Dear CCM Member,

We are pleased to present **Innovative Ideas for Managing Local Governments: A Connecticut Town & City Compendium** – our 32nd 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 quarterly 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 kmaloney@ccm-ct.org.

Good reading!

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It seems that each year hiking and outdoor activity grow in popularity in the state of Connecticut. In that spirit many towns and cities are looking to improve their trails where possible, and extend them, creating a web of trails throughout the state. One such project is the Sue Grossman Trail that runs between Torrington and Winchester.

A portion of the trail follows an abandoned railraid bed, this was established in 2009 when it first opened, and begins in Winsted and crosses into Torrington.

The Grossman Trail is extremely popular, with an estimated 42,107 individual trips along the trail in 2017 alone according to the CT Trail Census. Infra-red counters were placed at strategic points along the trails to count how many people passed. From the Torrington Hikes N Bikes newsletter in April 2018, the trail counted 84,215 hits (with an approximate 42,107 annual trips) “despite not being near any urban areas or high density residential areas.”

The goal of extending the trail down into Torrington has not only health, but financial benefits as well. The newsletter noted that a full third of trail users spend money at local restaurants and retail stores as part of their outdoor adventure, explaining that “communities that are more walkable are attractive places to live is directly related to increased property values.”

Both the Town of Winchester and the City of Torrington received a grant to complete the trail, which has been happening in phases for about 15 years. The municipalities have responded to the overwhelming popularity of this trail by working together to maximize the enjoyment for all.

Although, the proposal submitted to the Town of Winchester states that the maintenance of the trail will fall on the Town, “this is a popular project and will likely receive ample support for the minimal amount of maintenance that will be required.”

When completed, the path will be approximately 10 feet in width and paved. The towns are working with the Army Corps of Engineers, CT DEEP, and the local Inland Wetlands Commissions to provide “environmental compatibility” and with conservation in mind.

One resident suggested that markings should be placed around the trail and old railway describing the history and prior use of the land. It was agreed upon and thought to be a “good project for scouts to undertake.” A completion date for the project has not currently been set.

40,000 Trail Walkers Can’t Be Wrong
Residents get a longer trail between Torrington and Winchester
**Check It Out**

Mansfield Public Library eliminates most fines on late books

In a move that is sure to delight many bookworms, Mansfield Public Library has announced that it will no longer charge fines on much of what you can borrow including all children’s items and other specified books.

Fines will still be charged for high use and high cost items, per the press release from the Windham Chamber, and these include items like tools, cake pans (yes, many libraries have begun loaning out cake pans), electronic devices, and museum passes.

Additionally, if a book was transferred through the interlibrary system and that library does collect fines, then the Mansfield Public Library will follow the fining policy of the library that the book originated from.

This is part of a larger movement for libraries across the country who are challenging the effectiveness of collecting fines for late books in the first place. At a meeting of librarians in February of 2018, Gretchen Caserotti, a panel member from Meridian, Idaho noted that there is little evidence to support the idea that fines are a substantial revenue stream or that it’s an effective tool for teaching younger patrons responsibility.

According to a post by the Salt Lake City Public Library on Medium.Com, late fees accounted for just 0.3 percent of the library’s total revenue, making them nominal only.

In fact, fines are largely seen as an economic and mental barrier from taking advantage of libraries in the first place. The fear of fines prevent people from taking out books, especially for those in low income families. Even a single fine might prevent a regular visitor from returning.

Public libraries are an integral part of society, especially for those without the resources or space to fill up bookshelves at home. Mansfield Public Library’s decision to eliminate fines on most items is part of a trend that seeks greater access to one of our most precious resources: knowledge.

And if there are people who do bring a book back late and feel guilty about it, the press release says that there will be a donation jar at the checkout counter where you can help support your local library.

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**Walking The Line**

Torrington makes space for pedestrians

As more and more cities and towns aim to build a diversified transportation system, we at CCM have written about bike paths that extend from Long Island Sound to Massachusetts, a train line that connects New Haven to Hartford, and improvements in between. But among the most important infrastructure in the state is the humble sidewalk. While trains, cars, and bikes dominate the conversation, sidewalks are sometimes forgotten. This integral infrastructure is a key factor in pedestrian safety, and that is why Torrington has made it a focus of their infrastructure planning.

The Torrington Register Citizen wrote in July 2018 about a development grant that totaled nearly $2 million that the city was awarded by the state to improve safety for pedestrians as part of the 2017 Responsible Growth and Transit Oriented Development Grants. From the article, we learn that there will be “nine pedestrian crossings and nine streetlights along the corridor where the upgrades will be built” extending from Torrington Heights Road to the Big Lots Plaza and will take six months to a year to complete.

But that wasn’t the end to their plans. They received a Community Connectivity Grant in the amount of $400,000 to pay for a multitude of projects, including those to upgrade to safer crosswalks. In another article, again from the Register Citizen, Mayor Elinor Carbone astutely notes that “A decade ago, roads were designed to offer the fastest way to get there by car,” but that many of those trends are changing in order to offer a more walkable vision of town. These improvements according to the grant will be towards “Four public parking lots in downtown — at City Hall, Daycoeton and Litchfield streets, Franklin and Center streets and Mason and John streets — lack lighting, directional signage and have hard-to-find crosswalks.”

