying power from the citizens of almost the whole state,” Killingly Town Manager Sean Hendricks said. “It’s one of the benefits of being a member of CCM and for being a resident of Killingly.”

About 125 towns in Connecticut are participating in the program. In addition to prescription drugs, participants also get discounts on vision and hearing aid services. The program has helped Connecticut residents save more than $5 million in prescription drug costs thus far.

The program taps into savings by using economies of scale. ProAct negotiates purchasing agreements with local pharmacies. In turn those drug stores experience a jump in business as more people use the discount card at those stores to fill their prescription.

Neighboring Putnam has been using the program for nearly two years and officials there say the results have been “fantastic.”

“The average prescription drug cost for those cardholders is $34 and we’re seeing an average overall savings of 54 percent on purchases,” Putnam Town Administrator Doug Cutler explained. “Anytime you can help people, especially with the high cost of these prescriptions, it’s a great thing.”

Amen to that, Mr. Cutler!

Woof!

Montville mulling ordinance for man’s best friend

No more fetching for Fido on Montville’s athletic fields.

A new ordinance in the works would ban leashed and non-leashed dogs from the town’s athletic fields and playgrounds at the Camp Oakdale recreation complex. The town is designating other areas in the complex where dogs will be permitted.

Town officials say they are moving to address the need for more sanitary conditions because some owners have allowed their dogs to relieve themselves in areas where spectators and teams gather.

“I’ve been to the fields with my grandkids,” Councilor Chuck Longton said. “The concern is general cleanliness. Kids step in it without looking.”

The call of nature can happen anywhere but it’s how owners respond to it that has officials concerned.

Park and Recreation Department Director Peter Bushway said dog owners are expected to clean up after their pets. He said there now will be signs indicating the areas where dogs are permitted and prohibited.

“People can still come to the park with their dogs and use the trails and other parts of the park,” Bushway said. “The town also is building a dog park there, so owners will have a designated space to bring their pets.”

The town plans to construct the fenced-in dog park behind the tennis courts. Overseen by a special Dog Park Committee, the funding will be provided through donations. The only cost to the town is expected to be service calls and field maintenance.

Youth Lacrosse League President Kristin Ventresca said that while she has observed owners being responsible and cleaning up after their dogs, she supports the new ordinance.

“You have little kids walking and crawling around sometimes,” said Ventresca.
East Haddam is moving forward with a plan to convert a former middle school building into a municipal and public safety complex, thanks to a U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Program loan and a recent change in Connecticut law that now allows towns to use 40-year financing, terms which had previously been capped at 30 years.

“The USDA loan will enable our small town to rebuild our municipal complex in an unused middle school building, opening up a great economic area for tourism across from the Goodspeed Opera House,” said First Selectman Mark B. Walter.

Preliminary planning for the renovated school focused on potential uses that could include space for municipal workers, the Board of Education, Shared Services, Emergency Services as well as Public Safety. The town’s Middle School Conversion Committee will develop and present a final plan.

The change in state law to allow towns to use 40 year loans will significantly reduce annual repayment costs and could lead to more community facilities and local infrastructure projects, officials said.

The rural development loans may be paid back over a 40-year period instead of the shorter terms for Connecticut municipal construction bonds, so they are more affordable on a year-to-year basis for smaller towns.

The change in the state statute was spearheaded by state Sen. Cathy Osten (D-Sprague) who is also the First Selectman of Sprague.

Communities with no more than 20,000 residents are eligible for USDA rural development loans and funds can be used to purchase, construct or improve essential community facilities, purchase equipment and pay related project expenses. Examples of essential community facilities include:

- Health care facilities such as hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes
- Public facilities such as town halls, courthouses, and street improvements
- Community support services such as child care centers and community centers
- Public safety services such as fire departments, police stations, prisons, or public works vehicles
- Educational services such as museums, libraries or private schools
- Utility services such as telemedicine or distance learning equipment
- Local food systems such as community gardens and food pantries
**GOVERNANCE**

**Shifting Gears**

Meriden eyes changes to downtown parking

With a focus on improving downtown parking and at the same time finding more resources for enforcement, Meriden officials are reviewing an engineering plan that recommends a number of changes to the status quo.

City Economic Development Director Juliet Burdelski said officials are recommending changes that “we think have some long-term benefits.”

Chief among the suggestions are eliminating the merchant validation program and offering short-term free garage and on-street parking. Officials say the validation program was a high-cost, low-revenue venture. Merchants were not charged for validating tickets and the city lost revenue. The report considered some of the largest patrons of downtown, such as YMCA members, and estimated that two-hours free parking “should be sufficient.”

The city parking commission would be able to pay for maintenance and repairs, signage, lighting, ticket booths, and other equipment if a separate capital account was created and funded by revenue from garage tickets, leases, and parking violation fines. Other recommendations include raising monthly parking fees by $10 and hiring more enforcement staff.

The report also recommended standardizing the length of time for street parking and raising more public awareness of the various parking lots and rates. For example, non-essential police vehicles and shuttle buses are parked overnight in a 172-space free municipal lot. The report recommended moving those vehicles and improving signage to clarify that parking is open to the public.

“Some of these recommendations aren’t necessarily infrastructure, but information changes,” Burdelski said. “Just making sure that everyone knows what the rules are; we’ll need to have a better public awareness campaign. If we’re going to have a thriving downtown, we’re going to have to look at these things and develop a parking program that works like a business. In a successful downtown, parking is key to how it operates.”

**Accentuate The Positive**

Thomaston schools setting down a ‘path’ for others to follow

The give-and-take of building a budget can often be a bumpy road. But Thomaston school officials have hit on a trail-blazing idea that represents a little more give than take, much to the delight of town officials.

The Positive Alternatives to Traditional High School (PATHS) program is among the proposals school officials have included in their budget plans this year. Superintendent Francine Coss explains that the program will not only save the town money but has the potential to be a revenue generator.

Operated through Effective School Solutions, a private organization that provides in-district therapeutic services, PATHS would bring back local students who have been placed in other districts, saving the town the out-placement tuition and transportation costs. Currently, the town is paying $80,000 for tuition and transportation for those students.

Coss said PATHS provides the social worker, speech pathologist, and behavioral health specialists, critical positions that would cut down on the town’s personnel costs.

“It’s better than a wash,” she said.

It’s also something that neighboring towns could tap into, creating a revenue stream to help offset costs. Thomaston school officials say they already have commitments from two out-of-district students that would bring in about $50,000 in tuition. The program can accommodate up to 10 students without increasing PATHS staffing.

Aimee Turner, the Director of Pupil Services, said the intent is to start out small and eventually expand “as we feel comfortable.”

Board of Finance officials called the idea a “bright, new fresh approach” and commended school officials for proposing it.

“That’s huge,” BOF member Mike Madow said. “Thomaston is going to be in the forefront instead of being behind.”

Most importantly, PATHS would provide a valuable service to those students who would benefit from an alternative educational approach.

“We did our homework,” Superintendent Coss said. “What they can offer our students is far better than what we could produce as educators.”
Giving a big nod to Groton's seafaring reputation as the Submarine Capital of the World, town and city officials have joined forces to create a memorial park using a key component of the submarine USS Groton as the focal piece.

The joint organizing committee has its sights on bringing home the “sail,” the tall tower that juts up from the hull. Commissioned in 1978, the boat is the third named for Groton. Parts of the boat are in Washington State and must be reassembled.

The committee surveyed residents this past summer to engage them in the decision-making process. Organizers said they wanted to gain insight and critical information to “ensure financial and organizational resources are available to build this memorial.”

The memorial is expected to cost at least $700,000 if installed on the grounds of a former school, one of the potential sites the committee is exploring. Once installed, the “sail” would also feature – appropriately – the town’s corporate seal.

“It finally brings a submarine to the monument, which is what the logo of the town is,” Town Councilor Rich Moravskik said.

Both proposed sites are near historic Fort Griswold, which played a key role in the Revolutionary War when it was captured by British Forces in 1781 as a result of Benedict Arnold’s treason. The fort was designated a state park in 1953.

Groton City Mayor Marian Galbraith said either site would also be linked to the Thames River Heritage Park but regardless of location, the intent of the memorial is to honor those who built or served on the submarine.

“It’s the way these designs respect and honor the history and the people of the USS Groton,” the mayor said.
Curbside Pickup
Stamford updating regs on food vendor trucks

Parking it here. That’s the message Stamford officials are working to clarify as they update a city ordinance governing food vendor trucks. The city aims to identify stationary parking zones to accommodate the vendors and at the same provide safe areas for customers queuing up for the mobile meals.

Officials also are mindful of not infringing the business of licensed restaurants in a city that may pay up to $15,000 a month in rent, while food truck permits are a fraction of that at under $600.

“Restaurants don’t want to see a food truck show up and park in front of their establishment because that’s just a crazy and unnecessary competition,” said Frank Fedeli, customer service supervisor of the Citizen’s Service Bureau.

The drive to update the ordinance stemmed from late night noshing. Many food trucks were doing business after 11 p.m. along Bedford Street when restaurants closed. However, they parked on the left side of the roadway with the service window facing the traffic lane. Customers had to line up in the street creating a potential public safety hazard. The trucks eventually moved to the other side of the street after receiving a warning letter from police.

Deputy Police Chief Thomas Wuennemann said the trucks are on the streets until 3 a.m. Because there is nothing in the current ordinance limiting parking locations, the trucks can operate anywhere if they have a valid permit. City officials say that limits their enforcement efforts because they don’t have the ability to know where the trucks are.

In addition to identifying stationary parking zones, proposed changes also include limiting parking 500 to 1,000 feet away from restaurants. A committee formed by the Service Bureau and Stamford Law Department will be working on the changes and will consider input from the police and health departments, vendors, and restaurants.

Open Space
Ridgefield tackling boundary violations

What do you do when a good walk in the woods is spoiled?

Ridgefield officials are taking action to address violations of open space, particularly by abutting landowners who some say treat the public land as if it were their own – and not too kindly, either. Illegal dumping, fencing off and, in at least one case, erecting a shed, are some of the violations noted by Conservation Commission members.

The Commission oversees some 2,500 acres of open space around the town and officials say they spot a number of encroachments each year, most of which are settled in a friendly manner.

“We walk our boundaries and often it’s brought to our attention by neighbors,” Commission Chairman Carroll Brewster said. “A lot of them are innocent. Someone is just mistaken about a boundary and that kind of thing. And some of them, I think, have required a little more forceful action from us.”

That forceful action may include codifying the protocol the Commission uses when it has to address the encroachment. Brewster says the Commission has gone to the town attorney for advice, support, and ultimately a letter to send to the alleged trespasser warning him or her of a fine.

The Commission recently asked the Board of Selectmen to make “perfectly clear” the procedure by which it seeks the advice of the town counsel. The town attorney works with a variety of town departments, but mainly reports to the First Selectman. The town attorney is usually the last resort to addressing the trespassers. “Normally we ask the property owner to please refrain from fencing or dumping or clearing or whatever else on public land. And normally the landowner will pull right back, and that’s that,” Brewster said. “In cases where that’s not been as easy to accomplish we’ve been having to go to town counsel and he then takes the matter over.”
The town of Portland is looking ahead – far ahead. Using the equivalent of a community-wide crystal ball, the town is taking stock of its long-term infrastructure needs in a review that includes securing its water supply.

Aided by its Long-Range Capital Commission, which reviews major purchase requests, town staff, boards and commissions, consultants and others, the town is on track to complete the long-range assessment by the end of the year. At the same time, it is revising its state-mandated Plan of Conservation and Development, a blueprint of development required every 10 years.

