April 2017

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We are pleased to present **Innovative Ideas for Managing Local Governments**: A Connecticut Town & City Compendium – our 30th 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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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civic Amenities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Development</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Safety</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When the Town of Wilton expanded its library a little over a decade ago it was with an eye to the future and with an understanding of the changing role of libraries. The predictions turned out to be right on the money.

Fast forward to 2017 where each year the Wilton Library offers more than 1,000 programs, logs about 270,000 visitors, and has a circulation of about 250,000. All this comes at a time when overall readership is down for libraries in general and book borrowing has dropped.

Statewide, library memberships are down more than 25 percent over the past 15 years but library-offered programs have doubled. Local libraries like Wilton’s have adapted to the changing habits of the reading public and in some cases, they have never been busier.

“We cover a wide range of programs, from the computers and software training, which we’re hoping to expand, to a terrific music series, a jazz series,” Wilton Library Executive Director Elaine Tai-Lauria said.

The library has pivoted from a book-loaning center to a cultural resource center for the community with lectures, music, streaming video and audio, and more.

“It’s part of the change we see in libraries,” Tai-Lauria explained. “People want libraries to offer more in the quality of life in the community, and that means programming,” she said.

The Wilton Library also offers a health and wellness program and officials are busy planning more quality of life activities that will focus on seniors.

“The Wilton Library is a gathering place for the community, a social and cultural center,” Marketing Director Janet Crystal said. “We accomplish that with some of the programs we offer.”
Hartford has put a new face on an old friend. The public golf course at Keney Park recently got a makeover and the reviews are all two thumbs up. The makeover came after years of neglect and after golfers who grew up learning to play on the course eventually started playing elsewhere, driven away by deteriorating conditions.

Problems at Keney included eroded cart paths, bridges and stairs in poor shape, damaged tee boxes, poorly maintained greens, and downed tree limbs throughout the course. In addition, a variety of trees had been cut down without permission and the stumps were never removed.

The course was shut down in late 2013 after the city of Hartford terminated its contract with then course manager MDM Golf Enterprises, LLC due to the deteriorated condition of the course. The City took over and contracted with the Connecticut PGA to act as a consultant on the restoration of Keney, an agreement that is unique in the country according to Connecticut Section PGA Executive Director Tom Hantke.

“Both the city and the PGA, we came to an understanding and said, ‘Hey, we can help one another,’” Hantke said. “And so we’re walking along every step with the City and the Department of Public Works, helping them make the right decisions.”

One recent Sunday, Douglas Taylor came back to play Keney after a lengthy hiatus. Taylor had played Keney for more than two decades before conditions drove him away.

“It’s amazing. It’s nice to see,” Taylor said from the 16th tee box. “I’m happy. They needed to do it. The people who had it before ran it into the ground. We stopped playing here, took our league from here.”

The turnaround started after the City hired Dusenberry Design Inc., a Milwaukee design firm, to oversee a restoration to match the original 1927 design of Devereux Emmet.

The work involved improving the greens and adding some sand traps, as well as a widening of the fairways. A new driving range and practice areas for putting and chipping were also added. A new golf professional was brought onboard at Keney, and a new crew was hired to oversee maintenance.

Now the “new” 6,019 yard, par-70 Keney Park course is making new believers out of old regulars.

Jesse Reyes played at Keney from 2003-2010 with his golf league until poor course conditions forced them to move to a different course. But a few weeks ago, Reyes and three other league members were back.

“We always had a saying that it never rains at Keney Park,” Reyes said. “It’s nice. We’re happy we can go golf somewhere close to home.”

“The bunkers, the greens, the fairways, all of it is improved,” Taylor said. “And just having a practice facility now, which they never had before. So it’s great.”
CIVIC AMENITIES

Eyes On The Future

Milford looks to expand municipal golf course

Milford is keeping its eye on the ball — the little white one that is, that bewitches and sometimes bedevils golfers the world over.

The city added to its open space inventory last year with the purchase of a seven-acre parcel adjacent to the city-owned golf course. The possible uses of the piece include an expansion of the nine-hole course, not to add more holes but to make the par 32 course longer on certain holes.

Until those plans are finalized, however, the purchase means the addition of another green place to the list of Milford’s open spaces.

The purchase is a win-win for lovers of green spaces — the original plan would have seen a 63-unit housing development occupy the land. That proposal was modified to a five-home subdivision before the developers decided to pull the plug. Neighborhood opposition was part of the reason the developers withdrew the plan. Now the neighbors will hear only the occasional sound of “fore!”

The site includes the original house built on the property in 1868, which is being rented to a local family. The property also features some “excellent” period barns according to city officials.

The parcel was originally part of a huge apple orchard, and apple trees still line the course which opened in 1997, fittingly, as the Orchards Golf Course. The town built it utilizing funds it received when the Iroquois Gas Pipeline was extended through Milford.

The course is maintained and operated through funds raised from greens fees and memberships.

The $1.6 million purchase price came from a variety of sources, including income from the Iroquois Pipeline, blighted property liens, an open-space fund that developers contribute to, and an upkeep fund and greens fees from the golf course. About $210,000 came from city coffers.
In Harmony

New alliance promotes Monroe arts and culture

Hoping to tap into and promote the town’s arts and cultural assets while saving taxpayer money is music to the ears for Monroe officials. The recent formation of the Monroe Arts and Culture Council brings together a broad array of interests — theater, music, arts, the library, parks and recreation, and the schools.

The group has already set out on social media to promote the many attractions and talents unique to the town. “Monroe has many accomplished artists, musicians, dancers, the DaVinci Festival, and Two Planks Theater Company,” the council’s Facebook post proclaims. “We also have many parks, trails, lakes, and rich farming, manufacturing and military history. We hope to see you soon!”

First Selectman Steve Vavrek explained that the 12-member committee is not a town-sponsored group nor are the members town-appointed; rather his office is facilitating the collaboration of the groups all for a common goal. And one of the first goals is the construction of a permanent bandshell in the community park.

Vavrek said the outdoor stage at Wolfe Park could use a permanent bandshell and that every year the town builds a temporary structure and those costs add up.

“We’re throwing money at this bandshell every year, and if we just built one, look at the money we would save,” Vavrek said. “If we get this right it shouldn’t cost the taxpayers anything.”

The bigger picture, of course, is encouraging the community to get out and enjoy the many cultural assets the town offers. The new arts council is now part of the Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County, allowing Monroe events to be listed on the Alliance’s website which will draw regional interest in town events.

“I’m trying to build our arts program because as athletic a town as we are, we have over 350 acres of park land and not everybody wants to go see a game, not everybody has kids, but a lot of people like to walk and see nice things,” Vavrek said. “How else can we bring this town together? If you’re not an athlete, if you don’t have kids — I think art and music and theater is the way to go.”

Wheels Up

New Britain peddling itself as bike-friendly community

Like many older urban communities across the country, New Britain has worked to make the city friendly to visitors and residents who prefer walking or bicycling through downtown.

More than just a vision, the city has now gotten the attention of the Connecticut cycling community and a group called Bike Walk CT brought its Discover CT Tour to New Britain for a one-day tour in September. Founded in 2000, the non-profit group provides education and advocacy to promote the benefits of walkable and cycling-friendly communities.

New Britain is one of seven Connecticut towns to receive the League of American Bicyclists’ designation as a bike-friendly community. The other communities include New Haven, which because of Yale University, has been home to a longtime cycling community. The other towns are mostly suburbs in the greater-Hartford area – Glastonbury, Simsbury, Farmington, South Windsor, and West Hartford.

The City of New Britain continues to transform an environment long defined by its industrial roots into a community that embraces transit-oriented development and neighborhood amenities that encourage foot and bike traffic. Visitors are now directed by signs that take them through walking tours through historic sections. The city has also partnered with the New Britain Museum of American Art to set up free bike sharing, and to encourage people to visit the Walnut Hill section.

The one-day Discover CT Tour through New Britain in September also gave the city a chance to spotlight some of its award-winning work. Early last year, New Britain garnered national honors from the American Council of Engineering Companies for improvements to the downtown area. Part of the makeover included the addition of bicycle lanes and improved pedestrian walkways and signage.

“This is a prestigious honor,” said Public Works Director Mark Moriarty. “It recognizes the forward-thinking changes we are making in our downtown area to make it safer for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists.”
Good Bones
Southington has big ideas to grow downtown business

“Good bones.” That’s how one economic development expert has described the state of downtown Southington and that’s good news for town officials who have been actively working to revitalize the town center.

Like many communities in the state, Southington is aiming to reverse the trend of businesses moving away from downtown. The town already has many wonderful draws to bring people back. Town officials and business leaders are working with the non-profit Connecticut Main Street Center, which provides advocacy, technical assistance, and education to help capitalize on its assets.

“They have a great little downtown,” said Connecticut Main Street Center CEO John Simone. “It has good bones and community events seem to draw a lot of people.”

One of the early ideas that town officials put into motion was decorating the windows of vacant buildings in order to spur more activity.

“We did this with the artwork on the Gura Building as it was being converted into the headquarters for Southington Community Cultural Arts,” said town Economic Development Director Lou Perillo.

Connecticut Main Street Center officials say that another strong niche for Southington is the many popular restaurants in the downtown area. Even though shopping habits are trending to online buying, going out for a good meal and a good time is something you can’t do while sitting in front of a computer.

“Food and entertainment are major niches that help draw people in,” Simone explained. “As years go on, brick-and-mortar retail is going to play a lesser role as you really can’t change the trend of people buying online or on TV.”

The town may also be looking into the growing trend of providing so-called “maker spaces.” For businesses that want to provide food products, such as jellies, jams, and baked goods from a store, a certified commercial kitchen is required. A maker space is a building that would house a kitchen that could be leased by various small business owners in order for them to produce their goods.

Business owners welcome the ideas and advocacy the town is leveraging from its partnership with Connecticut Main Street Center.

“We are looking to grow our downtown and I’m sure they have some very good ideas to help support that,” said Southington Chamber of Commerce President Elizabeth Francis.
As a regional industrial park continues to take shape in Windham County, its participating towns are exploring every opportunity to tell their story. Windham County municipal and education officials recently met with state lawmakers and representatives from UConn to discuss networking and leveraging the assets in the region. Setting up “innovation districts” around the state will allow towns to spotlight their selling points for prospective businesses looking to put down roots.

If innovation districts were established, the State would give priority to certain small businesses seeking loans. The idea also includes developing night classes for skilled trades programs at technical schools and providing UConn with resources to staff an entrepreneurship program. The Town of Putnam is currently selling lots for a regional technology park and hopes to attract businesses that bring in clean manufacturing jobs. Regionalization is the key to getting there. Brooklyn, Pomfret, and Scotland have purchased shares in the park and will benefit when business is booming.

“The question is, ‘How do we market ourselves to companies who might be interested in coming to Putnam?’” Putnam Town Administrator Doug Cutler says. “We have to make them aware of all the programs available to them.” Putnam Economic Development Coordinator Delpha Very says trends in manufacturing and light industry bode well for what the region is trying to do. Start-ups are looking for lab and office spaces of around 7,000 square feet or smaller. Towns also need to look at rehabbing small, site-ready properties such as mill buildings, of which there are plenty in the region.

“We have to be innovative and creative to make them incubator spaces,” Very says.

Establishing partnerships with colleges and universities can be a tremendous asset in not only training the next generation of manufacturers but creating opportunities at the local level for those jobs.

“We love to work with Connecticut companies,” says Mike Accorsi, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education at UConn. “If you aren’t working with us, please connect.”