These two projects are a continuation of the already great work the City of Torrington has done to improve sidewalk health. Back in 2016, the Torrington Sidewalk Project widened sidewalks, put in plants, and new lighting with funds coming from the federal government at the time. Whether you’re just going for a nice stroll around downtown or you walk to and from the bus stop to get to work, you recognize that sidewalks are important part of your municipality; and towns and cities must follow Torrington’s lead in recognizing the need for safe pedestrian travel.
In a shining moment of civic participation fifteen years ago, hundreds of New Haven-area citizens made their voices heard in opposition to plans for the New Haven Savings Bank to demutualize. Listening to its constituents, the City protested the move, but failed to stop the process from moving forward. Despite this, the City fought for concessions, and what they got in return would instead help foster a mutually-owned community bank.

As part of the settlement with the city, the former New Haven Savings Bank donated $25 million to the First City Fund Corporation (FCFC). With this money, New Haven was able to found the First Community Bank in 2004, later rebranding as the Start Community Bank in 2012. With it came the promise of a mutually-owned bank that works for the community.

Over the course of its time in the city, it has not only served its purpose as a community bank with regular banking services like savings accounts, but also in giving back to the community through financial and social investment in the city.

This includes gaining federal recognition as part of the Elm City Resident Card program that helped the city’s undocumented residents gain footing in the community. This group of residents are often victims of violence and theft due to their vulnerability. The card allowed them to open bank accounts — many at Start Community — and overcome barriers in reporting crimes, creating a safer New Haven for all.

Additionally, the bank is a certified Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), which attracts private investment into communities like New Haven. By being a participating CDFI, Start Community Bank fosters “the development of affordable housing, the creation of jobs and local businesses, and the expansion of community facilities,” according to literature found on the government website for CDFI organizations.

As part of the responsibility of being a CDFI, the bank has helped many in the community avoid foreclosure through the ROOF program, a partnership with Yale University. The bank won Bank Enterprise Awards for its work as a catalyst of economic growth from 2012 to 2014.

The Bank Enterprise Award, won on the legs of the ROOF program and the Elm City Resident Card, is a sign of Start Community Bank’s larger mission, one that was mandated fifteen years ago when the residents of New Haven demanded a community bank: serve the community. It is part of their vision as a bank: “You Thrive. We Thrive.”

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Getting Back Into Plumb
Renovations will preserve historic library for years to come

When you have a treasure such as the Plumb Memorial Library in Shelton, you aim to keep it for generations to come.

Designed by Charles Beardsley (not to be confused with James Beardsley who donated the land that would become Connecticut’s only zoo) this building is an architectural treasure. It was built in 1895 in what is known as Richardsonian Romanesque style that was so popular at the turn of the century in America. It was outfitted with many high-falutin adornments such as Tiffany stained glass windows and ornately hand carved wood features.

When it was donated to the city, by David Plumb, after whom the building is named, its sure they spared no expense. And when the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places, they said: “The library which the Plumb family gave to the City of Shelton has been steadily used and well maintained over the more than three-quarters of a century since it was constructed. With a modern addition to the north which provides added floor space and more efficient book storage, it continues to serve the community well, providing library facilities in a building which is a distinguished example of late nineteenth century Romanesque architecture.”

Now, more than a century old, the library continues to need those renovations to keep it not only up to date with current needs, but to honor the historical beauty of the building. Some have complained about the building going into disrepair in the recent years, but the Library Board of Directors and Friends of the Shelton Library System worked with the City of Shelton to fund and start renovations.

According to the Shelton Herald, they will be renovating the building in phases, with the first phase aiming to repair the floors and ceiling, add cabinetry and outlets, and put in screens and televisions, something they certainly did not prepare for in 1895. The first phase is being funded by The Library Board, and will cost roughly $80,000.

By restoring the Plumb Memorial Library in Shelton, the Board of Directors, Friends, and the City of Shelton are sending many important messages to the citizens. First, that they will honor our past, and the long tradition of upholding fine examples of architecture. But most importantly, that libraries are important spaces in cities, and places where the public can go and meet, educate themselves, learn together, and more. With the renovations planned to take place over the next several years, they will ensure that Shelton residents will have a beautiful library for centuries to come.
The human rights campaign (HRC) released its seventh annual municipal equality index (MEI), rating a city’s LGBTQ inclusion in municipal law, policy, and services. While the HRC had noted that the MEI had “changed dramatically” for 2018, a record number of cities had recorded perfect scores, 78, up from just 11 when the MEI was first introduced. Among the cities that achieved a perfect score was Stamford.

The MEI is scored across five categories: Non-Discrimination Laws, Municipality as Employer, Municipal Services, Law Enforcement, and Leadership on LGBTQ Equality. Points are awarded in each category on criteria such as whether a city has non-discrimination ordinances or a LGBTQ Police Liaison or Task Force. Only 506 cities were judged, which included the 50 state capitals, the 200 largest cities, the five largest cities or municipalities in each state, the cities home to the state’s two largest public universities, and 75 municipalities that have high proportions of same-sex couples. An additional 98 cities were selected by HRC and Equality Federation state group members and supporters.

Of the towns and cities that were rated in Connecticut, only Stamford scored perfectly across all the categories, but a few other municipalities had beat the national average of 58. Hartford was nearly perfect with a score of 91. New Britain and New Haven had scores of 83, and Norwalk had a 71.

In a press release noting the increasing success of municipalities to protect their LGBTQ citizens, HRC President Chad Griffing said: “From San Antonio, Texas to Brookings, South Dakota -- this year’s MEI again proves that there are no barriers to municipal LGBTQ equality for a city with dedicated, pro-equality elected officials. Forward-looking leaders across the U.S. are stepping up, protecting their youth from so-called ‘conversion therapy,’ increasing anti-bullying protections, ensuring transgender city employees have access to inclusive health care benefits and protecting LGBTQ people from discrimination in all areas of life.”