“It’s my intention that we bring this review of all these needs together so we understand what our infrastructure needs are,” First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield said.

In a recently adopted resolution, the Board of Selectmen identified the need for a comprehensive look at everything above and below ground.

Reviewers will look at municipal buildings, parks and recreation facilities, utilities, roads, IT infrastructure and even trees.

An analysis of the water and sewer infrastructure will assess its condition and value and is being conducted in conjunction with the town’s water supplier, the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC).

Although the town buys much of its water from the MDC, it is not a member. However officials say the town could eventually join as a full member depending on the outcome of the assessment. The study will include a comparison of Portland’s water and sewer rates and the MDC rates. The non-profit MDC supplies water to 400,000 people in eight member towns. It also provides water to parts of six other towns, including Portland.

“With this analysis, we can see how our future water needs will be taken care of,” Selectman Carl Chudzik said. “This is something we all agree on, as well as the staff and the Water and Sewer Committee.”
In The Zone
New Haven seeking a livable density

The city of New Haven wants to make the most of the type of mixed-used development that it has been courting and has begun revisiting its zoning maps.

Officials say that with much-needed upgrades to zoning, the Elm City could comfortably welcome an additional 10,000 residents to its current 130,000 population.

Mayor Toni Harp has directed city planners to begin a thorough review of the city's zoning map with an eye toward allowing denser development.

“It’s really time for us to rewrite the code,” Harp said.

Some of the existing zoning no longer makes sense, Harp explained. For example, one developer had to ask for a variance to bring nearly 80 apartment units in five buildings to the area of Crown and George streets because that block is currently zoned for auto businesses.

“We don’t really have automobile companies that much in our town,” Harp said. “We’ve got to look at the map and make it modern.”

The move to modernize comes as New Haven is undergoing a heightened activity in market-rate apartment projects in the downtown. The city recently welcomed a $40 million apartment complex on Chapel and Howe streets.

City Plan Director Karyn Gilvarg said several zoning amendments that have been enacted over the past few years to update rules included redefining an industrial zone around the Mill River to accommodate mixed-use development and slightly reducing the number of parking spaces required. Another proposed change would permit taller buildings.

She said the re-mapping project will complement the work of the city’s recently completed 10-year comprehensive plan that sought broad input from the public. The city held dozens of meetings with various community groups and conducted an online survey.

Curb Appeal
Darien refining response to blight

In order to take a bite out of blight, the town of Darien is moving forward with plans to put a tad more teeth into its existing ordinances.

First Selectman Jayme Stevenson says the town is considering fines or other sanctions but is not seeking heavy punitive measures. Rather, officials are looking at a process that would allow the town to help bring property owners into compliance.

“I’m very cognizant of personal property rights and want to limit government overreach but by the same token I want to help people in neighborhoods with blight situations,” Stevenson said.

“Sometimes we can get action from carrots and sometimes we can get action by sticks. I think sometimes a modest fine is enough to get an owner to take action.”

Officials say about 20 properties in town have been the focus of several complaints and would likely qualify under a blight ordinance. However, there is no staff position or dedicated blight officer in town hall that specifically handles blight complaints.

To craft a new ordinance Members of the Town Government Structure and Administration Committee are revisiting a proposal first floated in 2007 but failed to gain final approval. The proposal sought to define blighted properties as those with missing, broken, or boarded up windows, collapsed walls and roofs, unrepaired fire or water damage, vehicles in disrepair, and rodent infestations.

The committee will also study blight ordinances established in nearly 30 cities and towns in the state, including nearby New Canaan, Westport, Norwalk, Ridgefield, and Brookfield.

“To have an ordinance would give town officials the assurance that they are proceeding in a standardized way so they aren’t subject to complaints of favoritism or the opposite,” Committee Chairman Frank Kemp said.
Redefining Branchville
Ridgefield wants to revitalize former railroad neighborhood

Defined almost a century ago by the branch line of the Danbury and Norwalk railroads that once passed through, the Branchville section of Ridgefield is ripe for revitalization and it’s a change that residents have strongly backed.

The results of a recent online survey indicate keen support for a makeover, one that would result in more specialty shops, dining, entertainment, and a more walkable, bikeable neighborhood. The changes could complement many of the Transit Oriented Development studies that have looked at potential development around Metro North routes along the Route 7 corridor.

Located in Ridgefield’s southeast corner, the Branchville section had been mostly farmland and some mill activity, but it was the railroad that ushered in an industrial boom to the small community. Passenger service continued there until about 1925 and rail freight service didn’t cease operations until the mid-1960s. Some of the former tracks have now given way to recreational “rails-to-trails.”

The survey was part of a partnership with the Western Connecticut Council of Governments. Additionally, the town fielded input from a series of public meetings. Town officials, including First Selectman Rudy Marconi, support the pedestrian improvements and have described the Branchville section as “underutilized.”

Their sentiments have echoed in the community. Nearly eight of 10 survey respondents support revitalization and fewer than 10 percent of the 300 who responded want to stick with the status quo. Many indicated a need to keep local dollars local rather than shopping and dining in nearby towns. Others said smart development in Branchville would add to their hometown’s quality of life.

“I would love to see Branchville morph into a smaller Ridgefield,” wrote one respondent. “As a young married couple, my husband and I want to have places to walk when we have children in the future.”

Keeping Up With Changing Times
Westport creates panel to study fire fighting operations

The times, they are a changing – especially when it comes to protecting homes and businesses from destructive fires that can create economic havoc and disrupt lives.

Fire fighting has changed over the past several decades and Westport wants to make sure its firefighting capabilities are up to speed with the changing times.

That’s why Westport First Selectman Jim Marpe recently created a Fire Department Strategic Planning Steering Committee to make sure the town can “deliver high quality firefighting and rescue services in the 21st century.”

In the years since the town’s existing four fire stations were built, Marpe said the department has changed from a volunteer to a primarily professional staff and home sizes have grown substantially, making the task of fighting house fires much more challenging and resource-intensive.

Marpe said the new committee will examine the impacts of those kinds of changes on fire fighting operations, evaluate what they mean for the future and then make recommendations about the best path going forward.

The new Committee represents the first effort to examine the town’s fire fighting capabilities since 2002 and it includes members of the Representative Town Meeting, the RTM’s Public Protection and Long-Range Planning committees, as well as the Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief, and Operations Director from the fire department.

Marpe expressed gratitude to “all the representatives of the areas of Westport who will give of their time and expertise to put forward the best recommendations.”

“I am confident that with their leadership, our first-class fire department will maintain its high level of capability, but with appropriate plans for the future,” Marpe said.
The town of Woodbury is fine-tuning its wish list for future development, attractions, and amenities by inviting residents and business owners to be its sounding board. A team of consulting architects listened and is taking detailed notes.

The vision that resulted is a variety of recommendations that ranged from everything from more art space to a walkable village, a community recreation center, and enhanced communication with local government.

Several residents suggested the town rebrand itself as more of an “artisan” community, moving beyond its recognition as home to several antique dealers. The bigger picture envisions a town where tourists could browse antiques, sample farm-to-table food, visit historic homes, and enjoy nearby natural resources. Among the draws would be a fall festival that celebrates a weeklong farmers market.

To help formalize that vision, the architects recommended the establishment of an official Arts and Culture Commission.

Other committees recommended for formation was one composed of representatives from various community groups and town board members to improve communication between residents and municipal government.

Redesigning narrower roads through the center of town would open up more space for tourist parking. It would also help to slow traffic for pedestrian safety. To better utilize open space, the town’s North Green seating could be reorganized and food vendors could be stationed nearby making it an optimal gathering spot, the consultants said.

Officials say a comprehensive development plan from the consultants is expected in the next several months. The initiatives come on the heels of news that the town has secured state funds to help buy 250 acres of open space.

“It’s a sign of how well things happen here when we all work together,” First Selectman William Butterly said.
HEALTH

Saving Big

CCM’s Prescription Drug Discount Program shows continued success

Since it was introduced in September 2012, CCM’s ProAct Prescription Drug Discount Program has saved residents in participating municipalities hundreds of thousands of dollars on prescriptions filled in towns all across Connecticut.

The ProAct program is free to CCM-member towns and targets uninsured and under-insured residents by providing savings on any prescriptions not covered by insurance. There are no costs to either the participating towns or their residents.

The Town of Hamden began participating in August 2013 and Mayor Curt Leng recently reported that since the program began 24 months ago, Hamden residents have collectively saved more than $85,300 and have filled more than 1,800 prescriptions by using the assistance of the program.

“Residents who are uninsured or under-insured are often forced to pay the full cash price for essential prescription medications, which can be extremely costly” said Leng. “We hope that by working with The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, we can help to provide residents with an opportunity to purchase their necessary medications at a discounted price.”

Hamden is one of over 120 municipalities throughout Connecticut that has helped provide its residents with access to more affordable medications regardless of their insurance status. Under the program, every prescription medication is eligible to receive some level of discount, and even some pet medications are covered.

There are no enrollment forms or requirements to use the ProAct discount drug card and all residents are eligible to participate. Residents in participating towns get immediate fiscal relief at the pharmacy counter by participating in the program:

• anyone can participate regardless of age or income
• all prescription medications are covered
• there is no cost to the municipality or to participating residents
• cost savings average 10-20 percent on brand medications and 20-70 percent on generics for a total average savings of 45 percent
• 56,000 pharmacies participate nationwide, including most chain pharmacies and many independent pharmacies.

Fitness And Fun

Stamford employees embrace a healthy challenge

The city of Stamford is working to improve its employees’ health one step at a time. Actually, it’s more like 5,000 steps.

City employees participated in a 10-week Health and Wellness Challenge to help establish and maintain a healthier lifestyle. A prong of that initiative was a three-week step challenge that encouraged employees to take at least 5,000 steps a day. By the end of those three weeks, municipal workers had combined for more than 23 million steps.

Almost 200 city of Stamford employees are participating in a 10-week Health and Wellness Challenge with the goal of developing and sustaining a healthier lifestyle. The Wellness Challenge takes place over a ten week period with five different challenges designed to encourage healthy eating, fitness, and weight loss.

“Little competition never hurts,” said Mayor David Martin. “We have been getting positive feedback and everyone participating seems to be having fun with it.”

Participants competed in teams of four. In all, more than 40 teams competed and points were awarded on the team and individual level. Some of the results, like weight loss, were quantifiable. For others, the rewards were more intangible. One worker told city officials the challenge gave him more quality time with his children because his steps included walking them to the bus stop.

In addition to the step challenge, other facets of the campaign included eating more fruit and vegetables, creating a health dish, achieving a 10 percent weight loss, and a challenge to exercise at least 450 minutes over a three week period.

Angie Murphy, the city’s Human Resource Assistant, says the challenge has bridged relationships among employees and departments and “changed lives for some employees as they now make conscious decisions on their overall health.”
Do A 180
Mental health focus of Glastonbury wellness campaign

Following on the heels of a popular town-wide fitness initiative, the Glastonbury Chamber of Commerce is working to raise awareness and sensitivity about mental health issues. The campaign, “Do a 180, Think” features a number of workshops over the next several weeks to help the community understand the issues and provide the tools to help others. “People don’t like to talk about it, but it has an impact on everyone’s lives,” Chamber Executive Director Mary Ellen Dombrowski said.

The campaign is organized and promoted by the Chamber’s Wellness Council, whom Dombrowski described as “group of passionate people who don’t give up.” The Council last year promoted the campaign, “Do a 180, Move!” an initiative that encouraged residents to tone up by patronizing all the fitness businesses in town. The mental health campaign focuses on education, life strategies, and action.