Spreading Awareness
Manufacturing a work force is a goal for Quiet Corner towns

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Hub Of Activity
Transit-oriented development reshaping Meriden

It is a trend sweeping the nation as more folks begin to migrate back to the city, swapping traffic headaches for proximity to public transportation and giant suburban malls for convenient nearby retail offerings. Meriden is among the Connecticut communities embracing that transit-oriented trend and developers have noticed.

The city has several projects currently in progress, beginning with the construction of a new train station that will be one of the stops along the enhanced New Haven to Springfield commuter line. The state is investing more than $600 million in the project to run more daily trains beginning in 2018, getting more cars off of I-91, and encouraging development up and down the corridor.

Development is already happening around the rail station project area. Across the street from the steel infrastructure that will soon become the new Meriden station, there is a 63-unit apartment building that is going up, offering a mix of market-rate and affordable housing. There is also a parking garage under construction that will be part of the entire mix of housing, retail, and transit.

About $110 million in state, federal, and private money have helped finance the projects. Once completed and with amenities all within walking distance, the new downtown will have something for everyone — young professionals and empty-nesters.

City officials are eagerly watching it all take shape. “It’s been a decade of hard work,” says Meriden City Councilor David Lowell.

Transit Transition
Windsor Locks lands state grant to boost downtown revival

Revitalizing downtown Windsor Locks and linking that rebirth to a planned commuter station got a big boost recently in the form of a state grant targeting transit-oriented development.

The $137,000 grant will allow the town to accelerate work on three Main Street properties adjacent to the commuter station. Officials say the funds will be used to pay for all preliminary work project expenses, such as land acquisition, survey costs, appraisals, and legal and environmental expenses.

The town had initially requested $1.7 million from the state to include construction costs but can apply for the construction costs once the preliminary work is completed and the project is deemed “shovel ready.”

“The important thing is that the state has bought into this project and has given us the funds we need to move this important project forward,” First Selectman Chris Kervick says.

The town plans to purchase a former post office to then re-sell it to a developer. The property would then be developed into a mixed-use, retail building with apartments on the top floors and commercial property on the ground floor.

The town has already invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in state grants and local capital to upgrade the town hall and reconstruct several streets in the vicinity of the proposed transit center. At the heart of the project is relocating the Amtrak train stop back to downtown and complementing that with mixed-use development. The town has been working with the State Department of Transportation the past three years on the relocation project.

“Revitalizing Main Street is like completing a jigsaw puzzle,” Kervick says. “This is just one more important piece fitting into place.”
Developing Story
Private investment, public support spur growth in West Haven

West Haven is on the cusp of an economic rebirth, one that Mayor Edward M. O’Brien hopes will shape and strengthen the landscape of the city’s business climate in the decades ahead.

Anchoring the years-in-the-making revival is The Haven outlet mall development, a $200 million proposal by The Haven Group LLC to build dozens of high-end retail shops, a 200-seat amphitheater, seven restaurants, and a waterfront promenade in the 24-acre Water Street project area on New Haven Harbor. Phase one of the two-phase, 347,826-square-foot development, known as The Haven South, is expected to include 60 upscale outlet stores and encompass 250,000 square feet.

The privately financed project is expected to create hundreds of full- and part-time jobs, as well as hundreds of construction jobs, and generate $2 million in annual property tax revenue for the city.

Mayor O’Brien said The Haven is the game-changing economic engine that West Haven has long sought since the demise of the old Savin Rock amusement park in 1966. The mayor called it “a transformational project that will make it a destination and steer development in the coastal city for generations to come.”

Ripe for development, West Haven is teeming with economic development opportunities to grow its grand list of taxable property, O’Brien said, from mixed-use to commercial to workforce housing possibilities. Leading the charge in the heart of the city’s Allingtown neighborhood is The Atwood, a new 90,150-square-foot building at 222 Boston Post Road that will house 67 market-rate apartments and 15,200 square feet of retail space on the ground floor, according to officials familiar with the project.

The $18 million, four-story building, just down the road from the University of New Haven on Route 1, is being developed on the former 89-year-old site of the Carroll Cut-Rate Furniture store. The Atwood, which should open this summer, will net the city $1.8 million in property tax revenue over the life of a seven-year tax deferral agreement for the developer.

West Haven’s groundswell of contemporary development initiatives are blazing a new frontier of development in the city, an upward trend that has not gone unnoticed. Because of the city’s creative, modern, and sophisticated planning, O’Brien recently participated in the East Regional Session of the Mayors’ Institute on City Design (MICD) in Miami, Florida. The invitation-only event was limited to eight mayors, eight design and real estate development experts, and MICD partners.

“West Haven’s groundswell of contemporary development initiatives are blazing a new frontier of development in the city," said O’Brien, who spoke about the transit-oriented development, or TOD, zoning district for the area surrounding the Metro-North Railroad commuter station, a project aimed at “encouraging a more walkable, bikeable, mixed-use and pedestrian-friendly environment.”

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the City of West Haven,” said O’Brien, who spoke about the transit-oriented development, or TOD, zoning district for the area surrounding the Metro-North Railroad commuter station, a project aimed at “encouraging a more walkable, bikeable, mixed-use and pedestrian-friendly environment.”

“It was exciting to discuss this progressive development plan with other mayors and design experts from across the country and seek their advice on ways to potentially enhance the TOD,” O’Brien said.
Danbury is doubling down on development near its train station with the hope of attracting new residents and businesses to the transportation hub and giving the Hat City’s economy a boost.

Transit-oriented developments (TOD) are in planning or development stages in many Connecticut communities as increasing numbers of people want to walk or bike from their homes or jobs to public transportation. The city vibe is attracting young people to urban centers, bringing energy and “feet on the street,” and that means more restaurants, shopping, and entertainment — and more dollars pumped into local coffers.

Danbury is definitely ready to drive that train. With the help of a state grant, the city is studying TOD possibilities in the immediate area of the downtown train station. TOD districts typically allow for more housing and commercial density near transportation centers, making them appealing to municipalities for many reasons, not the least of which includes getting the highest and best use from the strategic properties located near mass transit.

The TOD study will focus on the boundaries of the TOD zone and how to further enhance development within it. “It will look at a variety of things, including zoning regulations, additional infrastructure or marketing, that will help entice people to develop the area,” said city planner Sharon Calitro. “Urban areas throughout the country are looking to develop higher-density downtown development around modes of transit, particularly as populations shift back into the cities and people want to use more mass transit.”

National studies have confirmed that nearly three in four Americans would support zoning changes to encourage transit-oriented development in their own communities. In addition, nearly 75 percent of millennials and 60 percent of Generation X residents would be willing to pay higher housing costs in order to get to work without driving.

But rather than the wave of the future, the future of TODs is now, believes Danbury Mayor Mark Boughton.

Boughton said Danbury already has many of the components in place to create a successful transit-oriented district in the train station area. “We believe downtown Danbury can be a transportation hub for the surrounding region and the foundation is already in place,” the mayor said.

The Danbury TOD study is expected to take about a year to complete.
Assessed For Success

Windsor Locks is first to establish TIF district under new state law

Afer residents approved the measure at a referendum, Windsor Locks became the first town in the state to create a downtown tax increment financing (TIF) district.

A 2015 state law designed to help municipalities revitalize their downtown areas included a provision that permits TIFs. The law helps municipalities reinvigorate blighted or depressed commercial areas without a cost to taxpayers because investments in the district are paid for by revenues generated by growth in the TIF district.

Windsor Locks First Selectman Chris Kervick said the goal “is to allow us to leverage new revenue from early improvements in the district to help stimulate and support continued investment in the district — it is a way to build on momentum — and it works best when there are one or two big projects up front to get things moving in the right direction.”

TIF districts work by determining the current tax assessment on each property within the district and the revenue produced by that assessment at the time the district is created. Any increase in taxes that results from a rise in the assessment in subsequent years is known as the “increment.”

While the town’s general fund continues to receive the same amount of taxes it was receiving at the time the district was created, the increment is deposited into a separate municipal account. Expenditures from this account may be used on improvements within the district, on incentives to developers, or to pay for infrastructure improvements, schools, or other needs that result from development within the TIF. The general fund continues to receive the revenue it had been receiving; only the revenues that come from the new value created in the district are separated and reinvested.

“It’s a creative way to stimulate revitalization of downtown at no expense to the taxpayer because it relies only on new money coming in,” said Kervick.

The new TIF district will pay immediate dividends. The developer of a $64 million conversion of an abandoned mill on Main Street into 164 upscale one- and two-bedroom apartments cited the TIF district as one of the “keys” in the company’s decision to invest in the project.

“Not only will the TIF district not burden taxpayers but it will increase revenue as new investment in the district continues and assessments continue to rise,” Kervick said. “Success breeds success.”
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Dialing Up Demographics

Groton surveys help ID opportunities

What makes a community “millennial-friendly”? That’s just one of the many questions the town of Groton is getting answers to as a result of a recent survey the town commissioned. Following on the heels of a market analysis, the survey polled residents and businesses on Town services, housing, and other criteria to determine how best to spur economic development.

“We’re at somewhat of a crossroads now between baby boomers and millennials,” said Economic and Community Development Manager Paige Bronk. “And millennials have an almost entire opposite view of housing than baby boomers. We’re trying to get an understanding of what the younger demographic might desire, rather than the rest of us.”

Bronk said what the town has learned so far is that nearly 80 percent of the workers in the shoreline town commute from other towns. “We don’t have the full answer for that,” Bronk said. “But we know that part of the reason is that we haven’t fully realized Groton’s potential yet.”

Conducted by the Cromwell-based GreatBlue Research, the $14,500 phone poll was split in two parts. The first survey queried residents on what they want in the town that they cannot find, including housing, and what they leave town to shop for. The second survey polled businesses on what they believe helps them do business and what they identify as impediments.

Town officials plan to use the results in their outreach to developers, investors, and real estate agents.

“If we get statistically significant data showing that a certain percentage of people in town are looking for a specific housing type and it’s not being built right now, we can bring that out to the development community and get the product that the market is desiring,” Planning and Development Services Director Jonathan Reiner said.

Knock, Knock

Milford creating opportunities for budding entrepreneurs

“Knock, Knock — build a door.” A bit of sage advice from the late, great comic Milton Berle is at the heart of entrepreneurship and the City of Milford has set about helping build that door for those with a dream of owning their own business.

The city teamed up with the local chamber of commerce, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the Greater New Haven Score Chapter, and the Connecticut Procurement Technical Assistance Program to offer free seminars for small business owners and those thinking about entering the world of entrepreneurship.

“Small businesses are the lifeblood of any local community,” Mayor Benjamin Blake said. “This is an incredible opportunity for Milford entrepreneurs to better understand what it takes to be successful.”

According to the most recent SBA statistics (2014-15), U.S. small businesses employed about half or 56.1 million of the nation’s private workforce and companies with fewer than 100 employees make up the largest block of small businesses. Connecticut, in that same report, weighed in with about 330,000 small businesses and of those, 70,000 had employees.

The four-part series addressed topics that ranged from starting up a small business to navigating the bid process for local and state governments.

In the first class, participants got the ABCs for start-ups, including choosing a business name. There were also pointers on licensing and registration.

The second in the series helped participants understand SWOT Analysis — Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats — and what that means for their respective businesses.

The all-important financing needed for a business was the key lesson in the third session. Instructors detailed the SBA guaranteed loan program as well as other lending sources.

The series concluded with pointers on how to be a registered vendor with state and federal governments in order to bid on contracts.
Refining The Rules
Milford clarifies guidelines on out-of-district enrollment

Newly approved policy changes regarding out-of-district enrollment still provide for flexibility for those Milford families whose children are currently enrolled in schools outside their attendance area.

The revised policy seeks to clarify and bring more consistency to a policy that has been in place since 1995. That policy stated that Milford students must attend the school in the attendance area where they lived.