### Stamford, Connecticut

**City achieved a top score on equality index**

The city of Stamford achieved a top score on the equality index. The city has implemented policies and practices that promote LGBTQ inclusion and protection from discrimination. The city’s perfect score demonstrates its commitment to full equality and inclusion for all residents.

#### Non-Discrimination Laws

The city of Stamford has implemented non-discrimination policies in various areas, including employment, housing, and public accommodations. The city has policies that protect LGBTQ individuals from discrimination in these areas.

#### Municipality as Employer

The city of Stamford has taken steps to create an inclusive workplace for LGBTQ employees. The city has policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and also has policies that protect transgender city employees from conversion therapy.

#### Municipal Services

The city of Stamford provides services to LGBTQ individuals and community members. The city has policies that protect youth from bullying and has policies that protect against hate crimes.

#### Law Enforcement

The city of Stamford has a policy that ensures LGBTQ individuals are protected from discrimination in all areas of life. The city has policies that protect against hate crimes and has policies that protect against conversion therapy.

#### Leadership on LGBTQ Equality

The city of Stamford has taken steps to advocate for full equality for LGBTQ individuals. The city has policies that protect against discrimination and have policies that protect against the use of conversion therapy.

Stamford is perfect! City achieved a top score on equality index. The city has policies and practices that promote full equality and inclusion for all residents. The city’s perfect score demonstrates its commitment to full equality and inclusion for all residents.
Can’t Get It Out Of Your Head

New Britain announces winner of jingle contest

You might have heard that New Britain has a new theme song honoring the heritage and diversity of the Hardware City, but did you know that it was a local resident that wrote it?

This past May, Mayor Erin Stewart opened up a contest offering a $1000 gift pack to a resident who crafted the catchiest melody to honor and represent the town of New Britain as part of a branding and marketing campaign “to promote and highlight all that is new and changing in the city.”

According to the rules, the jingle would “reflect the community and invoke a feeling of optimism and positive change.” The contest was open to legal residents of Connecticut, whether or not they lived in New Britain, and had to be submitted in a 60 second video with a brief essay detailing the concept and musical style. The only other guideline was that it must utilize the city’s tagline: “Experience the New.” Entries were judged on “creativity, originality, musical performance and adherence to creative assignment.”

With all of that in mind, Mayor Stewart announced on September 4 the winner of the contest as local musician Curley Jones. Though he is usually a gospel singer, the jingle is a quick pop jaunt imploring people to “come on, y’all, come on down and see the new in New Britain.” He goes on to mention many of the locations and features that New Britain has to offer like the CT Fastrack and New Britain Bees, which are both popular features of the city’s growth.

The jingle is part of a much larger plan that Stewart has enacted in her time as mayor. One facet of that program is an “Experience the New” program book which says that “As you explore the pages that follow, one thing will become unmistakably clear: New Britain is a unique community, full of diverse and deeply rooted cultures and, of course, wonderful people. Our economy, arts, food, and civic life all reflect our breadth of shared experiences and ethnicities, and have made us a stronger and more vibrant community as a result.”

The contest, which will have a full premiere later in the year with a polished recording, was a way to include resident pride in the marketing. If there is one thing for sure, it’s a town or cities residents that already know what makes that place so great.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Art Comes To Main Street
Ansonia Welcomes Valley Arts Council to their renaissance

Connecticut’s towns and cities have a rich history with their main streets, and those that read our in-depth exploration of the topic in our June 2018 issue will know how integral a diverse main street is to the economic development of a municipality. The city of Ansonia is experiencing a period of growth on Main Street, and keeps growing with the addition of the Valley Arts Council at 260 Main Street.

The appropriately named Main Street Gallery was feted by Ansonia in December, which will sell art and photography from local artists, after the Council moves from their longtime Elizabeth Street home in Derby.

Western Connecticut is no stranger to art, but the Council felt there was no “binding thread” that could celebrate the arts, especially within the Valley community. After a study done in the early 2000s, the Council was formed. They found that “there exists a vibrant arts and cultural faction within each of the seven valley towns,” which help explain the tenacity of the Council, and a welcome addition to Ansonia’s revitalization, what many are calling a renaissance.

The town and Council have plans to work closely together, with many collaborations between the Cultural Commission and the Council. Already in the ramp up to the opening of the new space, the two worked on a Scarecrow competition at the 11th Annual Harvest Festival held by the city. Most recently they held a Gingerbread House Baking contest with all proceeds going to support the Council.

Quoted in the Valley Independent Sentinel, the Council’s president Rich DiCarlo said that they, “feel really comfortable in [their] new space; the city and its people have been very welcoming.”

In addition to serving as a gallery for local artists to sell their work, the Council also envisions using the space as a hub for learning and educational programming. Per the Sentinel article, they aim to start a new video program called “Art Talks,” as well as “Art Walks,” which will have artists working en plein air and exhibiting their work outdoors.

Currently the gallery is hosting an un-themed exhibit to start off the new year, but will host “Go” starting February 16th, an exhibit that explores transportation, getting from one place to another. That show will run for one month.
After years of lying dormant with a revolving door of owners, the historically important Yantic Woolen Company Mill will soon see new life as a 151-room hotel, after the zoning application passed unanimously with support from all areas.

The structure was first erected in 1865 by E. Winslow Williams after a fire destroyed an already working flannel mill that had been founded by Williams’ father, Captain Erastus Williams, according to the application to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Early on in its history, it saw major growth, demanding the addition of looms and wings to match the output that was demanded in 19th century Connecticut.

Because of the large size of the business, it became cumbersome after the Williamses sold the operation. It produced goods for the government in World War I, but until 1968, the building went through a succession of owners who limited its use or opened the factory only part time. The company that purchased the building, the Hale Manufacturing Company of Putnam, modified the equipment to produce Rayon and other synthetic materials. This lasted until 1989 when the building was left dormant.