“Mental Health First Aid,” an eight-hour certification course, is among the workshops being offered. Based on an Australian program created in 2001, the program is managed by the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. Participants are taught to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions and support the person in crisis until appropriate professional help arrives. A popular program throughout the country, nearly 90,000 people have undergone the training since 2008. There are more than two dozen certified instructors in Connecticut.

Other workshops include the aging process, depression, intervention, and creating happy, healthy and balanced lifestyles. There’s even a course on financial well-being where participants learn to develop a plan that includes management of personal finances and financial decisions that may need to be made in the case of serious illness or death.

“Mental health issues are so prevalent today. We wanted ways to help people. It’s great to get educated in case a problem should ever come up,” Dombrowski said.

A Taste Of Summer
Norwalk serving up free meals for kids

Volunteers clad in bright orange outfits were hard to miss walking the streets of Norwalk this summer -- and that was the point because they had a message that needed to be heard.

Toting banners, fliers, and lawn signs, volunteers spread the word that Norwalk’s summer food service program was kicking off for a second year. The program provides free summer meals on weekdays to Norwalk children who are receiving free and reduced cost lunches in the school district. Children can get either breakfast or lunch or in some cases both meals at one of five schools throughout the city.

Last year’s inaugural program proved so successful that city officials and organizers were eager to bring it back. The program has garnered the support of a number of municipal agencies, private business, and non-profit organizations.

“If young people do not get nutrition, they don’t develop properly, they don’t achieve, they can’t pay attention in school,” Mayor Harry Rilling said. “It’s really important that we provide them with meals, not only during the school years, but during summer months, which this program is designed to address.”

Children participating in summer camps around the city also are eligible for the free meals. According to officials with End Hunger Connecticut, one in four children eligible for free or reduced meals while in school may not have a place to eat when school is out.

“The program is available to children 18 and under and there’s no questions asked,” said Lucy Nolan, executive director of End Hunger Connecticut! “We really try to make it easy and try to get as many kids as possible to eat.”
Second Act
Former Seymour school transforms into apartments

Vacant for nearly three years, a former Seymour elementary school will be getting a new lease on life. Actually more like dozens of new leases.

The town decommissioned the 104-year-old Anna L. LoPresti School in 2012, but was still faced with heating bills of $80,000 a year to protect the sprinkler system. Officials were hopeful that there would be a second chapter for the grand old lady.

They weren’t disappointed.

The Planning & Zoning Commission’s recently approved zone change from residential to multifamily means the shuttered, sprawling brick edifice can now be converted to more than 40 market-price apartments.

The town sold the 52,000-square-foot building for $335,000 to a developer who specializes in renovating and re-using historic buildings. When completed, the $5 million project will transform old classrooms into contemporary one- and two-bedroom apartments.

“They can sit as an albatross for years,” Seymour Economic Development Director Fred Messore said. “Either there are environmental concerns or there’s not a market, or maybe the neighborhood isn’t receptive. So we’re very excited to see this come together.”

The timing is right as the conversion fits in well with the town’s revitalization plans to attract more people and businesses to the downtown. The town is using a $375,000 grant for sidewalks and streetscapes. New businesses such antique shops and restaurants are popping up just in time for the influx of new residents that the school apartments will create.

The former school is close to downtown and convenient to Route 8. And with the Metro-North Station just a 10-minute walk away, it makes it an ideal spot for young, professional commuters.

Town officials estimate the new apartment complex will add about $1 million to the tax base in the first five years.
Hope For The Best, Plan For The Worst
Fairfield County towns reviewing plans for dealing with disasters

Municipal officials in several western Connecticut towns are arming themselves with the “what-ifs” and “how-tos” in order to keep their communities prepared to deal with disaster.

What if the towns bore the brunt of a devastating storm, flood, or other natural disaster and just how would emergency officials prepare and respond? That was the focus of a series of recent public information meetings that allowed the municipalities to review a draft Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan prepared by the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WCCOG).

The current plan adopted by the towns was approved by the Federal Emergency Management Administration in 2011. The draft plan covers 2016 to 2021 and outlines risks, preparations, mitigations, and other responses for Wilton, Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Norwalk, Stamford, Weston, and Westport.

“Information is our greatest asset,” said Robert Sachnin, WCCOG regional planner. “The more informed our communities are, the better they can prepare for natural hazards.”

The plan examines the risks and potential impacts of floods, coastal storms, nor’easters, hurricanes, severe winter storms, drought, sea level rise, earthquakes, and dam failures. Once the plan wins final approval, the towns will be eligible for several types of federal funds. Eligible projects include activities that protect roads and bridges, utilities, flood control, water and sewer, and open space.

With reminders of Tropical Storm Irene and Superstorm Sandy still around, many towns don’t have to ask “what-if” anymore but rather “when.” The town of Westport, for example, plans to use a $1.4 million FEMA grant, established in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, to buy two properties in a vulnerable flood zone, demolish the buildings, and return the land to open space.

“The idea is to restore the land to its natural condition,” said Westport Operations Director Dewey Loselle.

Preserving Beauty
Coastal towns, conservationists hail critical funding from state

With strong support already lined up in Old Saybrook, Essex, and Westbrook, the state has steered in with the key piece of funding to preserve 1,000 acres of coastal forest along the shoreline.

The state Bonding Commission recently approved $2 million to protect the expanse known as “The Preserve,” representing a huge step forward in the region’s long-standing efforts to safeguard a pristine swath of wildlife habitat and enhance recreational opportunities.

“We will be adding great environmental and recreational value to the region with this purchase, which the Town has been championing for over 15 years,” said Old Saybrook First Selectman Carl Fortuna. “A lot had to come together in order for this to happen.”

More than 900 acres is located in Old Saybrook. The town has already pledged $3 million and can now move forward with that effort, Fortuna said. Essex voters overwhelmingly approved a $200,000 appropriation last summer for its portion. Other funding sources include a $1.4 million federal grant and $1.2 million from private donations being raised by the Trust for Public Land (TPL).

A private developer had initially planned to build a golf course and 220 homes on the land, but the TPL stepped in, worked out an agreement, and began courting funding sources. Conservationists have underscored the ecological importance of the coastal forest.

It is a key stop-over for migratory birds and offers a variety of habitat that sustains more than 100 species of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds. The waterways on the land form three different watersheds that all drain into Long Island Sound and a nearby aquifer provides about 200,000 gallons a day to the surrounding towns.

“This has been a long hard fight,” said Jim Denham, president of the Essex Land Trust. “It’s quite a positive achievement.”
buying a historic home is one thing, but preserving it for the ages can be challenging and expensive. Now Thomaston officials have hit on a new revenue source to help them maintain the home of the town’s most famous historical figure.

Clock-maker Seth Thomas put the town of Thomaston on the map – literally. The former village of Plymouth Hollow was renamed Thomaston in 1875 in honor of the man who began creating the iconic wooden movement shelf clocks in the early 19th century.

To help preserve his legacy, the town used grant money several years ago to buy his historic carriage house, now known as the Seth Thomas-Bradstreet House and Museum. To help with maintenance, town officials recently approved a $100-a-month rental agreement with the nearby Landmark Community Theater for storage space at the house.

Historical Commission Chairman Joe Wassong said the theater group “is thrilled to have a storage space across the street.” Wassong said the space will be used for storing sets and props. The $1,200 in rent will go toward maintenance and future repairs of the home.

“This money wouldn’t be going to something like buying a lamp, it would help refurbish and restore what we have,” said Selectman Kristin Mosimann, who is also a member of the Historic Commission. “A lot of the costs of repairing, painting, etc. were paid for by the Seth Thomas Bradstreet Society, with no cost to the town.”

Located across Main Street from the Seth Thomas home, the Landmark Theater Building is another key historical asset for the town. Productions are staged in a 130-year-old brick Romanesque building that has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1972.

The Road To Opportunity
Ansonia works to keep longtime local business in town

When Yankee ingenuity met the Industrial Revolution, manufacturing thrived in the region. And in the Naugatuck Valley, one particular business has roots that go back that far. Farrel Pomini, a world leader in the research, design, and manufacturing of systems for the plastics and rubber industry, has been a mainstay in Ansonia for more than one and a half centuries.

But when lack of funds for necessary consolidation and aggressive courting from a Midwest state threatened to uproot the 160-year-old Ansonia company, the city stepped in to keep it running right at home and attract new business as well. The solution: build a $1 million access road so that the Main Street plant – the last remaining operational facility of the original company – can move to a new industrial park across town.

Ansonia aldermen have approved a plan that will allow the city to accept the deed to the plant property and build the road. The company had received approval to build a new operation in the industrial park, but was unable to pay for the road. Additionally, a firm in Kansas had signaled strong interest in bringing the company to the Sunflower State.

But the city wanted Farrel to know that there’s no place like home.

“This is a serious commitment and Farrel very well could leave the city forever, and that would be a catastrophe,” Corporation Counsel John Marini said.

Seeking to alleviate any burden on taxpayers, city officials are optimistic that they can secure grant money to pay for the entire cost of the road. Ansonia already has $500,000 on hand through an Urban Act Development grant that can be used toward the construction. Transferring the deed was necessary to help the city pursue grants.

The road will also help breathe new life into the industrial park. The great recession of 2008 significantly slowed site work and potential tenants never materialized. Work resumed on the park when Farrel Pomini won approval to build a new facility there.

The new road is expected to be completed by September, a month before the company opens its newly consolidated operations.
Imagining the possibilities of spending a weekend soaking up knowledge from noted scientists, authors, artists, humanitarians, and business leaders.

Ben and Donna Rosen have done more than imagined it. They’ve created it. Looking for a way to give back to the community, the Kent couple have established: “KentPresents: An Ideas Festival Exploring What Comes Next.” The Kent School will host the festival in August.

“We want to look at the future and how it will play out,” Donna Perret Rosen said.

Ben Rosen, a retired venture capitalist, said the idea came from his past experiences and is also taking a page from the Aspen Ideas Festival. The Aspen festival began in 2005 and has grown to 300 presenters, 200 seminars, and thousands of attendees.

The Kent festival has already lined up some notables in their fields such as environmentalist Stewart Brand, New York Times National Security Correspondent David Sanger, playwright Michael Kramer, and Nobel laureate and scientist Harold Varmus. Some well-known locals will also be in attendance, such as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and actress and human rights advocate Mia Farrow.

Town residents for more than a dozen years, the Rosens say once the expenses are paid, all remaining proceeds will go to charity, specifically local nonprofit groups that serve people in need.

“The charitable benefit is going to be fantastic,” said First Selectman Bruce K. Adams.

Town social service officials confirm the needs do exist. This past winter some 60 residents required heating assistance. The food bank has served more than 40 households and over 120 households need some type of assistance. There are also seniors in affordable housing who survive on incomes of less than $10,000 a year.

“It’s an honor to pay the community back,” Donna Rosen said.
Spotting a community’s vulnerabilities before a disaster occurs is an essential component of emergency preparedness. It also could mean the difference in whether a town can receive millions of dollars of disaster aid.

The town of Plainville is surveying citizens and the business community to find out where they think those vulnerabilities lie in order to mitigate them from future catastrophes. After the past few years, these are not “what if” type scenarios but “when.” Tropical Storm Irene, the 2011 October nor’easter, Superstorm Sandy, and damaging winter storms are all not-too-distant reminders of just how damaging – and expensive – Mother Nature can be.

The weather events caused flooding, downed power lines, collapsed roofs from heavy snow, lost school days, and loss of business for merchants. Data collected from the survey will help identify natural hazards and allow the town to qualify for future federal disaster funds. The town received $2 million in FEMA funds to buy and demolish more than a dozen homes flooded from Tropical Storm Irene in 2011.