But School Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Feser said the policy has been open to interpretation, “resulting in inconsistency of practice which has prompted concerns.”

Dr. Feser explained that school attendance areas are determined by the Board of Education. During a reconfiguration and redistricting of the elementary schools, the Board developed criteria with the desire to balance enrollment to ensure parity in available resources across schools.

The new policy allows those students who are already attending out-of-neighborhood schools to be grandfathered in. Specifically, the cases in which that is permitted are:

- Students already attending an out-of-neighborhood school can remain there until they complete either elementary, middle, or high school. Once that is done they must return to the school in their own neighborhood.
- If a family moves after the start of the year, the student can also complete either elementary, middle, or high school at his or her original school.
- If a sibling is already attending an out-of-district school, a younger sibling can accompany them as long as they are in the same building.

Officials said the new policy also addresses some parent concerns just by clarifying its meaning. “The proposed revision has specific language to prevent misinterpretation of the exceptions that will and will not be considered.”

Walls Can Be A Good Thing
Branford schools opting for classroom with a different view

It has one of the largest price tags that the town has ever undertaken but for middle school students in Branford, a major school redesign will bring the facility into the 21st Century.

The $88 million project will do away with the once popular open classroom design, which was embraced in the 1970s, but four decades later school officials say it’s not a good fit for the modern student. The open-classroom concept was thought to encourage collaboration but it also had its drawbacks – it could be a bit noisy.

A former student, who is now a parent, related his open-classroom experience to school officials. “He recalls that he was in a math class adjacent to a Spanish class, and he felt as if by the end, he was proficient in Spanish just as much as he was in math,” Schools Superintendent Hamlet Hernandez said. “His way of saying the acoustics of the space was not conducive to maximizing the learning for students.”

The upgrade will result in more defined learning spaces for the district’s fifth through eighth grades. Hernandez says the middle school will be built to accommodate up to 1,000 students, a number based on enrollment projections. Current enrollment is just over 900.

Classrooms will be about 800 square feet, nearly double what they are now and each classroom would hold about 20 to 25 students.

“We still want children to collaborate, but they collaborate by using technology, they collaborate face-to-face, it’s not necessarily the walls,” Hernandez explained.

Finance Director James Finch says the project won’t have a major impact on the town budget. With a reimbursable rate at 35 percent, the school cost the town about $58 million.

“The debt service makes up less than 10 percent of our town’s total budget. So in this case, 8 cents of every dollar goes to total debt service, and the school would only be a portion of that,” Finch says.

The project is expected to be completed in November 2019.
Happy Trails
Towns team up to connect the open space dots

East Lyme, Salem, Lyme, and East Haddam recently marked the long-awaited opening of a 14-mile trail linking a long section of protected woodlands and meadows in the four towns with a brief ceremony at the western trailhead at the Chapel Farm Preserve in East Haddam.

The new path is the result of a four-year effort by the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Watershed Coordinating Committee, and the four towns.

Patricia Young, program director of the committee, says the idea emerged during a review of open space maps in the four towns, three of which — Lyme, Salem, and East Haddam — are in the Eightmile River watershed.

The maps indicated that there was a network of trails through the open space areas that could be connected if easements for hiking could be obtained.

Volunteers blazed the trail, created parking areas, repaired eroded areas on old forest roads, installed signs, and developed trail maps.

The new trail was named after the late Richard H. Goodwin who taught botany at Connecticut College in New London for many years. Goodwin was a founding member of the Nature Conservancy and a resident of East Haddam.

Young says while there are some short stretches with steep terrain on the trail, most of the hike is “moderate hiking.”

The trail begins in East Lyme, then heads north through property owned by Yale University that surrounds Powers Lake. It then connects with an existing path through the East Lyme portion of Nehantic State Forest, then enters Salem, and then connects to existing trails in Lyme.

Next, it winds through Salem Land Trust property before beginning a new section of trail cut through the state-owned Eightmile Wildlife Management Area in East Haddam, before ending at a preserve in East Haddam.

Funding was provided by the town of East Haddam, the East Haddam Land Trust, the National Park Service, and the state’s Connecticut Trail Grant Program.

Save The Oswegatchie Hills
East Lyme gains allies in goal to preserve open space

The town of East Lyme’s commitment to saving more than 200 acres of coastal land now has a few more friends for the cause and supporters hope it will stave off yet another proposal to develop the area.

A new coalition was recently formed to protect 236 acres that abut a nature preserve that is part of the Niantic River watershed. That land is currently under private ownership and there have been recent proposals to build high density housing on a portion of it. The parcel drains into the Niantic River and features deep ravines and legally protected vernal pools. For conservationists, this latest housing proposal created a call to action.

Members of the new coalition include the Friends of The Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve, the Connecticut Fund for the Environment, and the Save the River-Save the Hills group. The tract of land encompasses forest, wetland, and Niantic River shoreline.

East Lyme officials have long identified this stretch of land as a fragile parcel worth preserving. It is one of the few remaining large waterfront tracts that is unprotected and undeveloped. In 1968 the town classified it as open space in its Plan of Conservation and Development.

When proposals for a golf course community and other housing developments began to pop up more than 15 years ago, conservation-minded citizens formed the Friends and Save The River/Hills groups. The Friends group and the town currently coordinate stewardship of the 457-acre Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve.

Now the groups are expanding that tent for a broader coalition – much broader.

“We’re taking the next step in our partnership by forming the Save the Oswegatchie Hills Coalition,” the Connecticut Fund for the Environment explains. The coalition is now “open to organizations and businesses, elected officials, and individuals across Connecticut.”
Tweet Dreams
New Canaan adds bird sanctuary and nature preserve to open space inventory

New Canaan is adding to its open space inventory by acquiring a 6.5 acre parcel that local officials say is strategically important in town because it is adjacent to an already preserved parcel of 41 acres, it preserves a natural area in town that could otherwise be lost, and it will conserve an important bird sanctuary.

The Silvermine-Fowler Preserve, sponsored by the New Canaan Land Trust, contains a wide variety of wildlife habitats including meadows, woodlands, wetlands, and a pond which could be used for catch-and-release fishing.

The purchase will forever protect the Still Pond which hosts abundant wildlife, including important birds such as the Eastern Wood Peewee, Red-eyed Vireo, and Northern Flicker. The acquisition also protects a migratory bird route.

In addition, the parcel secures an important link to the abutting 41-acre Hicks Meadows – Kelley Uplands Audubon Sanctuary and provides an entry point to the area for residents of the nearby Silvermine neighborhood.

A house on the property will be removed and the driveway will serve as public access with linkages to existing trails. The land will be a significant addition to the Land Trust’s adjoining 41 acres.

The New Canaan Land Trust partnered with Trust for Public Land to raise funds for the acquisition and the state chipped in with an open space grant.

Capital Campaign committee member Chris Schipper said, “The preservation of the Fowler land and Still Pond is a success for all of us to enjoy. It is a bargain purchase, conserving an important bird sanctuary and providing a great recreational resource to the Silvermine District.”

The New Canaan Land Trust currently stewards 379 acres of diverse woodlands, wetlands, and ponds throughout the town.
With a recent stroke of her pen, New Haven Mayor Toni Harp signed an Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds and with that designation, New Haven is now one of 26 urban bird treaty cities in the country and only the second in Connecticut. The ceremony celebrating the official designation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was part of the city’s celebration of International Migratory Bird Day and the centennial anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The mayor was joined in the celebration by neighborhood partners and local students — as well as live birds of prey and other “birds of a feather” who flocked together for the historic event. The Urban Bird Treaty program is a cooperative effort between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and participating U.S. cities that brings together private citizens, federal, state, and municipal agencies as well as non-governmental organizations to conserve migratory birds.

The program’s goal is to connect people and habitats, restore open spaces, improve water quality in Long Island Sound, and inspire the next generation of conservation leaders.

The long list of project partners includes Audubon Connecticut; Common Ground High School; Urban Farm and Environmental Center; Yale Urban Resources Initiative; the City of New Haven Department of Parks, Recreation and Trees; Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service New England Coastal Program; Yale Peabody Museum; Menunkatuck Audubon Society; Southern Connecticut State University; New Haven Land Trust; and New Haven Public Schools.

The designation is the result of efforts to create “Urban Oases” in schools, parks, and yards across New Haven.

Audubon Connecticut received an Urban Bird Treaty grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to support the development of programming associated with the designation.

In 2012, the Urban Oases program was designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as one of the first Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership Programs in the country, known as the “New Haven Harbor Watershed Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership.”
#recyclinggoals

Enfield pitching in for statewide recycling goal

Effective recycling means much more than just separating plastics and glass – although that helps. But it is really about marshalling a concerted effort – town by town – to embrace and implement a comprehensive state plan that encompasses households, businesses, and local and state government.

Enfield officials recently had a community-wide discussion on the state’s proposed Solid Waste Management Plan, which is intended to achieve 60 percent recycling by 2024. A road map of sorts, the strategy is replacing the state’s current solid waste plan last updated in 2006. The town held a public information session with officials from the state Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP). The environmental agency is soliciting comments on the draft plan and held a statewide hearing on the issue this past spring.

“The Town of Enfield is pleased to take a leadership role on this important subject to ensure the public is informed and has the opportunity to comment,” Town Public Works Director Jonathan Bilmes said.

The state is currently recycling at a 30 percent rate with 3.6 million tons of waste generated annually. DEEP officials said achieving a 60 percent rate would translate to savings of about $40 million a year in disposal fees. Reaching that goal requires source reduction, new technologies, and recycling with a focus on personal behavior.

Enfield officials say municipalities can play a big part in reaching that statewide goal, but have asked DEEP for some considerations. They include reinstating funds for regional recycling coordinators, enhancing the focus on commercial and industrial sectors and cost-effective options for disposal of street sweepings and storm drain cleanings. Public Works Director Bilmes also suggests that the state help coordinate a working group of municipalities with collection forces.

State officials are also looking to establish a potential program for packaging that would place responsibility for that product with the industry that created it. Known as “extended producer responsibility” or EPR, the idea is product stewardship from beginning to end.

“Developing any kind of EPR program requires extensive dialogue with all stakeholders,” said Lee Sawyer, DEEP’s project manager for materials and compliance. “In the draft plan, we call for that process of dialogue to continue over the next couple of years.”

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Thinking About Recycling?

In Guilford, you can sleep on it

There are many ways of going green, even ways you may have never dreamed of.

In addition to paper, cardboard, plastic, metal, and glass, mattresses have now joined the list of items that residents can recycle in Guilford after the town’s selectmen recently decided to participate in the Connecticut Mattress Recycling Program.

“Mattress recycling has been pushed by recycling agencies for quite a while and the program came into effect July 2015 under state law,” said Town Engineer Jim Portley who noted that the program would benefit the town and is cost-free.

Residents can bring their mattresses to a mattress recycling container at the town’s transfer station and the container is for use by residents only, not businesses or companies. The container provided under the new state program can deliver up to 30 or 40 mattresses at a time, according to Portley.

“It is a good way for people to recycle,” he said.

While the town’s participation in the program is not mandated by the state, Portley said participating will help Guilford resolve some issues handling mattresses at the town’s facilities.

Portley said the number of mattresses being brought to the transfer station rose sharply during the first few months of 2016 and the container is a better way of disposal.

“Over the last couple of months I had a lot of push back from the folks that handle our bulky waste, which is where the mattresses would usually go, and also from the people that take the trash that goes into the hopper,” Portley said. “A few mattresses have slipped into there and they don’t break up very easily.”
GOVERNANCE

Municipal Workers Going To The Dogs
City launches volunteer dog walking program

The canine residents of Bridgeport’s animal shelter got a boost when the City launched a volunteer dog walking program for City employees. The program is designed to help prepare the animals for adoption by getting them comfortable with human interaction.