In 2011, the building went through an auction with the owners hoping that the building could fetch $2 million. At the time, this failed and the building was sold for just $209,000 in 2012 to a New York computer specialist according to the Norwich Bulletin. In the last 30 years, the building has had five owners, mirroring the early 20th century when no one owner could hold onto the property.

The news of the latest developer’s plans were welcome for a city that has seen a building go underutilized for three decades.

According to the application the developers, Mill Development CT LLC, the request was to convert the mill space into the aforementioned 151-room hotel (nearly one room for every year the building has stood), with amenities including a tennis court, playground, indoor pool, restaurant, and business center, with site improvements that include paved parking, drainage, utility connections, landscaping and exterior lighting.

Owing to the largeness of the building, these improvements will all fit comfortably on the footprint of the original mill area.

Additionally, the developers are lucky to have chosen this building for improvements: because the first mill was destroyed in a fire, the Williamses spared no expense when the building was constructed. From the NRHP application, it is noted that “features found in the Yantic mill reflect the period’s ongoing search for greater fire resistance,” continuing that “in addition to the use of masonry for the walls, the heavy timber interior framing and the thick floors built up of solid layers of wood were intended to minimize damage from fire.”

This doesn’t mean that there will be no work associated from the developer’s point of view, as other mills in the area had fallen victim to fire hazards in the past.

Peter Nystrom, the Mayor of Norwich, spoke in favor of the project as a taxpayer during the planning and zoning meeting, while City Historian Dale Plummer, and Norwich Historical District Commission sent in letters showing their support for the project.

As Mayor, Nystrom said to the Norwich Bulletin that the building is, “the gateway to our city when you’re coming from the capital. Gateways introduce people to what your city is about. We want to preserve that beautiful mill and engage it with the rest of the city.”

With a historic location and a good plan from the developers, the Yantic Woolen Mills building will continue to be a part of the future of Norwich instead of being relegated to the past.
Urban Planning is not something that changes overnight, especially in the state that is known as the “Land of Steady Habits,” which may or may not be a good thing depending on who you ask. It’s hard to move streets, and in crowded, densely packed urban areas, it’s hard to move buildings. Change will come more in the form of usage – turning old factories into lofts for younger generations is a popular form of this. Connecticut’s capital city, Hartford, is making many of these changes, slowly but surely, and according to some, doing a pretty darn good job of it too.

The planning has been going on for years, but the first phase could be said to have taken off in earnest in 2017, just one year ago. Projects like UConn’s Hartford campus and the Dunkin Donuts Park were meant to make Hartford more of a destination, especially its downtown areas.

It’s hard not to say that they’ve been a resounding success. In our last issue, we wrote about Dunkin Donuts Park receiving the honor of being the best minor league ballpark in America for the second year in a row. It is only the second ballpark to ever win back-to-back, and the only minor league stadium to ever do so (the other was PNC Park where the Pittsburgh Pirates play).

With the addition of the New Haven to Hartford train line – which ultimately ends up in Springfield, Mass. - the Hartford to Storrs line, and CTFasstrack, access to the city has never been easier. More than 115,000 riders took the Hartford to Storrs line in the first year alone, making it a resounding success, many of the riders were the students themselves who are able to pay for the public transportation system through student fees.

But once you get there, either for class, or for a ball game, you have to stick around to see what’s actually going on in Hartford. Getting people to do this is a problem that Lisa Chase, a writer who studies urban design and development recently told New England Public Radio when discussing Hartford’s redevelopment strategy.

“When I talk to people about Hartford’s ongoing redesign, I often hear disbelief and dismissiveness,” she said. “Not from residents who live in Hartford, especially young people invested in the fabric of the city, but from the ones on the periphery – people in the city’s inner-ring suburbs.” The problem is that they aren’t engaging with the city, but merely passing through.

Things like building a ballpark in the north end of town seem counterintuitive to a layperson, but to someone who spends all their time
Home Grown Businesses
Winchester looks to grow small businesses

Connecticut is home to many large businesses - pharmaceutical companies, insurance companies, and military - but the backbone of every town and city in America is small local businesses. The state understanding this, has created the Small Business Express Program, but as reported by the Register Citizen of Torrington, only businesses in two towns in Litchfield County have taken advantage of the program so far, Winchester being one of them. The Winchester Economic Development Council, wanted to get the word out about this program.

Started in response to the need to spur growth and job creation in the state, the small business express program is there “to provide the capital necessary to fuel small business progress. Whether you need an equity investment, capital purchase or working capital, you’ll find Connecticut offers an array of financing programs for small businesses.”

According to the Hartford Business Journal, the program over $254 million dollars in loans and grants has received promises to retain over 25 thousand jobs in the state of Connecticut, entirely in the small business sector. And among the over 1600 businesses that have received funds from this program, only 55 have gone out of business, which is a rate of .034 percent.

Businesses can take out loans and matching grants in order for just about anything their business needs at low interest rates meant to benefit the small businesses. The Register Citizen gives two examples of businesses that have taken advantage of this program: “Accounting and More, LLC in Litchfield, received a $200,000 job creation loan in 2018. It is a business owned by a woman and has one employee. A manufacturing company in Winchester, Dufrance Nuclear Shielding Inc., received a $229,500 job creation loan and a $60,000 matching grant in 2017. It hired 13 employees last year.”