“In order for the town to be eligible for disaster mitigation funding from FEMA, we have to have a hazard mitigation plan, which looks at trends we’ve seen regarding tropical storms, winter storms, tornadoes and other natural disasters, and seeks to pinpoint where our Achilles heel is for areas that receive repetitive losses,” said Mark DeVoe, director of Planning and Economic Development.

DeVoe said the plan will also help the town review its zoning and ultimately minimize future impacts from flooding.

The survey was prepared by the same consulting firm that works with other towns in the Capitol Region Council of Governments. The current survey updates the Council’s previous Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan that was approved by FEMA in 2008. The plan identifies natural hazard risks and strategies for reducing loss, both regionally and in each member town.
The Harleys Have It
Motorcycle patrols return to Bristol streets

After more than 20 years, motorcycles have returned to the Bristol police force and the public has responded with a big “thumbs up!”

“The parents love them, the children absolutely love them, and it’s a great resource to bring the community to the police officers and let them see how friendly the officers are,” Mayor Ken Cockayne said.

Used for traffic enforcement and accident investigation, the two 2015 Harley-Davidson Electra Glide bikes cost about $28,000 and were purchased through the asset forfeiture program using cash and assets illegally gained by criminals. Each motorcycle has all the tools of the trade that police on patrol need – an onboard computer, printer, siren, department decals, and more. The officers’ helmets use Bluetooth capabilities to connect to their radios.

For the public, all the so-called bells and whistles on the bikes and the officers who drive them are a splendid sight as they motor around the Bristol streets. They are also very approachable and that has made a difference, police officials say.

Police Chief Thomas Grimaldi said that citizens are more comfortable talking to an officer who is not inside a patrol car. The motorcycle officers agree, saying the Harleys make for a lot more conversation with the people on the streets.

Officer Pat Krajewski had patrolled Bristol for more than a dozen years in a cruiser, but now astride the Harley has a lot more interaction with the public. Children will often wave eagerly as he goes by and others will engage him in conversation, even while stopped at traffic lights.

“This really opens an officer up so people can talk with you,” Krajewski said.

Ahead Of The Curve
New Haven’s community policing success

With high profile episodes involving citizens and police in places like Baltimore and Ferguson capturing the nation’s attention, there is more focus on community policing than ever. One of the lessons learned is that having a police force which has built relationships with the community before a crisis occurs is very important and does make a difference.

In March, a presidential task force called for expanded efforts to connect officers with neighborhoods to try to restore trust between officers and the communities they serve. But community policing isn’t new to New Haven Chief of Police Dean Esserman who was New Haven’s deputy chief in 1991 when the city launched its community policing initiative.

There were 30 murders in the city that year, but after more officers started walking the beat and talking with residents, the murder rate fell sharply. However, Esserman left New Haven for the top cop jobs in Stamford and later Providence and a change of philosophy over the years saw a departure from beat cops.

In 2011 the murder rate soared to 34 – the same year Chief Esserman returned to New Haven and a year before Esserman reinstituted community policing in 2012.

With community policing, the police work directly with residents to identify potential problems before they erupt. Community policing depends on building of trust and establishing relationships between community members and the police. Because police officers aren’t isolated inside cruisers, they learn faster who the troublemakers are and develop a personal bond with the neighborhood.

“How you police matters,” Esserman said. “It’s about fairness and dignity and trust.”

In New Haven, the number of homicides, robberies, motor-vehicle thefts, and other types of serious crime has fallen about 30 percent since the city put a significant number of officers on foot in 2012. More than one-third of officers on the evening shift walk a beat and all new police-academy graduates are on foot-patrol for at least a year.

“We talk to people and people talk to us,” Esserman said. “It’s not just about contacts. It’s about learning humility and developing trust. You can’t drive on by if you’re not in a car.”
Learning by experience can sometimes be a dangerous lesson, especially for firefighters and other first responders. Those lessons just got a little safer in eastern Connecticut with the opening of a new firefighter training center in Killingly.

With stainless steel “burn rooms,” the $750,000 facility simulates real-life situations, complete with smoke machines, breachable doors and windows, a rappelling area, and walls that can move. Firefighters can practice forcible entries, searching in smoke-filled rooms, and conducting rescues. When “class” is in session, neighbors won’t have to worry about seeing plumes of smoke billowing out because the training fires are fueled by propane.

“I think this is an excellent training facility for firefighters to learn how to be safe in a dangerous job,” Town Council Chairman John Hallbergh said.

Built on 26 acres in the Dayville section of town, the three-story training center is leased to the Dayville Volunteer Fire Department for $1 a year for 10 years. The Dayville Department is one of six firefighting units in Killingly. The center now allows the town to offer one convenient training center for all its firefighters to other parts of the state for training.

Dayville Fire Department Chief Thomas Weaver says firefighters in the region will be able to train there “for many years to come.”

The center is officially named the Lt. Dennis Lemery Memorial Training Center after a Dayville firefighter who died in the line of duty more than 20 years ago. Some of Lemery’s former colleagues were on hand at the recent dedication of the facility. Marcel Lussier, a 51-year veteran of the Dayville Fire Department, said naming the center after the fallen firefighter was appropriate.

“It’s something no one ever thought would happen and that it would ever be this spectacular,” Lussier said.

Super Models
Milford police mix fashion and crime prevention

The Milford Police Department recently mixed a little fun with fashion all in the name of public safety.

The “models” were actually various municipal, utility, and service representatives in the community who walked the runway at the Westfield Connecticut Post Mall. They were suited up in legitimate uniforms that the police department wanted the general public to be aware of. The aim was to help citizens spot imposters looking to perpetrate scams while pretending to carry out “official business.”

“The purpose of this event is to educate seniors, children, and other residents and business owners about imposters who may pose as utility workers, law enforcement, and other municipal employees,” said Milford Sgt. Jeff Nielsen, the Department’s crime prevention officer.

Police wanted spectators to come away with a heightened awareness of what legitimate employees wear and how to identify them. Last held in 2009, this year’s fashion show featured representatives from animal control, an oil company, a water company, a caregiver group, a delivery company, and the Milford Fire, Police and Public Works departments.

Organizers stressed that anyone can be a target - not just senior citizens. Summer is a time when youngsters are home a lot and could be victimized. More than just the uniforms, police also provided tips on identifying legitimate credentials and official vehicles.

The Police Department has also unveiled a new crime-fighting tool this summer with the launch of “TipSubmit.” The high-tech tool allows citizens to submit anonymous tips or suspicious activities through the Web, a text message, or on any mobile device such as an Android or iPhone. Users can provide photos with “TipSubmit” and carry on anonymous two-way conversations with police. Funds for the new online tool were provided by the Milford Prevention Council through grants aimed at combatting underage drinking and substance abuse.
Preventing Overdose Deaths
Life-saving medication now part of Redding police response

The human toll of substance abuse is felt in every community across the state. In Connecticut, on average, one person dies every day from an opioid overdose. But when every second matters to bring someone back from the brink of death, Redding police will be ready.

The peace officers are already certified in emergency first aid skills and carry oxygen and defibrillators in their cruisers. Now, thanks to a new state law, Redding police will carry the life-saving medication naloxone, also known as Narcan. The medication quickly reverses the effects of overdoses linked to heroin and the prescription drugs oxycodone, methadone, and morphine.

Police Chief Douglas Fuchs said that all Redding police officers are trained Emergency Medical Responders. They not only know how to administer Narcan, they can recognize the signs and symptoms of an overdose. “We know this will afford us the opportunity to save a life,” Chief Fuchs said.

Connecticut state troopers began carrying Narcan last fall. Redding’s police department is among the first municipal police force to use the medication since the state’s new “Good Samaritan Law” was passed last year. Prior to that, only licensed health care practitioners were allowed to administer Narcan without being civilly or criminally liable for the action. The new law authorizes anyone to administer the medication to someone that he or she believes, in good faith, is experiencing an opioid-related drug overdose.

There is also no additional taxpayer expense to outfit the cruisers with Narcan. Danbury Hospital, which already provides paramedic services to the town, is supplying the police with Narcan.

“Opiate addiction is something that cuts across all socioeconomic groups,” First Selectman Julia Pemberton said. “Giving our first responders the ability to administer Narcan in the event of an opiate overdose will save the lives of members of our community, plain and simple.”

Police Leading The Fight
Officers help lead conference on drug abuse prevention

Stamford Police Capt. Richard Conklin calls it the “the perfect storm.”

Police in Stamford and Greenwich are seeing a spike in heroin use because the increased experimentation of prescription drugs by young people over the years has made the “legal” drugs scarcer on the street. The alternative, unfortunately, has been the highly addictive heroin.

In a call to action to help tackle the epidemic, local law enforcement joined with health care professionals and social workers at a recent regional conference at the UConn Stamford campus. Organized by drug abuse prevention group Communities 4 Action, the conference also attracted professionals from Darien, Norwalk, and New Canaan.

“Because our youth had gotten involved in prescription drugs in a very, very big way they had the misconception that the prescription drugs were a safe alternative because they are government-regulated and prescribed by a physician,” Capt. Conklin told conference-goers.

One of the tools in the crackdown of prescription drug abuse has been the state’s Prescription Drug Monitoring program, which maintains a registry that allows physicians and police to see what medications suspects and patients have been prescribed. Capt. Conklin said the program has cut down on the frequency of “doctor shopping” and the resulting streets sales of medications, particularly opiates. Conference participants also discussed ways to reach parents about the dangerous medications in their own medicine cabinets.

Officers shared first-hand the human toll that illegal drug use, and specifically heroin, has had on their towns. It is a beast that must be fed every day and an addict’s obsessive search for the next fix has led to higher crime rates and, tragically, loss of life. Since October, Stamford has seen at least three overdose fatalities. Greenwich had one overdose in 2012 but has seen at least 12 over the past two years.

“Sometimes, there is an expectation or assumption that this only happens in other places and that heroin addiction is kind of in the seedy end of town and affects only a small number of people,” Greenwich Police Chief Heavey said. “That is unfortunately a wrong perception.”
PUBLIC SAFETY

Pump Up The Volume
Westport looks to better communication for school safety

Upgrades to school safety in the wake of the Sandy Hook tragedy are ongoing across the state and recently the town of Westport enhanced its response with a new district-wide communications system. The town is adding more than 400 speakers throughout its schools to broadcast public address messages both inside and outside. The new speakers will be a modification of the existing fire alarm speakers and will be capable of broadcasting alerts that can be monitored and sent to first responders.

The system is adaptable to all types of situations in the buildings and can be programmed for lockdowns and shelter-in-place messages. “It will certainly work to get a short, simple message to everyone at the same time,” Police Chief Dale Call said.

Additionally, principals, assistant principals, nurses, custodians, and staff outside the buildings are being outfitted with digital two-way radios. The 190 new portable radios are replacing older analog versions. Each radio will be programmed to have a direct emergency communications channel.

There are approximately 5,800 students in the district’s eight schools – five elementary, two middle schools, and one high school. Local officials said that with nearly 1,900 students at the high school “we need a way to communicate immediately.”

The more than $740,000 appropriation for the project garnered a unanimous vote from the town Board of Finance. Maintenance costs for the public address system and radios will be rolled into the school district operating budget. School officials expect the new radios to last 10 to 15 years. “In my opinion communication and notification are important,” Board member Janis Collins said.

Changing the Channel
Greenwich police encrypt radio “chatter”

When the bad guys are aware of your every move because they are scanner snooping, what’s a police department to do? Change the channel.

That’s what Greenwich has recently done by going to an encrypted system for all of its radio transmissions – routine and emergency. Encryption uses a special filter that essentially jumbles the message and allows transmissions to be understandable to radios that are activated by the same system. Encrypted messages will either sound garbled or not be heard at all on some scanners.