The voluntary program encourages the City’s 5,000 employees to visit the animal shelter up to six days a week to walk, play with, and interact with the shelter dogs.

“I am so happy we are bringing this program back,” says Mayor Joe Ganim. “It breaks my heart to see these beautiful dogs without a home. Anyone working for the City now has a chance to help them find a home and increase the placement rate for abandoned dogs.”

The dog walking program is one of several initiatives the city has implemented recently to help socialize the dogs prior to adoption including “Treat for Quiet” training, which teaches dogs how to greet the public as they walk by without barking, and using bio-acoustically designed classical music from “Through a Dog’s Ear” and “Through a Cat’s Ear” to provide daily environmental enrichment.

Yes, there is fun for the felines too — cats get toys and catnip to play with and cat feather wands are left in the rooms to encourage staff and the public to provide visual enrichment and interaction.

“I am dedicated to providing a safe, clean, and enriching environment and my main focus is preparing them for their forever home,” says Bridgeport Chief Animal Control Officer Jennifer Wallace.

The Bridgeport Animal Control (BAC) facility is the largest municipal animal shelter in the state with the capacity to hold 80 dogs and 50 cats. In the last year, BAC impounded a total of 1,248 animals including dogs, cats, and wildlife. During the same time period, BAC found new homes for nearly 600 dogs and cats.

Second Chance City
Bridgeport jobs program aims to give ex-offenders a fresh start

The City of Bridgeport is engaging its business community in a second-chance initiative, asking employers to consider hiring ex-offenders and providing funds to pay the first few months of a new worker’s salary.

Mayor Joe Ganim, who understands the importance of second chances, has asked the City Council to approve $50,000 in seed money for the salary pool, which will also include grants and contributions. The goal, he says, is to convince employers to take a chance on people who are looking for a fresh start.

“People really just want an opportunity to work, make a living, support their families,” Ganim says. “I do feel we have an obligation on the local level to step up and take the lead.”

The mayor has joined forces with the Bridgeport Regional Business Council and will be asking the Business Council’s 1,000 members to sign a pledge that they would be willing to give ex-offenders an opportunity.

“We thrive based on acceptance of others. We thrive based on second chances,” says Business Council President Paul Timpanelli.

Some local employers, such as the University of Bridgeport and Housatonic Community College, have already stepped up and offered their support for the program. Job trainers in the city, such as Scott Wilderman of Career Resources, Inc., explained that his organization does a great job of providing job services and training for disadvantaged clients. The next step, he says, is to have employers step in and hire them.

Local dairy owner Douglas Wade is among those who have hired workers with criminal backgrounds.

“Any employer that doesn’t take the time to interview these people is missing out on very good employees,” Wade says.
Safety For All
South Windsor adopts panhandling ordinance

Balancing compassion with safety, South Windsor has adopted an ordinance to regulate panhandling in town by designating safe areas for panhandlers.

The ordinance, which the Town Council passed unanimously, also defines aggressive panhandling to protect residents from harassment.

During a public hearing on the ordinance, residents expressed concern that panhandlers along some of the major roads and near shopping centers were stepping out into traffic to approach cars for money.

“Someone stops to give him a dollar bill and the car behind him doesn’t stop, there’s an accident,” resident Robert Prouty said. “Stepping out into traffic to get money is a stupid thing to do because people don’t pay attention.”

The ordinance prohibits panhandling along the entrance ramps to highways and roadway medians, deeming them unsafe for panhandlers due to their proximity to traffic. The fine for violating the ordinance is $90.

“You can point to specific medians and specific locations in town and say that specific location is panhandling-unsafe and no one for no reason can stand on that location,” Town Attorney Keith Yagaloff says. “This is an ordinance that is based on safety rather than the activity of panhandling.”

Panhandling is protected by the first amendment and courts have upheld it as a protected activity, Attorney Yagaloff said. The South Windsor Ordinance was crafted to be legally sound and defendable against constitutional challenges.

The ordinance also makes it illegal for a panhandler to recklessly approach, follow closely, or speak to a person to the point where the person fears bodily harm. Officials say once the person says “no,” the panhandlers must cease their behavior.

Deputy Chief Scott Custer said police are mindful that panhandlers may be dealing with mental health issues and may be homeless and have referred several of the local panhandlers to South Windsor Human Services.

“The police department really does want to help the whole individual,” Custer said. “It’s not just about getting them off the street.”
GOVERNANCE

Battling Blight
Ansonia task force takes aim at violators

Ansonia’s tough anti-blight laws are paying off with some $35,000 collected in liens over the last year but city officials know there is more work to do. Now the newly formed Anti-Blight Task Force is going after illegal apartments that have become a growing concern. Officials have uncovered people living in attics, basements, garages, and other makeshift dwellings.

“We had a case of a guy living in a shed paying $650 in rent,” Blight Enforcement Officer David Blackwell, Sr. says. “He was a registered sex offender.”

Anti-blight ordinances passed in the last two years give a homeowner 10 days to clean up a blighted area or appeal the citation. Penalties of $100 per day are levied if no appeal or clean-up occurs. Fines increase to $250 a day if the property is not cleaned up after 30 days. The ordinance allows the city to hire a contractor to clean up the property and the bill is then attached as a lien.

The blight citations are issued by Ansonia’s blight officer but police also have the authority to write the citations, which require the homeowner to appear in court.

The task force also plans to hold informational meetings with homeowners and tenants. In those sessions, landlords would be brought up to speed on the anti-blight ordinance and on the various federal assistance programs that could help remediate code violations.

Ansonia Corporation Counsel John Marini says the ordinance respects the rights of private property owners. The appeal process gives residents and business owners an opportunity to explain their side before a neutral hearing officer. He also says the goal is not to punish but to get the property back to a safe condition as quickly as possible.

“The program gives the city unprecedented flexibility to work with residents and business owners to achieve remediation without the implementation of costly fines,” Marini says. “Again, the goal is prompt remediation of conditions that threaten the health, safety, and property values of our residents.”

Raising Revenue
North Haven adds fees for inspections

North Haven officials have found another source of revenue — it’s for services the town is already doing for free.

Voters in June approved proposals that would allow the town to start charging for fire inspections and zoning enforcement services. First Selectman Michael Freda says it’s a move to modernize the town’s operations.

“Other towns and municipalities have done updates to their fees,” Freda says. “The goal is to increase our top line revenue.”

Additionally, the town isn’t waiting around for the state’s finances to stabilize. With more uncertainty from the state budget, finding other revenue sources makes sense and lessens local dependence on state funding. Freda says the town has generally charged less than other municipalities for some services, or in some cases, charged nothing at all.

For the Fire Department, adding the fees for inspections will be a big help. Fire Chief Paul Januszewski says the inspections, which are state mandates, take up a lot of time. The chief and deputy chief are the only individuals certified to conduct the inspections.

Chief Januszewski says time spent on the inspections affects department operations and notes that municipalities can be liable if inspections aren’t in compliance with state law. The town has more than 1,200 buildings that must be inspected every one to four years.

The new revenue stream, he says, could help finance training for other members.

“We’ll enforce the regulations better with staff that is trained for this purpose,” the chief says. “It is required by general state statute 29-305 that inspections are done on all businesses, industrial complexes, schools — anything except one or two-family homes — anywhere from every one to four years.”
Capital Idea
Redding bond strategy paying dividends

Aiming to ease the burden on local taxpayers while still providing capital to pay for critical projects, the town of Redding made a short-term decision that will pay off in the long run.

Town finance officials have decided to use short-term financing in the form of bond anticipation notes (BANs) to fund some capital projects. That decision, officials say, helped save between $250,000 to $500,000, which amounted to an increase in the budget of about 1 percent.

The possibility of rising interest rates helped inform the discussion, officials say.

“We look at everything we possibly can to maximize the benefit and minimize the burden to the taxpayers,” Board of Finance Chairman Bill Alvarez said.

The short-term financing is funding some $6 million in road work along with other capital projects. The town is expected to revisit the bond option next year once it receives capital requests from the schools.

Redding doesn’t have to start paying on the BAN principal for 4 years.

It was the first time in many years that officials opted for the short-term financing rather than selling long-term bonds. The biggest differences are the interest rates and timelines.

BANs have lower rates that are reset nine months to a year while bonds have fixed rates over longer periods and are generally used to raise large sums. However, a BAN can eventually be converted to a bond. Redding doesn’t have to start paying on the BAN principal for four years, while a bond would have required payment from the start.

With a population of just under 10,000, most of the revenue comes from residential property taxes so the financing option was an important one, officials say.

“We have to take care of our town, we have to take care of our schools, and we have to take care of our infrastructure,” Alvarez said.

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Partnersing with schools, businesses, and nonprofits, the city of New Britain is helping to make sure that healthy food reaches those who need it the most and is putting a particular focus on children. The dire combination of poverty and homelessness jeopardizes the health of families, officials say. About 23 percent of the city’s population — some 16,400 people — live below the poverty line. More than 300 students in New Britain are homeless and about 65 percent of the district’s 10,000 pupils are on food stamps. Lack of food security affects a student’s performance and leads to more incidence of obesity and other social problems.

“A kid with poor nutrition and who is not eating right at home, has poor hygiene and a lack of clothing, might not go to school because they feel embarrassed,” School District Attendance Director Joe Vaverchak said. “To keep it simple, being hungry has an impact on our students.” In many cases that impact is felt despite the free breakfasts and lunches the district has been offering the past two years to all students. There are still families with young children who still have needs, officials say. Leveraging its community stakeholders, the city now offers dinner programs at five schools. The meals are open to any child from any school. When school is out for the summer, free breakfasts and lunches are served at several sites throughout the city, including New Britain High School, the local Boys & Girls Club, the New Britain Human Resources Agency, the Police Athletic League (PAL), and Stanley Park.

The city has also teamed with a private culinary group, which operates a food truck and provides free food deliveries to areas of the city with the neediest residents. Vaverchak explained that each school also has weekly attendance meetings where staff offers “positive intervention” to students who miss school often and might not be eating nutritiously at home.

“We are not waiting for problems to build where students miss too much school,” Vaverchak said. “We could go to the house and contact the parent at home in a positive way to see what we can do to help.”

Win/Win/Win
Norwalk health officials say offense is the best defense with vaccines

They were once life-savers that wiped out smallpox and largely eliminated polio, measles, and tetanus from the world and they now help prevent chicken pox, shingles, and the flu among other infectious diseases.

Since invented, vaccines have been responsible for saving millions of lives — and they are still a critically important part of health and well-being.

That’s why the Norwalk Health Department works throughout the year to promote to local residents its Immunization Action Plan (IAP) which was developed to make sure that city children and adults receive age-appropriate vaccines. The Health Department’s IAP program recently conducted a “Win/Win/Win” campaign targeted to 11- and 12-year-old Norwalk area youths which promoted the vaccine for human papilloma virus (HPV).

“The HPV vaccine can prevent several cancers in men and women. Boys and girls are recommended to start the three-dose vaccine series between 11 and 12 years of age,” said Pam Bates, RN, BSN, who coordinated the IAP program.

Health care providers were encouraged to discuss and administer the HPV vaccine to their teenage and pre-teen patients in Norwalk, Westport, and Wilton during the campaign and young people who discussed the HPV vaccine with their doctor or received the vaccine could enter a drawing to win an iPad.

As part of the outreach effort, health officials identified the groups of people who benefit from vaccines:

• School-aged children, for back-to-school vaccines
• Adults, because vaccines are not just for kids
• Pregnant women, to protect themselves and pass protection on to their babies
• Babies and young children, because a healthy start begins with on-time vaccinations
• Pre-teens and teens, to ensure a healthy future with vaccines
**Livable City**

**New Haven getting the lead out**

One of the cornerstones of New Haven’s “Livable City Initiative” is promoting safer, healthier neighborhoods, but older housing stock presents some challenges — lead paint chief among them. Thanks to federal funds, some high-tech tools, and a commitment to significantly decreasing young children’s exposure to lead paint, the city is steadily chipping away at the problem.