This is not the first time that Winchester had promoted this program. According to their press release, they had done a similar presentation in 2013 that resulted in nine jobs being created and over $700,000 in loans being distributed. Winchester understands that the most important part of programs like the Small Business Express Program is knowing that they exist.
The proverbial main street is an icon of Americana, especially for small and medium sized cities. In nearly every town, you can find a street on which there exists a grocer, a pharmacy, maybe a hardware store, banks, and bakers. It is a street where you see people you grew up with, you run into the parents of your child’s friends, the place where all your business is done, and this being Connecticut, probably a Green. It is the stuff of many American dreams.

Unfortunately, that vision in many ways has faded or does not live up to the idyllic memory provided by reminiscence. Businesses began to close and people started to leave after the economic downturn of the early naughts. This was exacerbated by the internet boom where in increasing numbers people don’t have to leave their homes to catch up with friends or go window shopping. This change has left many Main Streets blighted and deserted.

Though the sights of empty streets and stores might be disconcerting, there are those that are working on rejuvenating Main Streets across the state of Connecticut. They are doing this against great odds — with a federal government that has cut large amounts of funding and a state budget crisis that threatens the grand lists of communities large and small. They are caught in between a rock and a hard place when creating a vision of their town’s future. But with the right plans, towns across the state are finding ways to make their Main Streets attractive to prospective businesses and residents.

The concept of a “Main Street” is nearly as old as our country. In a series called “What It Means To Be American,” produced by the Smithsonian and Arizona State University, Miles Orvell traces the concept all the way back to Nathaniel Hawthorne. In the New England-set short story called “Main Street,” Hawthorne describes the birth of the town center through a mechanical “shifting panorama,” literally tracing the birth of a Main Street from a barely trodden path through the development of a full blooded town center. So central to American life was Main Street that Hawthorne suggests that towns sprung up around them rather than the other way around.

This effect can be seen in many of Connecticut’s larger cities. The Main Streets of Middletown and Norwich have roots in the 17th century and continue to be utilized today. New Haven is famous across the world for being one of the first towns across a modern grid system. Founded nearly 400 years ago, at its center was the Green, a gathering place for merchants and worshipers. And what was true for these larger towns, became true for the cities and towns that settled later.

Coventry’s downtown was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991, and they won a Municipal Excellence Award for their village in 2016

Eric Trott, the Director of Planning and Development for the town of Coventry has a robust definition of what a downtown means to one Connecticut town:

“A healthy downtown serves as a centerpiece for the community – a shining example of what often times is the best of what’s in a town or city. In Coventry, it is very significant since we are predominantly rural-residential and our Coventry Village serves many important roles in our community – a place of commerce, recreation, learning, art, entrepreneurship, gathering, dining, and living. The Village has a very strong connection with its rich industrial history, where many remnants still remain intact today – renovated and adaptively used mill buildings, stone structures – walls – stone lined waterways, architecturally significant residences and commercial buildings, the honoring and highlighting of the watercourse that once powered the mills (Mill Brook) and its source, Coventry Lake.”

In Hawthorne’s recollection, as the town’s needs changed, so did the street. There are natural ebbs and flows; a dirt path gave way to a dirt road, to pavers, and finally, in a turn that Hawthorne himself might not have imagined, to car-worthy streets.

Nationally, by the end of the 20th century, Main Streets began to lose their Mom & Pop Stores, only to be replaced by larger chain stores. Gone was the local credit union and the town pharmacist; many simply couldn’t compete, others were swallowed up in a seemingly endless period of mergers and acquisitions. With the boom of online shopping, gone too were the local goods stores.

It was the Great Recession that dealt the other
blow: people began leaving small towns, something Connecticut in particular has struggled with. It ranks among the states with the most outward migration, affecting small and medium sized towns the hardest.

Without retailers and without people, the modern Main Street has become something of a desert. But that doesn’t mean that there aren’t ways of rehabilitating and preserving a town center and local leaders are working hard to make that vision happen.

Across the state of Connecticut, local municipal leaders are doing what they can to bring back these town centers by focusing on multi-faceted initiatives meant to look attractive to both retailer and resident alike. As Bristol’s Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu said about Bristol, a healthy Main Street “looks like a downtown with people in it!”

One organization, the aptly-named Connecticut Main Street Center, has used the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s guidelines since its founding in 1995. The Four Point Approach is designed to not only preserve these locales for their historical importance, but “advances economic and community development within [that] context.”

From their website, the Four Point Approach is:

- Organization: Focusing on consensus and cooperation, we help build a framework for sensible, community-driven programming - matching a community’s assets to its potential.
- Promotion: Enhancing the image of downtown through retail promotions, special events and branding. Increasing the social value of downtown will increase the economic value of the district.
- Design: Improving the physical value and appeal of downtown through both new construction and rehabilitation of historic and under-utilized buildings. We encourage design of public spaces for walking and gathering.
- Economic Restructuring: Increasing the economic value by encouraging diversity among current and new businesses suitable to the unique needs of a particular marketplace.

These guidelines do not end here, and include a further 8 Principles meant to insure the success of the program. These include focusing on incremental change, public/private partnerships, and identifying what makes a Main Street viable to begin with — things like theatres, architectural style or layout can influence the direction a program takes.

Many cities and towns are using these guidelines or prescriptions of their own to recreate that vision that so many hold on to; Bristol, Coventry, and Westport are a few that come to mind.

“Westport has been actively engaged in moving forward with planned projects which were ready for implementation,” First Selectman Jim Marpe said about Westport. “The projects focus on one or more of the objectives to enhance the Downtown experience whether it is to beautify the streetscape, integrate roadways, improve mobility and pedestrian access, ease traffic congestion and increase available parking.

continues on page 16
“This includes street amenities like bike racks, benches, and new trash receptacles, restoration projects of historically important buildings, revamping parking in the area to help with traffic flow along with other general traffic fixes.