Police Chief Jim Heavey said a number of factors went into the decision, but the primary reason was officer safety. “We have received credible intelligence that criminals were using scanners and smart phone applications to monitor the location and activities of police officers,” the Chief explained.

Additionally, confidential information is also transmitted across the airwaves and the system will help protect privacy.

A growing number of departments across the state and nation are moving toward encrypted transmission as newer technology becomes available. Greenwich moved from an analog system to a $5.5 million digital communications system in 2009.

Previously the general public could tune into police activities with scanners or specially programmed mobile devices. However, the increased use of social media is allowing police departments to offer real-time public updates on law enforcement activities. The Greenwich police use Twitter to provide information on emergency situations, crimes, and traffic accidents and detours.

The public’s right to know has been raised as an issue with encrypted systems, but Freedom of information advocates say some information should understandably be kept confidential as long as taxpayers have the means to know how their public police department is performing.
Looking Good
New video cameras deter crime in New Haven

Now playing at a video monitor near you in downtown New Haven: You—or anyone else who wanders into the camera shot.

Downtown merchants are getting another level of security to help deter crime with the installation of several video cameras. It’s part of the city’s “Downtown Digital Eye” program that features a series of 360-degree traffic cameras, sidewalk cameras, and sidewalk monitors that publicly air the feed.

“You’re going to be a lot less likely to commit a crime if you know that you’re being watched,” says Matthew Griswold, manager of the Town Green Special Services District where the cameras are being installed. “We’re not trying to hide anything. We’re not Big Brother. This is a public camera.”

The Special Services District was established to improve conditions and is working with city and Yale University police and various city departments on the public video project. Five intersections are getting the first series of cameras and eventually officials hope to expand with cameras along the path from Union Station to downtown. The cameras film 24 hours a day and police and others can log in and monitor all the sites.

“We wanted people coming from the train station — commuters, visitors — to know that no matter where you go, you’re safe. You’re being watched and crimes are less likely to happen with our cameras there,” Griswold said.

They have already begun making a difference, spotting shoplifters and vandals defacing property. The cameras also let officials see if there is a tree down or some similar type of emergency.

In addition to airing the hustle and bustle along Elm City streets, the 30-inch monitors will also publicize notices and advertisements for community events. The District and its projects are funded through a special tax on downtown properties.

Less Guesswork
In Bridgeport, it’s “Smile:” You’re on the police officer’s camera”

The Bridgeport Police Department is purchasing body cameras for its police officers, a move that Police Chief Joseph Gaudett said “will help keep our kids, our families, and our police officers safe.”

The decision to equip Bridgeport’s police with uniform cameras comes after several high-profile incidents involving police in Ferguson, Missouri, New York City, and, most recently, Baltimore.

“I think that body cameras take a lot of guesswork out of the situation, should it occur,” said George Mintz, head of the Bridgeport branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

City Councilman Enrique Torres, R-130, said he has no reason to believe what happened in Baltimore will happen in Bridgeport, but believes the cameras are a worthwhile expense given the incidents that have garnered national attention.

“Cops are paid to pick up bad people and bring them in so the judicial system can judge them,” Torres said. “We’re skipping over a step here where cops are taking the judges’ role over on the street and issuing out punishment on the spot.”

Hartford and South Windsor are also considering the technology and the Branford Police Department already uses body cameras.

Joseph Dooley, the president of the Connecticut Police Chiefs Association, cautioned that the cameras are only part of the solution and have their own challenges in addition to their high cost at $900 per unit. Some of the concerns regarding body cameras include where to store the terabytes of data collected and the fact that the cameras are an evolving technology and could become quickly outdated.

“The general feeling is that they are not the complete answer, but can provide some transparency,” said Dooley. “But they have their place and as time goes by, more and more police departments will have them.”
Public Safety

Just In Case
Coventry adopts proactive approach for missing children

Often hailed as heroes for simply doing their jobs, police officers are that essential intermediary between the public’s well-being and tragedy.

The town of Coventry recently honored an officer for implementing a program that’s proactive and preemptive – helping officers quickly leap into action when a child with autism goes missing. Officer Gail McDonnell worked with school officials to help establish “Project Safe Return.”

Autism Speaks, a national advocacy group, reports that nearly 50 percent of children diagnosed with autism are prone to wander from safe areas.

McDonnell coordinated an outreach effort that encouraged parents and caregivers to provide police with identifying information of the child. Kept in a secure file, the information would be readily available to first responders in the event of a report of a missing child, whose name would be automatically flagged in the dispatch system.

Because parents or caregivers could be obviously distraught when contacting police, Project Safe Return makes sure that police have the necessary information before a child goes missing. With Project Safe Return, when police receive a 911 call, dispatch will be able to pull up a current photograph of the child and all necessary information. That information is then passed on to all officers through their patrol car laptop.

Coventry Police Chief Mark Palmer says the program may be the only one of its type in the region. During a recent Town Council meeting, the chief presented a special citation to Officer McDonnell, who also coordinated training for fellow officers and worked with Autism Speaks in developing the program.

“Participating in Project Safe Return is simple, and having the information in advance can be invaluable in quickly resolving a potentially tragic situation,” Officer McDonnell said.

Approachable Patrols
Greenwich police not back-pedaling on public safety

Modern policing sometimes means taking a step back in time and getting around town the old-fashioned way – on two wheels.

Greenwich police broke out the bikes this spring and resumed the Police Department’s bicycle patrols around town. About a dozen officers staff the patrol, which gives them more one-on-one interaction with the public.

“We’re more approachable. I can get out on Greenwich Avenue and people come up and talk to me,” Officer Carl Johnson says. “In a car there’s that disconnect.”

In a car, there’s also air conditioning, a computer, and other elements of technology and comfort. With no patrol car laptop to turn to, officers write tickets out by hand when they do spot violations. In addition to the public interaction, one of the main advantages of the bicycles is stealth. No sirens, no lights, and no warning to the bad guys.

Bike patrols have been part of law enforcement for over a century. They were used in many large cities in the late 1800s. According to “Police Patrol Magazine,” in 1895 when Teddy Roosevelt was the New York City Police Commissioner, he established a bicycle patrol of more than two dozen officers. The patrol reportedly was responsible for nearly 1,400 arrests in its first year. Bikes all but disappeared with the emergence of motorized vehicles in the early 1900s. It was a shift back to community policing in the 1970s that reintroduced the bike patrols.

The officers pedal through the business district and various neighborhoods in eight hour shifts – rain or shine. Not just any officer can hop on a bike and go. The Greenwich patrol members received training and certification through an international police bicycling association.

Greenwich Police Lt. Kraig Gray said the town’s bike patrols have been around for several years as part of the Department’s efforts to enhance interaction with the public.

“It’s all about modern policing, and connecting to the community,” he said.
When Seconds Count
Sprague’s new EMT device is a life-saver

First responders in Sprague have enhanced their life-saving capabilities by adding an $18,000 piece of medical equipment at no cost to the town.

The Baltic Fire Department recently purchased the LUCAS 2 chest compression system for its ambulance. It is new technology that will greatly help the medical crew in providing quality care during cardiac emergencies. The device was paid for with funds from the fire department’s billing account.

The volunteer department responds to about 300 calls a year and began billing for services seven years ago. Fire officials say that revenue has allowed them to spend more than $185,000 on supplies. Adding the new chest compression equipment was “an obvious choice,” said EMS Lieutenant Harry Segerstrom, Sr.

Medical guidelines, revised in November by the Eastern Connecticut EMS Council, require 100 chest compressions a minute for at least 20 minutes before a patient can put on an ambulance for additional treatment. The Lucas 2 can provide at least 100 compressions a minute with a depth of two inches with minimal interruption to the patient.

Segerstrom said the device is “user-friendly” and will make the responders’ job a lot easier. “You figure 100 per minute times 20 minutes, you get tired real quick,” he explained. “This machine solves that whole problem. There’s no doubt it will save lives.”

Patients beyond Baltic will essentially benefit as well. The device will travel with the ambulance and can be used when the department is providing mutual aid in other towns. All 19 medical response members have been trained to use the LUCAS 2.

“If it saves one person’s life, it pays for itself,” crew member and billing coordinator Donna Sanford said.

Loud And Clear
Plainfield upgrading municipal fleet’s radio system

An upgrade to its municipal radio system will allow the town of Plainfield to more quickly and directly communicate problems to police for quicker response times.

New radios are being installed in highway and maintenance vehicles, including sewer authority trucks, a move that will give drivers the ability to speak directly to police without having to rely on their cell phones. The new system is expected to be installed by the new year.

“Those can be unreliable, especially in winter or during storms,” said Emergency Management Paul Yellen, who noted the last tropical storm brought down some cell towers.

Yellen said that radios had never been part of the package when the town would buy new vehicles and as a result the older system essentially “fell apart.” The town has been able to restore the frequency, however, at no cost to taxpayers, he added.

The town used about $14,000 from its Local Capital Improvement Program funding to buy the radios. There will also be a backup generator that will kick in should the radio tower lose power.

Police officials say the new UHF radios will give them a new set of eyes and ears on the road. The radios will be tuned to a frequency closely monitored by town police. Police Captain Mario Arriaga said town drivers are often the first to spot road incidents, such as accidents, disabled vehicles, downed trees in the roads, and other traffic problems.

“They might already be on the road in a section we haven’t gotten to yet,” Captain Arriaga said. “With the cell phones, a driver would have to call dispatch and get transferred to a supervisor before we can let an officer know about the situation. This streamlines the whole process.”
Police departments have at their disposal a variety of resources to achieve their mission of protecting the residents and businesses they serve and in Greenwich, coffee is now one of them.

As part of its community outreach program, the Greenwich police department has initiated “Coffee with a Cop,” a nationwide program that brings police officers and community members together—over coffee—to discuss issues and learn more about each other.

“Coffee with a Cop” meetings take place at local restaurants. Program proponents say the neutral locations provide the opportunity for real conversations about issues that matter, like public safety, crime trends and safety tips. Through the meetings, citizens and police officers get to know each other and discuss mutual goals for the communities they live in and serve.

“It’s another of the multiple ways we try to connect with the community,” said Lt. Kraig Gray. “The idea is to humanize police officers, let people speak with police officers in an informal way.”

The first meeting was held in Old Greenwich and the next one will be held in the west end of Greenwich with Spanish-speaking officers. Multiple meetings will be scheduled throughout Greenwich over the coming months.

“It will definitely be all over town,” Lt. Gray said. There will be no set agenda at the coffee discussions. In fact the banner promoting the program on the police department’s website says, “No agenda or speeches, just a chance to ask questions, voice concerns, and get to know the officers in your community.”

“If residents have issues with quality-of-life violations in their neighborhood or concerns about crime in the community, that input would be welcomed,” Gray said. “If people have questions about law-enforcement or what it’s like working as a police officer, those questions will be answered, too.”

Patrolling With A Personal Touch

In Winsted, foot patrols return to downtown

The beat goes on in Winsted -- one step at a time -- as foot patrols return to Main Street.

“We engage in the community,” said Police Chief William Fitzgerald. “You get to meet people and the best way to communicate is to be there face to face. The community likes walking beats and likes to see the officers downtown.”

The former commander of the Community-Oriented Policing Unit in Newport, Rhode Island, Chief Fitzgerald brought that same focus to Winsted when he was hired in April to lead the 18-member department. His strong support for community police was evident in his first official remarks after being sworn in this past spring.