Environmental Health Program Director Paul Kowalski said lead poisoning in children is “a lifelong disease and it’s incurable.” It can cause irreversible damage that leads to developmental delays, hyperactivity, and lower IQs.

Glenda Wolfe, a city lead poisoning inspector, is among those on the front lines helping to ferret out the trouble spots. Her tools include a high-tech sensor that records pin-point measurements of the lead level. Her job takes her inside many homes that were built more than 100 years ago. During one recent stop at a home built in the 1800s, the meter topped out at 9.9 — the highest it could go.

“A child could easily put chipping and flaking paint in his mouth. The thing about lead paint is that it’s sweet, so if they happen to eat it they may like it because it’s sweet,” Wolfe explained.

To help property owners with the cost of lead abatement, the city makes low- to no-interest loans available to eligible applicants. The city received $3.2 million in federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Of that, some $1.8 million is earmarked over the next three years for lead abatement programs. So far, more than 1,300 abatements have been completed in the city at no cost to the homeowners.

Eligible property owners can get a five-year forgivable loan of up to $10,000 per unit and up to $2,000 for common/exterior areas for lead hazard control. Loans are zero percent interest for a five-year term and forgiven at the rate of 20 percent per year through the term of the loan. Property owners are responsible for any costs of abatement in excess of the loan amount.

In 2015, the number of children with elevated lead levels in their blood was 75, down from 108 in 2014. In 1995, the number of children with elevated levels was 400. Officials know their efforts are paying off but recognize there is more work to do.

“We’ve had a dramatic decline in the number of lead-poisoned kids,” Kowalski said. “Full abatement is what works in New Haven. I want to continue this program because it floors me when people say lead poisoning is a thing of the past. Lead is still an issue. It hasn’t gone away.”

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**Getting A Check-up**

Glastonbury survey assesses town health

What is the state of health in town? Glastonbury is getting a better idea of it, thanks to a recent townwide online health survey conducted by its recently formed Glastonbury Health Alliance.

The Alliance, a broad-based group of citizens, town representatives, health professionals, and others, is charged with identifying the current state of health in the community. To help accomplish that, Town officials say the Alliance conducted a townwide survey to “identify trends and factors influencing health and quality of life in town.”

The survey is one segment of the town’s Community Health Assessment initiative. Partnering with a health consulting group, the initiative also included gathering information from focus groups and interviews with residents to collect their thoughts and perceptions about health. The topics discussed included physical, mental and emotional health, nutrition and food access, as well as health resources available in the community.

Officials say the citizen feedback is invaluable to help the town identify areas of strength as well as those areas that need improvement. Once all the data are collected, the Health Alliance will analyze the findings and create a final Health Assessment report.

Town representatives on the Health Alliance include members of the boards of Health, Community Development, Policy, Youth & Social Services, Parks & Recreation, Education, the Housing Authority, Emergency Medical Services, and Marketing & Communications.

The Health Assessment complements the town’s ongoing initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles for its residents. Current programs include Glastonbury Grown, a push to eat fresh, locally grown food while at the same time supporting local agriculture, and Walk for Health — a new guide that outlines local walking routes.
PUBLIC SAFETY

Colchester Conversation

Heart-to-heart talks about drugs begin at home

It’s never too early for parents to have that difficult conversation with their children about drugs. That was the message from Colchester in the series of “Community Conversations” that the eastern Connecticut town sponsored for its families.

With first-hand accounts from medical professionals, families, and others, the event was aimed at helping parents identify the early signs of drug use – particularly heroin and other opiates. Other lessons included how to limit access to prescription drugs, often the dangerous first step on the road to destructive drug abuse.

The event was organized by Colchester Youth Services and sponsored by the public schools and the non-profit United Community Family Services. The event came on the heels of a spate of highly publicized heroin overdoses at local hospitals. In 2015, the combined total of heroin overdoses seen by Lawrence + Memorial Hospital in New London and William W. Backus Hospital was more than 100. And in early 2016, Lawrence + Memorial reported nearly 20 heroin overdoses coming through the doors including one death.

“This is such an important topic for everyone to be aware of,” Youth Services Program Coordinator Jennifer Martino said. “We cannot express how important it is for families to learn about this devastating addiction and to continue having the conversation with their family and friends.”

Youth Services organizers wanted to ensure that parents were armed with information that would help deter the behavior before it begins and said it often begins at a very young age.

Among the somber stats offered by the group:

• On average, Connecticut children start consuming alcohol at 11, two years younger than the national average.
• Children who learn about drugs from their parents are up to 50 percent less likely to use drugs.
• Less than 30 percent of teens actually do get their drug information from their parents.

“Start the talk early and talk often,” Martino said.

Support System

New Canaan focuses on preventing drug abuse

How to combat the growing problem of opioid and other drug abuse is a serious discussion that more and more communities are having across Connecticut.

New Canaan joined the discussion last year, bringing together several community groups at Town Hall. Organized by the town’s Health and Human Services staff and League of Women Voters, the forum aimed at preventing the proliferation of drug abuse, the No. 1 killer in America.

At the forum, Police Chief Leon Krolikowski said that 45 percent of the drug arrests are town residents, selling heroin, cocaine, and other illegal drugs.

“It’s all here,” the chief said. “It’s just a matter of us, as a community, paying more attention to what’s going on and getting the right information.”

Krolikowski was part of a panel that included High School Student Resource Police Officer Jason Kim, Dr. John Douglas, the director of a local drug rehab hospital, addiction counselor Vince Benevento, and two local adults in recovery.

The panel discussed the roots of addition – how people get hooked – and also the tragic cycle that can be tremendously difficult to escape. One of the recovering addicts said her descent into addiction began in the eighth grade when she had her first drink. She hid her problem for years, taking part in sports, doing well in college, but there was the dark side.

“My school life revolved around drinking,” she said, continuing to binge drink in college, smoke marijuana, and take other drugs. By her junior year, “my addiction had caught up with me.”

She eventually left school and returned home, to the safety and love of her parents, which “was the greatest thing,” she said. From there she began to turn around her life, but not without struggles. She lost three friends – one in a drunken driving accident and two to overdoses.

Panel member Benevento, the addiction counselor, told the audience that it takes lifelong support to help someone through recovery.

“We’re talking about an illness,” Benevento said. “This is longstanding behavior intervention.”
Glastonbury Comes To the Rescue
Will share dispatch services with East Hampton

It was simply the neighborly thing to do. When the non-profit that provided East Hampton with public safety dispatch services announced it was shutting down operations, the town councils in Glastonbury and East Hampton got together and approved – unanimously – an agreement that allowed both towns to share dispatching responsibilities.

“We were in a very difficult position because we have a full-time police department,” East Hampton Town Manager Michael Maniscalco said about the new arrangement. “We were thankful Glastonbury came to the table to help. They offer a lot in terms of not only police dispatching, but also fire and ambulance services.”

Glastonbury will be hiring three new dispatchers, while an upgrade of the dispatch center and its equipment will be undertaken to accommodate the additional staff. In addition to the dispatch services, the costs will also be shared – Glastonbury will cover $710,000 of the $1.2 million upgrade, while East Hampton will chip in an additional $500,000.

Glastonbury has applied for several state grants that will cover $625,000 of its share.

“The granting agencies have been very supportive,” said Glastonbury Town Manager Richard J. Johnson. “We still have a lot of details and a lot of steps and a long way to go before we finalize the agreement.”

“Each town is moving forward as carefully, but effectively as we can,” Johnson said. “Both communities are confident the proposed dispatch services can work well.”

The dispatch center also handles calls for Middlesex Hospital and fire departments in Bozrah, Colchester, East Haddam, Marlborough, and Salem out of the state police Troop K barracks in Colchester.

Collegiate Curb Appeal
Bridgeport, UB combining to spruce up neighborhoods

Bridgeport officials know the type of quality education that college students can expect from the University of Bridgeport. The city just wants students – current and prospective – to like what they see when they visit.

The city and university are joining forces to bring more “curb appeal” to some of the blighted neighborhoods that border the 54-acre campus. The initiative is part of the city’s “Gateway to the South End” plans that Mayor Joe Ganim included in his budget proposal.

Under the plan, the city would borrow $2 million up front and as much as $10 million over the next five years. The city and university have combined forces in the past to invest in new sidewalks, and this initiative will take it to a new level – new plantings, esplanades, and traffic islands.

At 5,400 students, the UB student population is the highest it’s been since the 1980s. The university is undergoing a major expansion, concentrating on its schools of nursing and engineering, and the expansion of recreational facilities. The long-term goal is for the expansion to coincide and complement the city’s public/private redevelopment efforts in the South End. Those upgrades include replacing old manufacturing sites and replacing an aging housing project. The “curb appeal” projects are initiatives that can be accomplished in the short term, officials said.

Mayor Ganim is touting the gateway project as a main attraction for the university. During a recent speech from one of the top floors of UB’s library, the mayor noted that the vantage point offered a stunning panoramic view of the city and waterfront. If prospective students and their parents are looking for aesthetics in a campus, they would not be disappointed.

“When they come in, if they get to see this view, they say, ‘Where do I sign?’” the mayor said. “Who wouldn’t?”
PUBLIC SAFETY

Put To The Test
Avon firefighters invite public to try firefighting training course

It was part community relations and part recruitment effort when Avon firefighters invited the public to join them in participating in a unique “obstacle course” — a specially-designed course of firefighting tasks that have to be accomplished in the critical early minutes of every fire scene.

The physical performance qualification (PPQ) course has 10 stations on the training course which mimic the work that must be performed in the first 15 minutes of a fire.

Resident Laura Ward was among the participants who put on the gear in order to challenge a firefighter training course that requires equal parts strength and endurance.

“It’s definitely a lot harder than it looks,” she said. “The ladder was the most difficult. It’s heavy, it’s awkward, it’s taller than you, and it’s wobbling all over the place.”

Despite the chilly late-autumn temperatures, completing the course was no walk in the park even for the firefighters.

“I’ve got to be honest with you, I feel like it’s in the middle of July, I’m sweating really hard,” said volunteer firefighter Frank Lupis who said the course demonstrated the skills he needs to polish before his next trip down the fire pole.

“I’ve got a lot more practice to do and somebody’s life is on the line,” he said.

The department offered the course to the whole community, both as a recruitment effort and to give people a better appreciation of what it requires to fight fires.

“It’s to really expose the firefighters as occupational athletes,” said volunteer fire captain and ER doctor Adam Corrado.

The community participants said the course gave them a better understanding of what it takes to be one of the department’s 70 volunteers.

“It takes a special kind of individual who’s ready to step up and face the challenge and be an everyday hero,” Ward said.

Room To Grow
Middletown expanding busy South District firehouse

For almost 50 years, firefighters from Middletown’s South District station have been answering the call for help. Their building, constructed in 1969 for an all-volunteer service, now houses a professional staff that answers nearly 3,000 emergency calls a year.

The mission has not changed, but the building soon will.

The city is expanding the firehouse to address the growing needs of the 35 sworn firefighters and three administrative staff members. Renovations include a larger dormitory, adding a women’s locker room, renovating the men’s locker room, modernizing the mechanicals, and building out more office and training space. The project will also provide for a larger community room because the station is used as a polling place and by community groups for meetings.

“We want to make sure we’re looking at this project and what works today, but also what’s going to be sustainable for the organization at least 30 years out,” Fire Chief Robert Ross said. “It really was never designed to house the working operation we’ve evolved into.”