“They included “input from thousands of Westporters” in the process, meaning that just like the villagers in Hawthorne’s story, the people who use the downtown area had a say in its look and use. This culminated in the adoption of a Downtown Master Plan, set to be finished in 2025, Marpe believes “will continuously enhance and improve Downtown’s physical landscape as well as the overall experience.”

Over in Coventry, they have focused on transportation projects that aimed to improved mobility through town. “The Village has just been the subject of a 2+ year intense transportation construction project that has provided incredible improvements which enhance the safety and mobility of motorists and pedestrians,” per Eric Trott, the Coventry Director of Planning and Development.

He elaborated that, “a large section of Main Street was reconstructed by a State of CT Department of Transportation project which now provides sidewalks, crosswalks, street lighting, banner poles, benches, bike racks, landscaping, park enhancements, special parking and access improvements. However, the project was completed by applying ‘context sensitive solutions’ with the design of the improvements to harmonize with the existing features present in the Village.”

Many of our downtowns, like those in Coventry or Middletown or New Haven, are among the oldest continually used streets in America, sometimes with little or no reform. Projects like those in Coventry are essential to bring the Main Street into the 21st century.

In Bristol, that means adding new buildings, like a new medical arts building across from the historic side of Main Street, and Mayor Zoppo-Sassu noted that “this week, the state added a Bristol arts magnet school to the funding list of school construction projects which will occupy the former Memorial Boulevard School next to downtown.” The new must always live next to the old in order to grow and evolve.

That doesn’t mean that the old get forgotten. Bristol’s Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu had stated as one of her goals to keep the lights on at the Memorial Boulevard Theater. To keep the “lights on” both implies that businesses are open and welcoming: The metaphorical “lights on” is a sign of rejuvenation, revitalization, and general activity, a destination, and the renovated use of a building that generations of Bristolites have a nostalgic attachment to. The theater sits on a gateway, adjacent to downtown, and will be a catalyst for what we are trying to accomplish in putting the pieces of a puzzle together and defining what downtown is for the next generation.

Main Street may never again be what it was. Like Hawthorne envisioned over 100 years ago, Main Streets are constrained to the ebbs and flows of time, with unknowable changes in use and traffic. No one in the Greatest Generation could have quite predicted the internet age in the same way Hawthorne couldn’t possibly have predicted motorized carriages. And so the old saying is true: the only constant is change.

But to take that very fact into account is to accept the responsibility of being caretaker of our Main Streets, through good times and bad. Over the course of nearly 400 years, the state of Connecticut has seen its fair share of both, and with it our Main Streets have become American icons.

It is up to the municipal leaders to be steward of these institutions so important to the American story, and that they preserve and adapt at the same time. As First Selectman Marpe says “downtown provides Westporters with a “sense of place” as a town, and a gathering place for neighbors and visitors.” And what is true for Westport is true for all of Connecticut. It’s no easy task, but those in Bristol, Coventry, Westport, and in each corner of this state are making gains in preservation and growth, in economy and population. And with their care, Main Streets across the state will hopefully see a renaissance.
A brownfield is a sight for sore eyes: a field of formerly industrial facilities that have gone unused for some indeterminate length of time or were redeveloped before any attempts at a cleanup. Both local governments and citizens often cry out for these areas to be remediated or redeveloped, eliminating the blight, but for any number of reasons projects like these are halted. One example is Norwalk’s Ryan Park.

The 2.2-acre park was built on former industrial land, and contained a number of chemical contaminants including Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), a compound found in many different products before it was discovered to be toxic and a likely carcinogen. In addition to the PCBs, there were two properties with leaking underground storage tanks. Lead based soil was also found.

Since that time, Norwalk has been actively seeking to rectify the situation, working on remediation efforts that would bring the park back to full use. This included digging up and safely disposing of the contaminated soil in a chemical waste landfill or some other method that is approved by the Toxic Substance Control Act (TSCA).

These efforts are funded in part by grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and a state grant awarded by the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) in February of 2017.

The park’s remediation could possibly be done by the end of 2018, with additional plantings in 2019. The plans include games tables, a performance area, basketball courts and a fitness area, a walking loop, water area, and even some musical sculptures that invite park-goers to interact with their surroundings.

Connecticut has a continued interest in moving projects like Ryan Park forward, and has given out Brownfield Area-Wide Revitalization (BAR) grants. The 2018 recipients include the City of Ansonia, Bridgeport Economic Development Corporation, Towns of Naugatuck, New Milford, Thompson, and the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments.
One of the hardest situations an American town has to deal with after manufacturing has left is what to do with the land. Sometimes these brownfields run into contamination problems during redevelopment, but other times a municipality has a development opportunity that’s obvious. This was a recent occurrence in the Borough of Naugatuck, which has looked to move forward on a proposed inland port on the former Uniroyal Chemical Company land.

For Mayor N. Warren “Pete” Hess, the development of the nearly 90-acre parcel of land was a no-brainer, and because of the railway that runs through the land, an inland port was an equally easy choice to make.

Inland ports often take the place of congested sea ports as a means to both store and transport goods coming from abroad. This hub, dubbed the Port of Naugatuck, would allow goods coming from places like Canada, Europe, or even Asia to go through customs before being distributed to the tri-state area via truck.

The Port of Naugatuck is situated on the Pan Am line, which gives it access to a large portion of New England and Canada as well as easy access to the New York/Newark markets. This would be doubly efficient for companies, because their goods will have already been cleared through customs, eliminating costly cargo transfers.

The port will also be a useful warehousing location because of the large amount of space available to develop. Companies can build and utilize warehouses at the port in much the same way that they would at a sea port.