“My new command team and I have the will and fortitude to re-engage the public, schools, and business community and to address crime and quality-of-life issues,” Fitzgerald told the crowd. “We will uncover any problem, and we will redress any wrong. From this day forward, we commit ourselves to the notion that the police and the community are truly partners.”

Clad in highly visible yellow shirts, officers walk routes along Main Street in four-hour shifts, engaging business owners, customers, the young and the old.

Community reaction has been positive particularly from merchants who appreciate seeing an officer stop by for a visit now and then. Economic Development Commission member Frank Berg says the initiative creates a “safe vibe” on the street, especially at night.

“I think it’s a great idea,” Berg says. “I think it’s really going to bring people together.”

Officers understand that building relationships in the community is vital for gaining information. Officer Daniel Peitrafesa says patrolling in a squad doesn’t provide the same personal interaction with the community, but strolling Main Street is a great way to establish rapport.

“It’s a mutual respect, and sometimes that gets missed in the police contact,” Peitrafesa says. “I love doing it. I took this job to serve the community, and this is a great way to do it.”
Taking The Lead
Planned energy park to fuel growth, revenue in Beacon Falls

The industrial revolution isn’t dead. It’s just taking on a much different look in the once heavily industrial Naugatuck Valley.

Beacon Falls officials are moving forward with plans to turn an old sand mine into a cutting edge energy park – one that would be home to the largest fuel cell power plant in the state. By doing so the town is tapping into a renewable energy industry that Connecticut has quietly led for years. According to the Connecticut Hydrogen Fuel Cell Coalition, state companies have “pioneered the development and application of fuel cells and hydrogen generation and continue to lead the world” with the infrastructure, equipment, academic, and state government support needed to sustain the industry.

Fuel cells use hydrogen-rich fuel to create electricity and produce very little pollution. The 63.3-megawatt plant proposed for the Beacon Falls project would generate enough energy to power 60,000 homes in Connecticut.

For Beacon Falls it means producing more than energy. The project is expected to generate $90 million in local property and sales tax over the plant’s 20-year life span. First Selectman Christopher Bielik says the town has been in discussions since last year with a group of energy and construction companies that will develop and operate the plant on a 24-acre site near the Naugatuck River.

It has the potential to transform not only Beacon Falls but the entire Naugatuck Valley, Bielik says.

“It will put the town on the map and make a huge difference when other businesses come looking in the community and the area,” Bielik says.

The complex will be built on land owned by the Torrington-based construction company O&G Industries. The other partners in the project are Danbury-based Fuel Cell Energy and Middletown-based CT Energy & Technology.

The developers say that pending all appropriate approvals, construction could start within a year.

Shedding A Light
Portland researches energy efficient solutions

Why rent when you can own? Street lights, that is.

That concept is at the heart of CCM’s energy street lighting program that helps member towns cut down on their lighting bills. The town of Portland is the latest municipality considering the possibility. First Selectman Susan S. Bransfield estimates the town could pare down the $100,000 it spends yearly to operate the street lights it leases from Ever-source.

“The selectmen are very committed to the wise use of our energy,” Bransfield said.

CCM estimates that municipalities spend about a third of their annual electric costs on street lighting. The CCM program helps members purchase the lights and upgrade to the cleaner, whiter, and more efficient LED technology. The program helps member municipalities manage the system with 24/7 service and provides preventive and on-time responsive maintenance. With the upgrades, municipalities also have the ability to control when the lights should burn brightest and when a softer glow is more appropriate.

Bransfield said the town will do its homework before making any decision and that includes talking to neighboring communities who have adopted or are in the process of adopting the system. They include Middletown, which has already purchased the lights and Glastonbury, which is in the process of doing so.

Middletown has just over 5,000 lights and the upgrade, approved in a 2013 referendum, is estimated to save the city over $300,000 annually in energy costs.

Bransfield says she may also talk with officials in Cromwell, which recently approved a cost analysis for upgrading its system of 1,200 street lights.

Portland’s Clean Energy Task Force will also be consulted, the first selectman said.
TECHNOLOGY

Bright Future

Cheshire to reap the benefits of solar farm

The town of Cheshire has plans to begin “farming” at its former landfill and its cash crop will be renewable energy.

The town is working with a solar energy company to install a solar farm – and a large array of solar panels – at the town’s Waterbury Road site. According to Town Engineer Walter Gancarz, the town could save about $1.7 million on electricity costs over 20 years.

The project will breathe new life into a five-acre site that officials say has very little reuse potential. The solar farm is one of the few allowable uses and would be an optimal fit. Converting defunct landfills into energy generators is part of a growing eco-friendly trend across the state and nation. Studies show that over the last 30 years, municipal solid waste landfills in the U.S. have decreased dramatically from about 8,000 to fewer than 1,800.

Such sites represent open space where installing solar arrays encounter fewer concerns over aesthetic impacts. Because of existing environmental concerns they are not well suited for residential zoning or other real estate development. But mixing the sun and science on these sites is making sense for more and more municipalities.

“It could be terrific for the town,” said Town Council Chairman Tim Slocum. “The town saves money over time and feels better about using renewables.”

Construction at the Cheshire landfill is scheduled to begin this fall and the installation would come at no cost to the town. The solar farm would be up and operating by the middle of 2016. The town will lock in an energy purchase agreement of 8 cents per kilowatt hour. Electricity generated from the solar farm will feed a meter at the Public Works garage. Officials say any power generated above what the town needs will be returned to the grid and the town would be credited for the excess electricity.

Current Events

Fairfield celebrates benefits of EVs

The town of Fairfield put in a big plug in for the newest mode of clean, green transportation by sponsoring a recent “Electric Vehicle Showcase.”

Held in a commuter parking lot, more than 20 electric vehicles – autos and bicycles – were put on display. They were provided by local auto dealers and private owners. The event coincided with National Drive Electric Week.

The event was organized by the Fairfield Clean Energy Task Force.

“With the highest density of charging stations in Connecticut, the Fairfield community is helping to promote our region’s opportunities for cleaner transportation,” Task Force Chairman Scott Thomson said. “It’s the perfect time for an event that brings prime-time electric vehicle technology to a wider audience.”

The town has 10 EV charging stations with 10 more planned.

Experts were on hand to enlighten the public about the financial benefits of owning and driving the efficient electric vehicles. EV owners are eligible for up to $7,500 in federal tax credits and $3,000 in state rebates and incentives.

There are more than 1,600 electric vehicles registered in Connecticut. The state launched a $1 million incentive program this year that will provide cash rebates to residents, businesses and municipalities that buy or lease EVs. Officials estimate there are enough funds in the program for rebates for more than 450 electric or hydrogen vehicles. Funds for the program arose from the 2012 merger of Northeast Utilities and NStar.

The 15 vehicle models that qualify for the program are manufactured by Audi, BMW, Chevrolet, FIAT, Ford, Kia, Mercedes, Mitsubishi, Nissan, Smart, Volkswagen, Hyundai, and Toyota.

“Our town is proud to be an active participant in supporting and utilizing numerous clean energy and green initiatives,” First Selectman Michael Tetreau said.
A Bright Idea
Norwalk residents turn out for light bulb swap

The city of Norwalk is making good on its pledge to leverage more clean energy sources and is getting help from the entire community to do so. With a boost from a $15,000 Clean Energy Communities grant, the city purchased about 6,000 energy efficient LED light bulbs and offered them to residents in a citywide swap. A “Bright Idea” swap in September proved so successful that officials made plans to hold a second one in December.

Mayor Harry Rilling said the turnout has been “tremendous.” More than 500 city residents showed up at the first swap and exchanged about 3,000 traditional incandescent light bulbs for LED bulbs. An LED bulb can last about 23 years, each one saving about $10 a year compared to an incandescent bulb, which has a life span of less than three years.

The Mayor said the city signed an Energize Connecticut Clean Energy Communities pledge in 2014 to reduce municipal building energy consumption by 20 percent and use more renewable sources by 2018. The “Bright Idea” swap has been an important part of that initiative. The event also provided holiday lights and other specialty lights at discounted purchase prices.

Councilman John Kydes, who also heads up the Mayor’s Energy and Environment Task Force, said city residents helped make the grant available. The $15,000 was secured through participation in the Home Energy Solutions program in which energy specialists provided in-home energy efficiency assessments. He said the city is excited to “give residents a way to cut energy costs at home.”

“Community participation is critical to helping our city reach its energy goals. With the support of our community, there are no limitations to what Norwalk can accomplish,” Kydes said.

Sunny Side Up
Voluntown to reap solar savings with new panel project

When cities and towns search for ways to save money, they often look at everything under the sun. In Voluntown, catching some rays also means saving some energy dollars after the town recently installed an array of solar panels at an elementary school after a year’s worth of planning and installing the 904-panel system.

Once the panels passed their first photovoltaic test and the meters on the panels were configured, it was all systems go for the environmentally-friendly project. School Superintendent Adam Burrows said testing each connection with the panels was a tedious project that also added to the project’s timeframe. Configuring the meters — which record electricity consumption patterns — was the last step in the process.

Voluntown officials say the solar array will generate about 215 kilowatts of power for the school. The solar array occupies over three-quarters of an acre behind the school’s playground. In total, the system is projected to generate in excess of 200,000 kilowatts per year and officials expect the panels to save the town between $30,000 and $50,000 in electricity costs each year.

Officials say the project’s low-cost power purchase agreement will lock in a fixed price of electricity for the elementary school for 20 years. The agreement means the elementary school’s electric costs will be lower than its current electric costs and if utility rates continue to escalate, the savings will increase over time.

In addition, the town will pay a flat rate of 9.5 cents per kilowatt hour through a solar power purchase agreement.
**City Of The Future**

Norwalk’s smart parking tool is spot on for motorists and merchants

Need to find a parking space in Norwalk? There’s an app for that.

The city’s Parking Authority is providing real-time parking availability through “Parker,” a free downloadable application. Rolled out this past fall, the application alerts motorists when there are open spaces in the South Norwalk Train Station Garage and at available metered spaces on an increasing number of city streets.

Calling Norwalk a “city of the future,” Mayor Harry Rilling said the app offers an easy way for residents and visitors to park quickly and get out and enjoy all the city has to offer.

“In addition, with people driving around less, smart parking alleviates congestion and saves on gas, making it better for the environment,” the Mayor said.

So far, the city has installed parking sensors at on-street parking spaces on six streets with plans to add another street this year.

Parking Authority staffer Kathryn Hebert says since October, “Parker” has been used in 1,500 “app sessions” and 170,000 “parking events” – instances when a driver pulls into a spot.

“The actual sessions where people are using the app correlates to the turnovers and the average (session) is over two minutes, which tells us they’re using (the app) to find parking,” Hebert said. “These things take a while to catch on. I expect this will happen now. Everything is immediate and people use their phones for everything. It’s very easy and convenient.”

It’s not just motorists who are benefitting from “Parker” by saving time and gas. Norwalk merchants are finding out it’s a convenience they can offer their patrons. Some businesses have begun incorporating “Parker” on their website to entice customers worried about finding parking near their stores.

“As the city grows and new buildings go into construction, it’s a great thing,” says Norwalk business owner Carlos Perez.

“E” Is For Easy

East Hampton offering e-filing

The paperless revolution continues across the state. East Hampton is among the towns keeping ahead of the technology curve by becoming one of the latest communities to offer easy and convenient “e-recording” to residents and businesses.

For many users now, municipal business can be conducted with the click of a mouse or a key stroke. It eliminates the need to drive to Town Hall or rely on the mail service.

Town Clerk Sandra Wieleba said the technology provides a host of advantage for users who can now scan and upload documents to the clerk’s office for recording. This “real-time” recording saves time and money, eliminates payment errors, and increases staff productivity.