Adding Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH) to its call area has had an impact as well. Since 2011 when it began covering the CVH campus, call volume to the station has increased some 28 percent.

The city is using a $1 million state grant for the project and more state funding will be sought in the future to add an exercise room, expand the kitchen, and provide more storage areas.

“I’m really excited that this building is going to get the renovations it really, truly needs,” South Fire Commissioner Bill Gregorio, Sr. said. “We have such a large senior community here we can’t take on a project of this magnitude and put that burden on taxpayers.”
PUBLIC SAFETY

A Higher Calling
New Britain clergy partner with police

For 12 weeks this past spring, clergy members in New Britain got an up close and personal look at policing in the Hardware City.

Dubbed the “Faith-based Academy,” the program offered clergy a chance to learn about policing and to build stronger bonds with law enforcement.

“Our initial concerns were some of the events taking place with police-involved shootings... and so we wanted to try to get out ahead of that here in New Britain,” said Rev. John Morris of Spotswood A.M.E. Zion Church, who was among the program’s two dozen participants.

Morris said he participated in a similar partnership when he pastored a church in Texas and was delighted when he heard that New Britain police were interested in creating an alliance.

The faith-based academy is the first of its kind in New Britain and the idea arose from discussions between Police Chief James Wardwell and the Rev. Thomas Mills of Grace C.M.E. Church.

“We’re blessed to have a positive relationship with many parts of the community,” Chief Wardwell explained. “We recognize that our faith-based community, including clergy and their congregations, are some of the most important stakeholders in our community.”

Police officials say the clergy program is run very similarly to the department’s Citizens Police Academy. Participants get to meet the officers in the various divisions - traffic, patrol, youth bureau, vice, and animal control. They learn about what goes into the decision to fire a service weapon and other uses of force, and get a lesson on a high-tech simulator.

Chief Wardwell said he’s hopeful that by working with the clergy, his officers will gain insights into the community they are sworn to serve.

“We know that people who have gone through the Citizens Academy tell their friends and family about it and that’s awesome,” Wardwell said. “With the clergy academy, the reach will be more substantial and we’ll be able to get feedback.”

On The Front Lines
Madison firefighters prepared to do battle with opioid abuse

The state continues to add more soldiers in the war against opioid abuse as firefighters from Madison recently became one of the latest groups of first responders trained in saving lives.

The Madison firefighters have been trained in administering naloxone, a drug that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. New state laws regarding who can administer naloxone have been expanded to include first responders. In the past year the use of naloxone, which is commercially known as Narcan, has been credited with saving hundreds of lives in Connecticut.

Opioid use is on the rise across the state, including along the shoreline, and Madison officials wanted to ensure they were prepared. Because of their training this past fall, Madison firefighters are now able to carry Narcan on response vehicles from both volunteer fire departments. All emergency medical technicians and emergency medical responders underwent thorough training, fire officials said.

“We ran a total of three sessions to get everybody trained,” North Madison Volunteer Fire Company Deputy Chief David Cone said. “It is a one-hour training. It was developed by the state so essentially every EMT and EMR in the state is getting the same training so everyone is taking the same approach to this.”

Responders say administering the reversal drug is fairly simple. The training sessions allowed them to practice with training devices that used water.

Firefighters were faced with a real life and death situation prior to completing the training earlier this fall. EMS Coordinator Jon Wolff said they were called for a heroin overdose.

“Madison EMS arrived only a few minutes after we did and the patient did fine, but we could have given the Narcan ourselves had it been available,” he said. “We’re now fully prepared for the next overdose call, thanks to this new initiative.”
Enhanced Response
Milford initiative provides more ambulance service

A partnership with a private ambulance company will help the city of Milford to enhance its public safety efforts with quicker response times and improved patient care. The initiative also provides a new stream of non-taxpayer revenue to help fund the operation.

“Over the past few years, we’ve worked diligently and extensively to develop a better response system for residents,” Mayor Ben Blake said. “We’ve advocated for state legislative changes and then petitioned the Department of Health to secure these important advancements which will benefit patients and taxpayers.”

The fire department has had first responder status for many years and has provided advance life support (ALS). Recently, however, the state Department of Public Health assigned Milford the transport designation for basic life support (BLS) ambulance service. This now allows the fire department to transport patients to area hospitals and bill insurance companies for each level of service. This will help create a sufficient revenue stream to return to the general fund while helping to offset tax increases.

The partnership with Nelson Ambulance Service is part of the city’s enhanced Emergency Medical Services Plan. The fire department’s emergency medical services (EMS) division and Milford Hospital will now provide uniform medical oversight and control to consistently monitor and manage the quality of EMS in the city. It provides greater accountability and it will give the city the right to dictate the standards of service and choice of a provider that will live up to these standards.

The city currently has 113 firefighters. Of those, 112 are emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and 27 are licensed paramedics. The first responders operate out of paramedic engine companies and three licensed city ambulances strategically positioned across Milford to ensure time-critical response for the 5,000 medical calls they answer each year.

“We meet and exceed the high response time standards established by the National Fire Protection Association, and these impressive response times have produced life-saving results,” Fire Chief Douglas Edo said.

Such Great Heights
Oxford firefighters team with energy developer to practice rescue skills

The Oxford Volunteer Fire Department recently went to great lengths to practice a unique high-angle rescue drill, a life-saving technique used to rescue injured or otherwise incapacitated persons at high-degree slopes.

High angle is the variety of technical rope rescue techniques used to rescue incapacitated persons on terrain at slopes of 60 degrees or greater. It involves the need to hoist victims from one level to another with ropes, pulleys, harnesses, belay devices, and various hauling implements.

Rescuers may also be required to build on-site rigging systems designed either to raise or lower accident victims to the optimum elevation for safe extraction. Skyscrapers, mountains, and other steep elevation locations are prime suspects for these extraction efforts.

The developer of a natural gas energy facility in town hosted the training at the development site and made available a crane to perform two of the exercises which enabled the simulation of realistic rescue scenarios.

The fire department conducted three practice rescues, two which utilized the on-site crane and one using the department’s ladder truck. The scenario involved rescuing an injured worker from the steam turbine table top of the energy facility, which is approximately 40 feet off the ground.

Oxford firefighters expressed thanks to the developer, CPV Towantic Energy, for hosting the training.

“This was a very productive exercise not only for our department, but for the strong relationship we’ve built with the CPV Towantic Energy Center project team,” said Scott J. Pelletier, Fire Chief of the Oxford Volunteer Fire Department. “This kind of on-site training is invaluable for ensuring our staff is properly trained to ensure safety in any potential situation.”

Currently under construction, the CPV Towantic Energy Center in Oxford will use clean natural gas to create electricity to power more than 750,000 Connecticut homes. It will be one of the cleanest and environmentally-friendly electric generating projects in the world when it comes online in 2018.
Technology is changing the way we perform nearly every public safety function, and that includes firefighting. To be prepared for whatever comes next requires modern training methods and modern training equipment and facilities.

Thanks to a recently-christened new training facility, the North Branford Fire Department has all those pieces in place.

The new training facility is a state-of-the-art, pre-engineered, steel-constructed two-and-a-half-story burn building that is attached to a three-story training tower. The town bonded the cost of the $370,000 training facility and the fire department stayed within budget because staff acted as the general contractor, purchased the building materials, bid the assembly, and maintained a constant presence during the facility’s construction.

With a growing scarcity of state funds for regional firefighting schools, municipalities are sometimes going it on their own. Farmington and Killingworth have also undertaken similar firefighting training projects in recent years. Farmington’s facility cost about $1.4 million for a prefabricated building and a water recapture facility.

Referring to the state funding issue, North Branford Fire Chief William Seward III said towns are now “devising cost-effective training concepts” on their own.

By providing the department’s 129-member professional volunteer firefighters with a place to train, the chief said the department expects to “improve the morale of its membership, diversify its training program, share its resources with its mutual aid partnerships, and elevate the level of competence within the agency.”

“We are an all-hazards fire department, delivering rapid and effective services to our community. We support our neighbors and they continue to support us; mutual aid cooperation is necessary based upon the state and federal laws, regulations and standards by which the fire service must operate today,” Seward said.

In 2015, the North Branford Fire Department responded to 1,958 alarms.
Firefighters are used to fighting house fires, car fires, forest fires, and just about any kind of fire. And as first responders they also have to be prepared for almost any kind of emergency or special circumstance, from a natural catastrophe to a cat in a tree.

That’s why the Plainville Fire Department — the sponsor of the town’s annual Hot Air Balloon Festival — recently reported for some unique training at the fire station where members learned about hot air balloon safety.

For 32 years, the Plainville Fire Department has been the sole sponsor of the event which attracts tens of thousands of people as well as 20 to 30 hot air balloons.

Fire Chief Kevin Toner cited a hot air balloon ride in Texas in August that struck power lines, fell and killed 16 people and he said that “horrific” tragedy was on department members’ minds during the training.

“All we’re hoping to familiarize ourselves with where the shutoffs are in the balloons, all the safety devices, how we can eliminate a hazard very quickly and make a rescue if needed,” the chief said.

Much of the training was provided by the hot air balloon pilots who participate in the festival and Chief Toner said that kind of hands-on experience will help his crew learn the ropes of hot air balloon safety.

The balloons use between 25 and 45 gallons of propane as fuel which burns around 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit, making them a potential fire hazard in the event of an accident.

“When you pre-plan, you’re ready if something happens,” said Jim Lenois, the Fire Department’s safety officer.

Future Agents

FBI Youth Leadership Program develops leaders of tomorrow

The shooter who was firing electrodes at a mannequin while shouting, “Taser! Taser!” was just 14 years old but that was old enough because she was participating in the seventh Connecticut Chapter of the Federal Bureau of Investigation National Academy Youth Leadership Program.

The taser training was just one piece of a week-long program that also saw a dozen participating teenagers fire simulated rounds made of soap using a shooting simulator, visit the FBI offices in New Haven, and observe arraignments at New Britain Superior Court.

Training sessions also included discussions of ethics and leadership and lessons in crime scene techniques.

“We try to do a lot of team building which they can take back to their schools,” said Avon Police Lt. Kelly Walsh who has coordinated the week-long program for each of its seven years — which is fitting since Walsh herself attended the FBI National Academy youth program as a teen.

The Connecticut Chapter FBI program was developed by Walsh and her police chief in Avon to provide Connecticut youths who are not chosen for the FBI National Academy an opportunity to receive the same kind of training in Connecticut.

Each year Walsh raises money to pay for the academy and coordinates it with a host police department. This year, the leadership program was conducted at the New Britain Police Department.

Applications are taken from across the state from teenagers between 14 and 17 years old who are required to write an essay on leadership that includes their definition of personal responsibility.

“The FBI program gives them an opportunity to learn some leadership skills,” said New Britain Training Officer James Krolikowski. “They get a small picture of what an officer goes through and what’s expected.”
They take an oath to protect and to serve and in one very special case, to bring cheer to the littlest of citizens.

The Hartford Police Department’s “Toughest Beat” brings officers to the Children’s Medical Center in Hartford to visit youngsters in need of distractions from their illnesses. It’s an outreach that officers happily participate in about four times a year. Different units, including the SWAT team, bomb squad, and K9 force, spend time with young patients answering questions about their professions.

“There are some tough beats to walk through the city, but walking through that ICU is probably the toughest thing you’ll walk through in your life. So when you think you have problems, you walk through and see how strong these people are enduring that,” said Hartford Deputy Police Chief Brian Foley.

During a recent visit, some of the children got an up-close look at high-tech equipment and vehicles. It was the first time in the program that the children were brought outside during the visit.