Benefits extend to the Borough of Naugatuck, which has visions of economic renewal to the town, its residents, and the state of Connecticut over the long term.

Bringing in additional revenue through taxes and jobs associated with the import of goods are two obvious benefits, but a dedicated railway would help alleviate traffic in the surrounding areas by getting more tractor trailers off the road as well.

Mayor Hess has gone on to hire Civil 1, Inc. to work on the project, which includes purchasing the parcel of land and environmental clean-up. The town has already applied for grants to aid in the completion of this project, which has some hurdles to jump before being complete.

One major issue is the completion of improvements to the Waterbury line of the Metro North railroad. It needs sidings so that two trains can safely pass, and upgrades to signals and cars, but those developments have stalled due to the impending insolvency of the Special Transportation Fund.

Municipal leaders from Waterbury to Bridgeport where the line runs see these upgrades as the chance to bring in development opportunities.

None more so than Mayor Hess, who has continually lobbied on all sides to see that this project benefits the residents of Naugatuck. He envisions a stable tax-base from the companies that invest in the Port of Naugatuck, a lower mill rate, and a revitalized town. It’s just the ticket to get Naugatuck back on the fast track.
Just a few short years after the opening of the CTfastrak, municipalities are beginning to utilize those bus hubs to renew their cities’ downtowns. A purse of public and private funds are going to build Columbus Commons, a combination apartment/retail space that aims to be the first phase of development for the city of New Britain.

The building is centered on what was the former New Britain Police Department building at 125 Columbus Boulevard that was razed in 2015. The location is centralized in the New Britain Downtown District which connects the city’s residents to Hartford, Bristol, Waterbury, and both the Amtrak and Metro-North Rails via the CTfastrak.

According to a press release from the City, it is the City’s first major Transit Oriented Development project. They expect the project to cost a total of $58 million dollars, with the state loaning the project $6 million dollars and $1.6 million coming from the Connecticut Housing Finance Agency. Bank of America is generating $16 million in equity for the project.

Xenolith Partners and Dakota Partners were chosen as the developers. In a joint statement they said they “are pleased to be a part of the downtown New Britain renaissance by expanding rental opportunities and cultivating commerce in a sustainable, transit-oriented development.”

New Britain’s Mayor Erin Stewart sees the project as a way for the rising tide of CTfastrak to lift all boats.

With 160 mixed-income residential units, she sees a slew of new restaurants and stores emerging in Columbus Commons and the greater downtown area to serve this new crop of residents, creating a domino effect of economic development. And there’s some evidence she might be right.

The millennial generation is reviving the idea of walkable cities in urban planning, and there’s no sign that this will change for the generation that follows them. Recently, the National Association of Realtors found in their 2017 Community Preference Survey that close to two-thirds of that age group prefer to live in locations with nearby restaurants and stores.

With Columbus Commons, people of any age will have access to a transit hub, restaurants, and retail all within a short distance of their homes.

The groundbreaking happened in 2017, and construction is set to start sometime in 2018 according to the developer’s website the project is happening in two phases.

Stewart said that the “project is the start of an exciting new era for downtown New Britain.”
What many people might not realize about the success of Bill Gates is that he had a leg up on the rest of us. In a story from Malcolm Gladwell’s book *The Outliers*, Gates’ elementary school in 1975 bought a used computer, a Teletype Model 33, one of the first computers that you didn’t need a computer science degree to operate. The school didn’t purchase the computer because they thought personal computing would change the world, but because they wanted their students to have every available resource to learn. In the same spirit, Andover Elementary has added a makerspace to their school.

These spaces are popping up everywhere as the cost for the hardware comes down. Unlike an ordinary teacher-led classroom, these spaces foster creativity and invention amongst students by giving them the tools to discover for themselves with teachers there for guidance.

According to an article in the Journal Inquirer, the project had a fairly low budget of just $25,000, and was spearheaded by Kirstina Frazier. She was featured in another article early on in 2018 for winning the state’s outstanding elementary school teacher for her efforts teaching coding to pre-schoolers. The curriculum encourages a focus on learning to learn and solve problems on your own. Principal John Briody said that he hopes to connect what the children are learning in the makerspace back to the classroom.

Some of the equipment that was purchased for this space was “circuitry kits, teaching robots, virtual reality goggles, two 3D printers, and a wide array of building supplies and tools.” 3D printers have been particularly popular among makerspaces as they, like computers in the 70s, have seen their cost drop dramatically. In 2010, a single desktop HP printer would cost in the range of $15,000, meaning that buying two printers would have driven the price over the total budget of the entire room. Some of these technologies would have been unthinkable just a generation ago, just as the internet was to that previous generation, but are important for children to have a leg up on the future.

Just like Bill Gates back in Seattle in the 70s, these children are preparing for a future world, one that we don’t know what it will look like exactly. While virtual reality goggles, robots, and 3D printers might seem like a lot for elementary school children to be getting their hands on, these children might be creating the next technology to go in the makerspace.
The opportunities for an artist to work on large scale municipal art projects are few and far between, let alone for children artists looking to explore their creativity. That’s why a project like American Mural Project (AMP) is so special, as it has announced a partnership with Winchester Public Schools.

The mural, which is on track to be the largest indoor collaborative artwork in the world, is a “celebration of American ingenuity, productivity, and commitment to work,” according to the project’s website. It is situated in two former mill buildings on Whiting Street in Winsted, Connecticut, which will house both the mural and a visitor’s center.

Part of the goal of the project, the brainchild of artist Ellen Griesedieck, is to include as many people as possible from all corners of the country, with 15,000 children and adults who have helped create pieces of the mural, and an additional 30,000 volunteers to help finish the project.