Wieleba said introducing this kind of technology is at the core of the mission of the clerk’s office, the official repository for documents submitted by citizens, title companies, banks, attorneys and others. On the user end, all that is required is high-speed Internet access, a personal computer, and a scanner.

“We will constantly strive to maintain a professional attitude and bring the most cutting-edge technology possible to our residents while providing accuracy and knowledge to the profession,” she said.

A secure process that can also record fees and payments, it eliminates the need to write checks. The technology also goes a long way in eliminating payment errors which tended to slow down the recording process in town hall. Except for conveyance taxes and deeds, a variety of documents are now being accepted at the clerk’s office for e-recording.

East Hampton joins more than two dozen towns in Connecticut that have adopted the electronic recording technology provided by the vendor Simplifile.

“My goal is to encourage more vendors to utilize this technology,” the Clerk said.
A significant renovation planned for Voluntown Town Hall may not be visible to the eye but will help residents conduct business in the blink of one.

Town officials are replacing the computers with faster ones that have all the modern upgrades. The town recently used money in the budget to replace computers for four offices – clerk, selectmen’s assistant, tax collector, and assessor – but it was important to expand the upgrades throughout to increase efficiency and cut down on waiting times for the public.

“Everyone had issues and they had to work harder to get things done,” First Selectman Tracy Hanson said.

Residents were among those most affected by the hiccups from the aging computers.

“People had to wait until we looked up certain things on our database,” Secretary Barbara Gauthier said. “Sometimes the computer would crash with some programs when we would need them and the residents would have to have come back to get the information.”

Hanson said the rest of the computer upgrades will be funded through a $21,300 grant the town received from the Nutmeg Network, the state’s high-speed fiber-optic infrastructure. The state expanded the broadband network in 2010 to improve public safety and education services throughout the state. Grant funding had initially been available only to schools, libraries, and emergency services but has now expanded for other municipal programs.

Once installed, the new Town Hall computers will be connected to the elementary school’s system for a faster connection. The project will complement the town’s recent upgrade of its servers, which have helped speed up the pace a bit. But without the new computers on the front end, there were still issues, Hanson said.

“It got to a point where we updated our server and the old programs wouldn’t even open or transfer with the new server because they were so outdated,” Hanson said.
Could a low-tech way for handling traffic congestion be a better fit than adding lights, lanes, and signs? Sometimes less is more and the town of Glastonbury is one of a growing number of communities in the state considering “roundabouts,” a circular intersection that requires incoming drivers to yield to traffic inside the circle.

The town is reviewing a $1.5 million proposal to install a roundabout to ease traffic congestion along busy Hebron Avenue. Another option – an $850,000 project – would add several turn lanes on the westbound side of the road at the intersection with New London Turnpike.

After receiving an update and support from the state Department of Transportation on the use of roundabouts and improved safety, town councilors held a recent public hearing on the matter. While the roundabout proposal got mixed reviews from many of the residents who spoke, the idea of installing the circular patterns to “calm” traffic is picking up speed around the state.

According to the DOT, about 25 towns in Connecticut are currently considering installing roundabouts. A DOT official told the Glastonbury Town Council that single-lane roundabouts are generally safer for pedestrians and cyclists. The DOT said several studies have all indicated about a 40 percent reduction in crashes, nearly 80 percent reduction in injuries and a 90 percent drop in fatalities. Roundabouts also complement a “Complete Streets” policy, which is intended to calm traffic by design and not signs.

Glastonbury Town Council Chairman Stewart “Chip” Beckett noted that roundabouts don’t require electricity. As a result, they would be easier to maintain during power outages. He said he has also biked through roundabouts and found them “safer than a traditional intersection.”

Councilman William T. Finn supports the roundabout but said he wants to ensure the public is adequately informed and educated on the issue.

“If we are looking for the downtown area to be our growth area and economic engine, we have to put in the network that’s going to make that be successful,” Finn said.
Future Firefighters
High school fire brigade getting ready in Monroe

The town of Monroe won't have to look far for its next generation of firefighters. They're already assembled and honing their skills – in high school.

The Masuk High School all-volunteer fire brigade has been in existence for 30 years. Each of the current 11 brigade members is a junior member of one of Monroe's three volunteer fire departments. While in school, brigade members are responsible for helping out in emergencies, supervising specific posts, and making sure school evacuations are conducted smoothly.

“We have to check the doors, classrooms, and bathrooms and make sure everyone gets out safely,” fire brigade member Charlie Christo said.

That training and readiness sprang into action when a cigarette was carelessly tossed in a waste basket in a high school restroom a few years ago.

“It was incredibly smoky, and one of the fire brigade kids went in and put it out with a fire extinguisher,” said Brigade Advisor Dave York, who also serves as the town’s Emergency Management Director. “They are attentive to public safety, any fire hazards, or any other risks and they will let me or other administrators know.”

Bonded by their common interest, brigade members “really care for each other,” York said.

As junior firefighters, they help out at firehouses and pitch in at emergency scenes, but because of age limitations they largely are assigned clean-up details, tool retrieval, and other chores off the front lines. Those helping hands have meant a lot to the adult firefighters, who can be quite fatigued after fighting a fire.

“When juniors can come in and fill air packs and help get ladders off the trucks and help set up and clean up afterwards, it is a big service to the senior members,” York said. “It’s also a process for them becoming adult members, a transition.”

Warm Hearts
Volunteers walk to raise funds for heating assistance in New Milford

The holidays may be over, but the feeling of “good will toward men – and women” was on abundant display when walkers in New Milford rang in the New Year by volunteering a little shoe leather for a good cause at the fourth annual “Cold Homes, Warm Hearts 5k Walk” in January.

The walk past and around the beautiful architecture and revitalized shops and restaurants of New Milford’s historic village center is a fundraiser for the Community Fuel Bank of New Milford.

Peg Molina, social services director for the town, said the walk was initiated four years ago following a 50 percent cut to Federal Energy Assistance grants for low income families in the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

The event is organized by New Milford Social Services, New Milford Senior Center, and New Milford Parks and Rec department and the major sponsors are three local fuel companies.

Individuals, companies, families, and school groups create teams to raise funds and raise awareness about the importance of helping heat the homes of families in need.

“Teams are a big part of what makes this walk a success,” said Carolyn Haglund, New Milford’s senior citizen services director.

Molina said that while oil prices are down, there are many still left in the cold who simply cannot afford to heat their homes.

Nearly 100 people participated in this year’s walk, including teams representing youth groups and church groups, the United Way and student groups, which Molina called a “wonderful mix of our community.”
Volunteers

Art Squad

Brightening up the fight against blight in Bristol

Bristol is adding two more weapons in its arsenal to fight blight – a little paint and a lot of creativity.

City Councilor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu said the town has assembled the “Art Squad,” a group of local artists and community members who are handy with a brush and committed to civic pride. Their mission is painting over the plywood used to board up doors and windows on blighted buildings and give the neighborhoods a fresh look. Shuttered buildings can be a detriment to the surrounding area when they really don’t have to be, she says.

“When the Art Squad’s help we felt there was an opportunity to perhaps flip the vision to a positive one,” Zoppo-Sassu says.

Created through the city’s “All Heart” branding campaign, the Art Squad enthusiastically embraced the task, according to Ginger Grant, the squad’s captain.

“We have several projects lined up but this was too good to pass up,” she said. “There are tons of artists excited and ready to paint away.”

The squad spent a day in May as part of the “All Heart Art to Fight Blight Day” and turned dozens of plain plywood sheets that were fronting decaying buildings into mini-billboards and colorful expressions of pride. The city made sure the boards were primed in advance and that paints, brushes, tarps, and other items were supplied.

“The arts have the power to transform,” squad member Lindsay Vigue said. “It can take a building that has fallen on hard times and immediately cheer it up, opening the chance for someone to be inspired to carry out a vision befitting of the neighborhood and great city.”

Gimme Shelter

Parents donate pavilion for Easton athletic fields

Seeking shelter from a storm or the hot sun or just finding a place to sit and relax is at the heart of a volunteer project in Easton.

A group of parents raised $30,000 over the past few years to build an open-air pavilion near the town’s soccer and baseball fields at an elementary school. Athan Crist, one of four fathers who spearheaded the project, said they “wanted to do something good for the town.” He said the group envisioned a facility where parents and grandparents can keep a watchful eye on young children while watching their older kids play ball.

“It will provide refuge from drizzle and rain and on days when it’s blisteringly hot,” he added.

The town is currently working on a three-phase master plan for the 127-acre property adjacent to the elementary school that would create a larger “civic park” when completed over the next decade. The first phase includes another pavilion, a concession building with bathrooms, more parking, a hiking trail and a passive recreation meadow. Phase two would add more tennis and a multipurpose field. Phase three calls for a splash park, a winter sports area and solar panel installations.

For now, however, the donated shelter is a welcome and much-needed addition.

“I applaud the efforts of these private citizens,” said John Broadbin, a member of the Parks and Recreation Commission.

The town’s Public Works Department will build the pavilion’s foundation, estimated to cost between $2,000 and $4,000.

The fathers are hopeful that their donation will inspire other residents to contribute to the larger project. The pavilion’s location, they say, will offer something for everyone.

“It’s a place to meet…with all the fields there from various sports like Little League, lacrosse, soccer and it is also for parties and picnics,” Athan said. “We thought it’s a great way to spend the money to get a lot of use and bring joy and happiness to the town.”
There’s A Buzz In The Air
Aircraft hobbyists filming progress in Putnam

Combining their passion for aerial photography and remote-controlled aircraft, two local men have sent an “eye in the sky” over Putnam. Chris Collins and Eric Lafrenais have filmed – free of charge – the ongoing construction at the high school and plan to document other projects.

“This gives us a chance to do something we love and help out the town at the same time,” said Lafrenais.

Both off-road enthusiasts, the men first got involved with the hobby through remote-controlled cars. That evolved into remote-controlled flying when they wanted a way to film aerial shots of their off-roading. One thing led to another and now they “fly” under the moniker, “Off-Camber Produkshuns.” Lafrenais and Collins sought permission from the Board of Selectmen to photograph the various projects.

Town officials appreciate the bird’s-eye view and see it as a way the town can produce marketing materials and document history.

“From a historic perspective these kinds of photos are invaluable to document the town’s development for future generations,” Town Administrator Douglas Cutler said.

The aerial photographers are also mindful of not buzzing above neighborhoods in this Quiet Corner town. That also has impressed officials.

“They know all the rules of how high they can fly, where they can fly,” Mayor Tony Falzarano said. “They only go where they have permission. And the photos they showed us are just great.”

The duo continues to fine tune their aerial photography and, someday, they hope to turn this amateur passion into something more.

“If you see the videos we did when we first started to now, there’s such a big difference,” Collins said. “We’re really getting better at it every time we do it and we’re just having so much fun.”

Paying Tribute
Stories of soldiers who died in action come to life in Newington

This past Memorial Day, Newington paid tribute to the local soldiers who died in action by honoring how they lived.

Thanks to the passionate pursuit of Memorial Day Parade organizers, the stories and photos of more than two dozen Newington soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice were published in a Memorial Day pamphlet. The publication was the brainchild of Police Detective and Command Sgt. Major Kenneth O’Brien, chairman of the Newington Memorial Day Parade Committee, and Committee Vice Chairman James Murphy Jr., a U.S. Army retiree.

They made it their mission to put together as much detail as possible about each soldier. They researched various sources, including the Connecticut State Library, the town library, the U.S. Military Overseas Cemeteries, the Connecticut Adjutant General, and Newington High School.

The pamphlet features photos, profiles, military rank, location and date of death, and burial place, among other facts. Local Boy Scout leader Tom Porell created the graphics for the booklet.