“It allows them to do hands-on stuff with some of our cooler vehicles, and officers and K9s,” Foley said.

For many of the children, the “Toughest Beat” program is the right kind of medicine at the right time. Eleven-year-old Brandon Rodriguez was recovering from appendix surgery and had the opportunity to explore an armored car, try on a shield and helmet, and even climb aboard a dive boat.

“It’s really nice of them to do this for kids who are hurt,” the youngster said. With his mother nearby, he peered through a pair of high-powered binoculars and gleefully exclaimed, “Mom, I could see my sister’s house from there!”

Police officials say the event has been positive for all involved.

“While it’s great for the kids to see the police officers, it’s also amazing and therapeutic for our own police officers,” Foley said.
PUBLIC SAFETY

All Aboard
West Hartford adds paramedic service to emergency response

West Hartford first responders now include trained paramedics, a much-desired addition that ends decades of paying a private service.

“It’s exciting for the department, it’s really changed the landscape for what we do,” Fire Chief Gary Allyn said. “We’re a fire department that’s 79 years old in its current configuration and this ranks right up there as being one of the big things that our fire department has done.”

The new paramedic service began last summer. Prior to that when an emergency call went out a paramedic from American Medical Response (AMR) would head to the scene. The town had been paying AMR about $315,000 a year. Now when a medical call comes in, the three groups of first responders include police, fire, and ambulance with a paramedic on board the fire truck. The paramedic will stay with the patient until they arrive at the hospital.

Chief Allyn says that means more efficient service with cost savings to local taxpayers. There are now 17 paramedics based at three of the five fire stations. Ultimately the town wants a full complement of 20 skilled paramedics — one at every station in town around the clock.

At the highest level of Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification, a paramedic is trained and certified to perform advanced life support, which includes administering IV fluids, injections, medications, and performing advanced respiratory procedures.

The added equipment costs are about $470,000 and to help pay for it, the town has used about $200,000 from a federal grant and money from a nonrecurring expense fund.

The switch from a commercial service won the unanimous approval of the town council and was then approved by the state Department of Public Health.

Chief Allyn called the change “a big deal and decades in the making.”

Self Defense 101
R.A.D. is a program of realistic self-defense tactics and techniques

The Cheshire Police Department is reminding people it offers a Rape Aggression Defense Systems training course, free to women who work or live in town, after several women have been groped while walking.

Police say the six-night course is a program of realistic self-defense techniques and tactics. It’s designed for the average woman, age 16 or older, with no prior experience or background in physical training or self-defense.

The program begins with a night of lecture that includes self-awareness, prevention, risk reduction, and risk avoidance. Subsequent classes get into hands-on, basic defensive training.

Classes run twice a week for three weeks and are held from 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Visit Cheshire’s website to apply for future training sessions. Applicants will be notified as more session dates are scheduled.

R.A.D. is not a Martial Arts program.

The courses are taught by nationally certified R.A.D. Instructors and provide each student with a workbook and reference manual. This manual outlines the entire Physical Defense Program for reference and continuous personal growth, and is the key to the free lifetime return and practice policy for R.A.D. graduates.

The cornerstone of R.A.D. Systems, this course has its foundations in education and awareness. The course includes lectures, discussion, and self-defense techniques suitable for women of all ages and abilities.

Eligibility Requirements:
• Female at least 16 years old
• Must live or work in Cheshire, CT

There are no minimum physical requirements to participate in the Rape Aggression Defense Systems class. You will not be asked to do anything that you do not wish to do.

Locations for the remaining classes will be given during the first class. Each class is approximately 2½ hours in length. The class is free to attendees and enrollment is limited to 14 students on a first come, first served basis.

Applications can be obtained at Cheshire Police Headquarters or submitted online through Cheshire’s website. Information submitted will remain confidential.
Shopper on the Internet is convenient, it saves consumers both time and money, and in some ways it has changed the way that people purchase goods and services. But one concern that comes with all that convenience is making sure there are safe exchange areas for those who conduct business on the Internet.

Accordingly, more and more municipal police departments are providing safe exchange areas — often on police department properties for residents who shop on Internet websites, especially Craigslist. For example, the Hartford, Waterford, Guilford, and Montville police departments all offer their parking lots or lobbies as safe exchange areas.

Guilford also uses their police department’s website and social media to promote the exchange location to town residents and Guilford Police Sgt. Chris Massey says while they have provided the safe exchange service for some time, the police department’s Facebook post is drawing even more attention to the free service.

The police department’s post says, “Internet purchases with local pick-up are extremely popular, but finding a place for the exchange can be challenging. Our front parking lot has two parking spaces prominently placed in front of cameras for our residents who are making purchases or selling items.”

Guilford’s safe exchange area is receiving good reviews. One commenter said: “This is an awesome idea. I hope more law enforcement buildings can provide this opportunity to the public. Thank you for being one step ahead!”

“It’s just a much safer way of doing this sort of transaction,” Massey said. “There is always somebody here, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There are cameras surveilling the property and the transaction.”

Because the Guilford police station is located a few hundred yards off exit 58 of Interstate 95, the department is offering its exchange area to residents of neighboring towns where an exchange site is not available.

“If someone is making a transaction at the police station, chances are you are dealing with a more reputable person and you are less likely to be a victim of fraud, or worse,” Massey said.

The Hartford police also use their website to encourage residents to take precautions with online purchases and sales. Their website tells residents: “Craigslist transactions that have turned into robberies and/or violent encounters have become a nationwide trend. The Hartford Police Department is offering its public parking lot as a suggested location option for these transactions.”
Police officers from more than two dozen Connecticut municipalities were part of the 2016 graduating class of a rigorous 10-week, 400-hour educational program which trains law enforcement managers from the mid to upper-levels of the chain of command how to be better commanders.

The “Command Officers Development Course” created by the Southern Police Institute at the University of Louisville provides comprehensive training on law enforcement administration and an in-depth overview of management practices, offered in five two-week sessions over a period of five months.

Participants learn how to help develop the strategic direction of an organization, develop values and goals, enhance internal communications, develop alternative solutions to problems, and implement and evaluate focused policing strategies.

The course also helps participants learn how to develop rules, regulations, policies and procedures, comply with law, and meet the standards of the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA).

Discussion topics include budgeting, community policing, labor law, leadership, ethics, and civil liability.

Graduates of the program are able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the primary federal requirements associated with personnel issues (including recruitment, selection, promotion, retention, discipline, termination, family leave, sick time, overtime, and compensation)
- Develop and evaluate risk management strategies
- Determine their organization’s effectiveness and the efficiency of police operations
- Demonstrate an understanding of internal affairs and the need to establish high ethical standards for police personnel

The Southern Police Institute offered the program in partnership with the J. Allen Lamb & Edward S. Pocock III Foundation which provided significant scholarship support for law enforcement and the West Hartford Police Department which hosted the training.

Lt. Samuel Soukup of the Wallingford Police Department completed the 10-week course of instruction for police commanders and the program got a thumbs-up from Police Chief William Wright.

“The opportunity to have Lt. Soukup attend this nationally recognized program is reflective of the police department’s commitment in advanced training to ensure that our community receives the best police service possible,” Chief Wright said.
Firefighters risk their lives on every call and the perils of battling a raging fire are all around. But there’s another serious and lethal risk that these everyday heroes must guard against — sudden cardiac death. According to medical experts, sudden cardiac deaths account for 60 to 90 percent of on-duty deaths among firefighters. And now the University of Connecticut and Hartford Hospital have teamed up to study the reasons behind those grim statistics.

They’ve found ready, willing, and very able research subjects at the Middletown Fire Department. The Middletown Fire Department is one of the few departments that have an on-site fitness facility, which researchers say is a big step in the right direction toward preventing on-duty deaths.

“The average citizen doesn’t realize how physically demanding and team-oriented the job is,” firefighter James Ehman says. “It’s vital to be in shape. We depend on it, the team depends on it, and we owe it to the public.”

Five Middletown firefighters opened the gym in an old Salvation Army building adjacent to their Main Street firehouse. The firefighters have certifications in fitness and opened the gym with funds from a donation from Aetna and money from the Common Council. The gym is named after a fallen colleague, Capt. Joseph Pagano, who died of a heart attack while on duty when he returned from an emergency call.

So just how fit are the Middletown firefighters? Five civilians, including Mayor Daniel Drew, found out during a friendly fitness competition that incorporated many of the tasks firefighters do every day.

Participants had to compete in full 80-pound firefighting gear. The contests included climbing four flights of stairs, forcing their way through a steel door, crawling through a two-foot round tube, lugging heavy hoses, and spraying every 10 seconds. But wait, there’s more! They also had to drag a 150-pound dummy and swing a sledgehammer repeatedly onto a heavy block to simulate cutting through a roof.

Needless to say, the civilians had their work cut out for them and all came away impressed. “It’s a window into the physical strain of being a firefighter,” Mayor Drew says. “Every single day these men and women exert themselves in a way impossible to conceive of without experiencing it first. The men and women who work here are heroes. They do a level of work and at a caliber that’s hard to explain.”

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Contact: Jennifer Cruz, Education and Events Program Administrator

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Westport wants its fire department primed for firefighting in the 21st century, says First Selectman Jim Marpe recently in leading fellow Board of Selectmen members in approving a consulting contract to study the department.

The Saugatuck fire station is the town’s oldest, built in 1900. Greens Farms was built in 1929. He says the goal “is to think about what firefighting means in the 21st century, and not just next year or five years out.”

He added: “Because when you are thinking of building fire stations, you need to be thinking 50, 75 years out because once built they will be there.”

Bob Galan, who heads the Fire Department Strategic Planning Steering Committee appointed in October to study the issues (see WestportNow, Oct. 29, 2015), responded, “Two of ours are approaching 100.”

The board approved a contract with Matrix Consulting Group, which is headquartered in California but has offices in Texas, Illinois, and the Boston area.

Marpe says the study was an outgrowth of a short-lived effort several years ago to relocate the Saugatuck fire station to town-owned land adjacent to a park on Riverside Avenue.

“In fact, there are a whole set of bigger questions here,” he says.

“Given the way homes and buildings are constructed now, and presumably fireproofed in a certain way, as we have learned, they are full of toxic things and once lit up are more dangerous than anything we fought in the last century.”

He pondered the role of drones in firefighting or robotics and asked where the productivity opportunities are in a modernized firefighting force.

Responding to a question from Selectman Avi Kaner whether the consultants would look at regionalization, Galan said they would look at regionalization or shared services with other communities.

Westport currently has mutual aid pacts with neighboring communities and its dispatch center currently handles 911 fire calls for New Canaan.

Galan says Matrix, at the town’s urging, has partnered with Lothrop Associates, an architectural firm headquartered in White Plains, New York.

“Having the architectural piece in there really gives you an added dimension as you move forward in identifying what your needs are, consolidating, and where you locate things,” he says.

Galan says the Matrix Consulting Group’s initial bid was in the $40,000 range but with Lothrop added, it became in the $60,000 range.

He added that the company has worked in municipalities similar to Westport, including those with a river dividing the community in half.

“It’s a wrinkle that not every town has,” Galan says.
Making Mental Health A Priority
Berlin woman makes strides for mental health service, advocacy

A Berlin woman has her sights set on making a difference when it comes to raising awareness about mental health.

Rachel Prior is bringing her passion for the issue to the local level. Prior is planning the first Mental Health Walk in Berlin, a fundraising event set to kick off in May 2017. The Goodwin College student who turned a school assignment into a worthy cause has been doing her homework well in advance.

“I watched a lot of videos on these different walks and wondered if there were any mental health walks,” she says.