The men explained that with each passing year as the town honors the soldiers from various wars, fewer and fewer people actually know who these men were. Many were barely out of their teens when they were killed.

“When you get older, the thing that really gets you is the age of these guys,” Murphy said.

One such soldier was Private Charles Hoadley Tudor, a casualty of World War I who served in the Army and died December 1, 1918. He was just 23 years old.

In all, the town honored 30 deceased servicemen killed in World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. The town lost 16 men alone in World War II. There were no local soldiers killed in Iraq or Afghanistan.

“We hope it stays that way,” O’Brien said.
GoNHGo

New bike map points the way in New Haven

It’s not the destination, it’s the journey and in New Haven that journey may just earn enterprising commuters a prize.

The city partnered with a number of public, private and non-profit groups to launch a collective effort throughout the month of September, dubbed “GoNHGo.” The campaign promoted alternative forms of active transportation and awarded prizes to businesses and individuals who used their car the least and traveled sustainably the most.

Organizers say the aim is to create “a healthier, more sustainable, more active city with lower public health costs.”

Doug Hausladen, the city’s Director of Transportation said the program encourages commuters to think “outside the car.”

Cyclist Brian Tang made the going a lot easier for cyclists by designing a new bike map of the city based on miles of his personal pedaling around the Elm City. What resulted was a special edition bike-and-bus map of Greater New Haven that was available for use just in time for the GoNHGo campaign.

The map incorporates bus routes to encourage using multiple forms of transit to complete a trip. Tang said if a trip isn’t directly on a bus route, “you can use your bicycle to help complete that, they call it, the last mile of your trip.”

A 2012 Yale graduate, Tang created the first edition of his bike map three years ago and it was distributed in cycle shops around the city. This new edition incorporates much more, including certain areas highlighted by orange stripes that show areas of heavy traffic or construction.

“Mapping is in a lot of ways an act of civic planning, an act of seeking to understand your environment. I think that drawing maps has been a big part of how I’ve come to understand the physical layout of New Haven and the different neighborhoods,” Tang said.

Giving Back

Darien teens reach Scouting pinnacle

Obtaining the rank of Eagle Scout is a challenging quest. Only 6 percent of all Boy Scouts in the nation achieve that milestone.

As Darien marks 100 years of scouting in town this year, three young men were recently celebrated for becoming Eagle Scouts. Along the way to obtaining the coveted rank, they have made a difference in their community through their service projects.

The newly minted Eagle Scouts made it a community affair as they enlisted the help and support of their troop members, leaders, and parents.

Eagle Scout Jack Ogilvie made repairs and improvements at a safe house operated by Connecticut’s Domestic Violence Crisis Center. Jack undertook a project that required efficiency, sensitivity, and confidentiality to ensure the safety of the residents. He took on the project after a fire had damaged the home and made the improvements urgent.

Birds got a boost and a place to call their own from Eagle Scout Christopher von Stuelpnagel’s project. He worked with the town, the Greenwich Audubon Society, and the Darien Land Trust to construct a new nesting platform for osprey. Also known as sea hawks, ospreys are a protected species and were in dire need of a new nest when the birds initially began building one on the Darien Police radio tower. Christopher’s project helped solve that dilemma.

Eagle Scout Sam Alptekin helped mentor middle school students at the Stamford-based Domus, a supportive program that helps under-privileged children stay in school. Sam volunteered on many Saturdays at Domus to help students through chemistry and physics. His approach brought science out of the books and directly into hands-on projects. Some of the experiments included creating lava lamps and making ice cream.

While their projects all differed, the young volunteers had much in common. They are all 2015 graduates of Darien High School and have each served their troop as Senior Patrol Leader.
New Leash On Life
Dogs on display for Berlin cancer fundraiser

Every dog has its day and in Berlin it’s for a good cause and a lot of fun.

A recent American Cancer Society fundraiser brought out dozens of dogs and their well-trained owners for a variation on the organization’s “Relay for Life.” Berlin’s “Bark for Life” went all in for the dogs as the pooches paraded around the Berlin fairgrounds, put on demonstrations, danced, and donned Halloween costumes.

At the heart of all this fun, of course, is giving back. Organizers say the benefit raised nearly $4,000. “This is basically a mini version of our Relay for Life where canines are invited,” event manager Lynn Kipphut. “It’s a fun family event and it’s nice to see the relationships of the canines and their owners.”

Berlin merchants banded together this year to add to the fun with creative fundraising ideas. The “Dirty Dog,” a local dog grooming business put together a team and sold heart-shaped doggie cookies, decorated with pink ribbons. Owner Janet Leitao also sold paper paw prints that customers could display in the grooming business with their dogs’ names written on them. Additionally, the groomer set up a collection bucket for contributions. Those efforts raised more than $1,000.

“We already have plans for next year on what we will do, what we will improve on, and what we will include,” Leitao said.

Organizers say “Bark for Life” also honors the pets that are dealing with cancer as well. Those dogs are loudly applauded as they parade with their owners during a special “survivors lap.”

“Bark for Life” was born in 2013 after organizers had so many requests from participants in the Relay for Life to bring their dogs.

Local PRIDE
Griswold volunteers raise money to help combat drug abuse

A coalition of Griswold volunteers that banded together months ago to help make their town a safe, drug free community is making a difference.

The group, Griswold PRIDE, recently put together a furious fundraising effort, helping collect $3,000 in one month to go toward the purchase of a state police drug-sniffing dog. The volunteers learned recently that their efforts paid off when state police officials announced they will be bringing a new dog on board at Troop E barracks, which covers Griswold. The Troop has three dogs but only one is cross-trained to sniff out drugs. The new dog will give law enforcement a second weapon in the battle against drugs.

“The need for a canine that’s cross-trained in narcotics is extremely high,” Jewett City Resident State Trooper Adam Chittick said. “Sometimes if we’re at a traffic stop or at a scene we make a call for the narcotics canine, and sometimes the handler isn’t working or the dog isn’t available. And that’s time-consuming, to have to wait for a dog to come from another location.”

The community formed Griswold PRIDE in response to the high number of heroin overdoses in the state. Its membership includes all segments of the community - residents, merchants, schools, clergy, town officials, state partners, health care, and other prevention professionals. The group has put together public awareness campaigns, collected data, and conducted an assessment of the community’s substance-abuse needs.

“The key part of this is that the dog is not just for Griswold, it’s for the whole region,” said the Rev. Ted Tumicki, a PRIDE member representing the faith community. “Drugs are an issue that affects all of Connecticut and other communities nearby.”

The campaign to add another drug-sniffing dog for state police brought an outpouring of support.

“I grew up here and I’ve seen what’s happened here and what it’s done to the community,” said merchant Jessica Burzycki, “I think it’s great what PRIDE is doing. I reached out to see how I could help, whether it was time or money.”
A Bridge For The Ages

Colchester youths building a connection to nature and history

When is a bridge more than bridge? When it has the potential to foster endless lessons in history, environment, wildlife, literature, and more.

That pretty much sums up a project undertaken by students at Colchester’s Bacon Academy. The high-schoolers are building a wooden bridge over nearby Sherman Brook, which will ultimately connect the campus to a historic expanse of land. The project has captured the attention and support of the community and land preservationists -- resulting in grants, donated material, and building plans from the town engineer.

“The work is all student-based. This is 100 percent kid-driven. It’s really cool,” said science teacher Joe Hage, who is overseeing the project.

Town-owned land includes the parcel the school sits on and the 30-foot-wide Sherman Brook, but ends a few yards past the brook. On the other side of the broad brook is a pristine parcel - 180 acres brimming with diverse wildlife, plant life, and rich history. Formerly owned by a private development, the land was eventually deeded to the town as open space. That’s where the bridge comes in.

State Archaeologist Nick Bellantoni provided some historical perspective of the land during a walking tour with the class. He pointed out large, well-defined charcoal kiln sites and vestiges of Native American camps. Because of the historical significance, the land is a classroom in itself and Hage said there is great potential for inter-disciplinary lessons.

Among the students’ biggest cheerleaders are members of the Colchester Land Trust, who recently hiked the land. Land trust officials noted the potential for a park-like entrance to Sherman Brook, complete with natural alcoves for lectures, poetry readings, or just quiet reflection.

“They land, the students, and the community come together through experiences such as Sherman Brook and other environmental education opportunities,” Land Trust Hike Coordinator John Barnowski said. “That’s how our legacy and heritage are passed from generation to generation.”

Learning Their Lessons

Killingly alternative ed students help others while helping themselves

For the past 12 years a different kind of school has been in session in Killingly and the “classrooms” are as varied as the four seasons.

From shoveling snow, to raking leaves, to gardening and more, students assigned to the town’s alternative Killingly Community Service Program (KCSP) are making a difference in the lives of many residents while attending to their studies.

Not attending to their studies is what initially landed them in the alternative program.

The program is for students who have been expelled or suspended from school and is one in which students are required to participate. By law, the school board must offer alternative education for students who have been expelled or suspended for violating the code of conduct.

The students receive tutoring and homework assignments but must also do two hours of community service each day. The grueling winter that gripped Connecticut and the Northeast served up many shoveling assignments. The town requires property owners to clear their sidewalks or be fined but for some residents – the elderly and disabled – the students were a much needed help.

Throughout the year, the students have gardened, painted, raked leaves, picked up litter, and helped out in the local food pantry. They’ve also built bird houses that the town has made available to residents.

KCSP staffer Laurie LeClerc said the program doesn’t mean time away from school but rather is considered an in-school suspension. Since it began in 2003, the program has helped lower student suspension rates by 70 percent, LeClerc said. “The students stay current with their studies and exams,” LeClerc said. “And they help erase the target they’ve painted on their backs by inappropriate choices or behavior.”
Positive Influences
Manchester schools conference creating next generation of leaders

Age gap? What age gap?
Manchester elementary students joined forces with their high school counterparts to get a glimpse of their future and build leadership skills at the same time.

It was all part of the school district’s fifth-grade leadership conference: “Leading Our Way into the Future.” All nine city elementary schools participated in the month-long conference designed to improve reading skills and promote diversity and positive attitudes in helping the youngsters build leadership skills.

They were each paired with a Manchester High School student who helped shepherd them through the day’s activities, which included tours of the high school. The students read various books and discussed the challenges faced by the characters. The conference provided the high-schoolers, who represented a diversity of race, culture, and backgrounds, with an opportunity to build their leadership skills, said coordinator Rhonda Philbert.

“We value their uniqueness,” Philbert said. “We let them know leaders are not afraid to be themselves and to respect everyone, even if they’re different from them.”

Conference organizers say it is important for the fifth-graders to take those leadership lessons back to their schools, where they are the oldest students and can have a positive influence on the younger grades.

By the end of conference, the lessons were hitting home for many of the fifth-graders.

“When you’re a leader you stick up for the people no matter their skin color, race – it doesn’t matter,” said fifth-grader Angelina Vazquez.

“What really matters is your attitude and how you act; it doesn’t matter how you look.”

The younger students also helped make a positive difference for the high school students.

“The (grade five) students bring out the best in them,” said Richard Blade, a Manchester High School student advocate.
CCM is the state’s largest, nonpartisan organization of municipal leaders, representing towns and cities of all sizes from all corners of the state, with 159 member municipalities.

We come together for one common mission - to improve everyday life for every resident of Connecticut. We share best practices and objective research to help our local leaders govern wisely. We advocate at the state level for issues affecting local taxpayers. And we pool our buying power to negotiate more cost effective services for our communities.

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900 Chapel Street, 9th Floor, New Haven, CT 06510
Tel: (203) 498-3000 • www.ccm-ct.org