She says the location for the first walk will be at either the Berlin Fairgrounds or Pistol Creek. Prior, who also volunteers at the Veterans Hospital in Newington, chose May for the event because it is nationally recognized as Mental Health Month. Her fundraising efforts will benefit Mental Health Connecticut (MHC), a non-profit education and advocacy group that has been serving Connecticut communities for decades.

MHC programs include residential services, supported and transitional employment, peer support, case management, and education. The programs are offered in Bridgeport, Danbury, Stamford, Torrington, Waterbury, and West Hartford.

MHC officials applaud the young woman’s initiative and passion to bring awareness to the cause.

“It’s really important, especially for the younger generation to really take up this work,” says Suzi Craig, MHC senior director of Advocacy & Development.

Although her first fundraising walk is still several months away, Prior has been eagerly promoting it on social media, distributing flyers around town, and drumming up interest at the Veterans Hospital.

“It affects everyone in some way,” Prior says. “We need to let people know that it’s OK not to be OK.”

Ending Hunger
Naugatuck’s Board of Education works to improve nutrition for youth

W ho said there’s no free lunch? Volunteers from Naugatuck’s Board of Education have made sure that for youths in town aged 18 and younger, there is indeed a free lunch this summer.

Numerous studies have established that nutrition plays a key role in the ability to learn and that poor, early life nutrition can have long-lasting negative consequences for cognitive ability. Nutrition is a key influence on student learning potential and school performance.

Even poorly nourished children who undergo a period of accelerated growth once their diet improves and appear normal as an adult may experience the emergence of cognitive or other developmental disabilities later in life.

Other studies show that nutrition can directly affect the mental capacity of school-aged children. Iron deficiency, even in early stages, can decrease dopamine transmission, which negatively impacts cognition.

Volunteers from the Naugatuck Board of Education recently ensured that youth in the community would be provided with free accessible meals during the summer by kicking off the annual summer food resource program during the last week in June. The volunteers then headed out across town to promote the program and make sure all residents were aware of the service which continued until August 19th.

Meals are available on weekdays at a variety of locations including elementary schools, high schools, local parks and recreational facilities, and the YMCA.

The program is offered in collaboration with End Hunger Connecticut! which is a statewide anti-hunger and food security organization that serves as a comprehensive anti-hunger resource for policymakers, community organizations, and low-income families.

The goal of EHC! is to improve the levels of food security and nutrition among Connecticut families while creating and supporting policies that move families toward self-sufficiency.
Neighbors come in all forms. In the Ansonia area, children will reap the benefits from the largesse of a corporate neighbor looking for a way to give back.

Employees from Basement Systems in Seymour rolled up their sleeves and wielded hammers and saws to help build a new $150,000 playground at the Ansonia Nature Center. It replaced a 25-year-old wooden structure that was taken down for safety issues. The new playscape is environmentally friendly and handicap-accessible.

It was a project with perfect timing. Nature Center Director Allison Rubelmann asked the local United Way for help last summer, explaining that the center needed to replace the aging structure. The center is visited by about 20,000 school children a year who come for the educational programs, are members of camps, or who just come to play. Center officials say they use the playground as a “holding station” in between programs.

“We know this is going to help a lot of kids.”
-CEO Larry Janesky

Timing is Everything
Company pitches in to replace Ansonia playscape

When Basement Systems reached out to me to ask for ideas for a major project their company could tackle, I immediately thought of Ansonia Nature and Recreation Center, because their playground had been unexpectedly taken down,” United Way’s Pat Tarasovic explains.

A crew of about 100 Basement Systems employees, many of them carpenters, went to work over a three-day weekend to build the playscape.

“Basement Systems is happy to support the Ansonia Nature and Recreation Center’s effort to rebuild its playground,” company CEO Larry Janesky says. “We know this is going to help a lot of kids.”
A Slam Dunk

Bridgeport reopens gym as a safe haven for youth

The city of Bridgeport teamed up with Housatonic Community College to help breathe new life into an old gym. The real winners are the youngsters of the Trumbull Gardens Housing Development.

The newly reopened gym and community center provide a safe haven for kids outside of school. The Housatonic faculty holds classes at the gym three days a week to tutor first-graders through high-schoolers.

“Our goal is to get you to the next grade and, if you’re in high school, to make sure you have all the tools to leave high school to go on to college,” Earl Graham, Housatonic’s director of admissions, told students during a recent open house.

The heart and soul of the facility are the residents of Trumbull Gardens who volunteer to organize activities in order to keep the doors open for the kids.

“I am here every day,” said Karen Bracey, head of Trumbull Gardens’ residents association. “Monday it’s closed, but I’m in here sweeping the floor and cleaning the bathrooms. I need the center open for my children.”

While basketball is the biggest draw, Bracey and others say the gym offers much more than sports. There are classrooms for computer work and tutoring. She also has plans to hold a pottery class and even musical theater.

“I want to expose my children to other things,” Bracey said.

The volunteers also want the children to learn about responsibility and manners. A sign on the wall reminds everyone of the tenets of the gym: “No swearing. No fighting. No pants sagging. Respect everyone. Have manners.”

For 11-year-old Jayden Ruiz, the Trumbull Gardens gym is his happy place and for a very simple reason.

“I didn’t have somewhere safe,” he said.

New Program Shows Its Heart

‘Derby Cares’ offers help with home repairs

Anti-blight ordinances often employ the carrot-and-stick approach, but in Derby one of the sticks is at the end of a broom manned by a volunteer from Derby Cares, a new program that offers help to elderly or disabled citizens with physical or financial limitations that prevent them from performing maintenance or repairs on their homes.

On a recent Saturday morning a team of volunteers arrived at the home of a 73-year-old disabled resident whose cluttered and overgrown yard put his home in violation of the city’s anti-blight ordinance and put him in danger of receiving a citation.

Instead, volunteers from Derby Cares arrived to rake leaves, trim hedges, sweep the porch, and haul away old lawn chairs, broken tools, stacks of newspapers, plastic bottles, and bins with years of accumulated belongings.

One of the volunteers was Derby Alderman Art Gerckens, who said he established Derby Cares because maintenance of properties can be a challenge for seniors and disabled citizens with diminished physical abilities or limited finances. Derby Cares is an independent rather than a city initiative.

Also among the volunteers was Carmen Dicenso, president of the Board of Aldermen, who used a backhoe borrowed from the next door neighbor as part of the clean-up effort.

“We may be a small city but we’re very big at heart. Derby Cares comes to the aid of people in need,” said Dicenso, who is chairman of Derby’s three-member Blight Committee appointed by the mayor.

Derby Cares shows the small city’s tender side, but the effort to combat blight also has teeth. The city’s anti-blight ordinance targets properties that have fallen into disrepair through inadequate maintenance, neglect through abandonment, or that display unsanitary conditions or safety concerns that are dangerous to life or property.

The city can fine residents $99 per day until the blighted property is no longer a danger or eyesore. Derby’s Clean and Lien program targets property owners who ignore letters from the Blight Committee. If the necessary work is not performed, the city can send public works crews to remediate the property and then bill the homeowner for the cost. If the property owner doesn’t pay that bill, the city can place a lien on the property and receive remittance when the homeowner sells the property.
Little Free Libraries are popping up in communities all over the country and Connecticut is no exception. Ledyard, Stonington, Groton, and Montville are four of the 52 documented towns in the Nutmeg state where residents host the grassroots reading opportunities on their properties.

Sandy Davis of Stonington said she decided two years ago to combine her love of literature with her commitment to her community by installing two newspaper boxes filled with books in her front yard – one with books for young readers and the other for adults.

“It’s a really great way to build community,” she said, noting that many of the neighborhood youngsters who visit her library often come with their families.

The Montville Rotary Club installed two Little Free Libraries last summer, one at a local youth camp and the other at a community center. Rotarian President-elect Mike Doherty said the libraries were “an easy and meaningful way to provide access to books in the community.”

Seven year-old Helena “Lena” Coury started her library last summer from books she no longer wanted. Unlike many Little Free Libraries that close during the winter, “Lena Lou’s” Little Free Library in Groton is open year-round and even features battery-powered lighting for nighttime walkers who want to browse the library’s offerings.

“We went in other neighborhoods and I really liked the idea of having one, and my uncle Doug made it for me,” Lena said.

Mark Fields of Ledyard built one to help his wife Jan distribute hundreds of books she receives as a book reviewer. Jan receives in excess of 100 books a month, but can’t give them to libraries because they are advance copies. Now the Fields’ Little Free Library boasts a steady supply of new titles for local residents to review for themselves.

The first Little Free Library was built in 2009 by Todd Bol of Hudson, Wisconsin, as a tribute to his mom who was a teacher. There are now more than 36,000 registered libraries in 47 countries.
Rock Solid

Historic Andover cemetery gets some TLC

The old burial grounds of colonial Connecticut have tales to tell and one Andover resident is helping to ensure that those stories continue to be part of the town’s history.

John Handfield, a Pratt & Whitney retiree who enjoys landscaping his own property, has spearheaded efforts to restore the historic rock wall around the town’s Olde Burying Ground, the final resting place of some notable New England families.

What first began as a task to just straighten some rocks on a section of the wall has turned into a project of civic pride for Handfield and others. He says people often honk their appreciation as they go by or stop to chat and thank him. Many others, he says, have rolled up their sleeves and helped in many different ways. Some have helped pile rocks, others have raked leaves and one local landscaper brought an excavator to help with one particularly tough section.

Handfield appreciates the help and doesn’t mind the work at all. He has a 300 foot rock wall at his home and admits, “I like working with stones.” And he’s making headway. So far three of the four perimeter walls have been spruced up and the volunteers are busy at work on the last section.

While more than 200 years of New England weather may have worn away much of the engraving on many of the gravestones, town officials know exactly who lies in repose. Mike Donnelly, president of the Olde Andover Burying Ground Committee, says a list of those buried there was drawn up many years ago.

“So we know who’s in there,” Donnelly says.

The cemetery was established in 1748. Aaron Phelps, who in 1750 was the first person to be buried there, is a direct ancestor of former presidents George W. Bush and George H.W. Bush. A direct descendant of Roger Williams, Samuel H. Williams, was also laid to rest in the Olde Burying Ground.

Town officials and residents say they are grateful for Handfield and the volunteer effort that is helping keep their history alive.

Team Players

Town and nonprofit partner to provide new adult day care program

Peace of mind is foremost in the minds of those who care for elderly relatives, and adult day care services are part of the continuum of care that many families need when providing for aging parents or other loved ones.

A geographic gap in adult day care coverage currently exists in the lower Naugatuck Valley area, requiring some Valley families to travel as far away as Stratford and Hamden to access adult day care, nearly 15 miles away. That’s 30 miles round-trip and it represents a long haul and a hardship for many families.

But help is on the horizon. The town of Seymour is collaborating with a local nonprofit on an effort to establish an adult day care program by renovating space on the top floor of the Seymour Community Center.

The nonprofit TEAM, Inc., which already provides area seniors with Meals on Wheels, transportation for medical appointments, and homemaking services, will provide the new adult day care service. The program will combine social and medical services so qualified caregivers will be on site to administer medications — and that’s where the peace of mind comes in.

Unlike senior centers which offer socialization and entertainment, adult day care is more appropriate for people who are less independent and either can’t be left alone, or those responsible for their care don’t want them left alone.

Having medical management and socialization in the same place is the best of both worlds and it costs less than other options like long-term care.

Officials say adult day care programs can help senior citizens bridge the gap between remaining independent in the community with their families and, when the time comes, that long-term care is appropriate.
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.

CCM is governed by a board of directors that is elected by the member municipalities. Our board represents municipalities of all sizes, leaders of different political parties, and towns/cities across the state. Our board members also serve on a variety of committees that participate in the development of CCM policy and programs.

Federal representation is provided by CCM in conjunction with the National League of Cities. CCM was founded in 1966.