Winsted was chosen as the site of the project for its rich history in the kind of work that the mural aims to celebrate. The site was a brownfield, and through grants it was able to begin renovations in 2017, nearly 11 years after the project initially secured the buildings. The building will be open to the public in 2019, as construction of the mural is still ongoing.

Winchester Public Schools CHAMPs program that is partnering with the AMP is aimed at after-school enrichment. The program has provided after-school programs for students in K-6 since 2011, which has included sports activities, choirs, and other arts programs.

Students will attend programs at the Whiting Mills until the AMP space opens up later this year.

In a statement to the Torrington Register Citizen, Theresa Padin, director of CHAMPs said that “students have the opportunity to work among studio spaces housing working artists and craftsmen, in addition to outdoor space that is perfect for small group instruction, nature exploration, and creating art and music in a natural environment.”

Going on, she says that it is through this partnership that the students will learn about their community; “from the rich history of Whiting Mills to the evolution of the mural, students will be linked to the past, present, and future of Winsted.”

America recognizes the importance of public art, and citizens knowledgeable in the history of their area. With this partnership, Winchester has an entire group of children who will grow up with both already instilled in them.

When I Paint My Masterpiece

Students have chance to learn about town’s past by creating its future
They say that High School years are some of the hardest of your life. It's a necessary gateway to becoming a fully-fledged adult, but you have to keep up with your peers, your studies, learn how to fend for yourself, maybe get a car, a job, all while planning for your future. That's why it's been an important innovation to have health centers in school like the one in Stamford High School.

In a report that was published under a partnership between the Connecticut Post and the Connecticut Health I-Team (C-HIT), they talk with Stamford High School sophomore Roger Sanchez who calls the health center at his school an oasis. “The health center helps me out academically, emotionally, and physically,” he said, and even recommends the program to friends. These health centers are very important, especially for minority students, because of their accessibility. Unlike a regular doctor’s appointment, where one has to be fit in against a rigid schedule, help can be found right where the student is all day. Per the CTPost/C-HIT report, data shows that a black or Hispanic teen would be, “much less likely to get or stick with [mental health services] if they pursued them elsewhere in their communities.”

One primary reason behind the increased likelihood of sticking with a mental health program is the expense. Many of the health centers have some funding from the state, and have licensed medical providers who have privileges to prescribe medication and bill insurance for services. Although, the health center is open to any student, even those without health insurance. The numbers according to the report are staggering: a black or Hispanic student participated in an average of 13.6 sessions at the school health center, while those seeking the same services in their community would only do two or three sessions.

Another factor is the staff, who have prioritized the well-being of these students. The Stamford health center is staffed by nurse practitioners, social workers, and dental professionals. Emily Segal, who is quoted in the CTPost/C-HIT story and works at Stamford High School, was recently named the Provider of the Year by the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers.

From their release on the award: “For the past 17 years, Segal has helped countless Stamford High School students cope with a variety of emotional and mental health challenges. Her compassionate, non-judgmental manner has resonated with students to the point they often discuss their troubles with her before approaching parents or friends. And since she strongly believes that education reduces the likelihood that kids make unhealthy decisions, Segal has organized several prevention activities over the years open to all students at the school.

“"To help kids manage the stressors of adolescence and give them the best chance to overcome obstacles, Segal has created a number of discussion and support groups to give kids a forum where they can voice their concerns. With the help of several students, she also formed Stamford High’s first Gay/Straight Alliance to bring a greater sense of tolerance and support around teens struggling with their sexual identities.”

LGBTQ youth are among the most high risk students when it comes to mental health issues, and per the Trevor Project, are five times as likely to have attempted suicide compared to heterosexual youth. This means that the work that goes on in these health centers, and especially work done by people like Emily Segal, can have their value measured in lives saved.

With the state budget being the way it is, programs like these are experiencing cuts, with the most recent budget allocating $10.7 million in 2019, a $300,000 cut from the proposed budget. These centers, like the one in Stamford, are sometimes a city’s most valuable resource, keeping their students happy and healthy and on the right track.
Soon, on a clear day you might be able to look off the Connecticut coast and see giants, or at least a Windmill farm providing the residents of Connecticut with clean power.

Companies such as Eversource and Deepwater Wind have submitted proposals in response to a call from Connecticut’s Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to build an offshore wind fuel cell to, “secure cost-effective resources consistent with the state’s energy and environmental goals,” as stated in their press release.

The two competing plans offer a 200 megawatt wind farm to service Connecticut energy needs, but differ slightly in the finer details.

Deepwater Wind, who ultimately won the bid, said in a press release that their project will be halfway between Montauk, N.Y., and Martha’s Vineyard, Mass., which is close to their other projects such as the 90 MW South Fork Wind Farm to supply Long Island and the Block Island Wind Farm serving Rhode Island. The latter was the first commercial wind farm in the United States.

Eversource, unlike Deepwater, would only have served the on-land portion of the project, with much of the planning going to Danish company, Orsted, who have a long history of building wind farms in Europe, with projects going back to the early 1990s. Eversource will also act as part of the evaluation team per the DEEP RFP.

According to figures from Eversource and Orsted, the project will provide 100,000 homes with power, deliver $80 million in savings in lower winter power costs, commit over $4 million to support programs and environmental partnerships, provide $2 million to a “newly created Connecticut Economic Development Fund,” generate $16.1 million in taxes, and add a total of $93 million in direct value to the Connecticut economy.

Plans like this have garnered criticism for disrupting views, most notably in Scotland (the country), which received international attention. But the plans for Connecticut intend for the farm to be built far enough off the coast that they would not disrupt the scenic beaches that are so popular in the state.

Another concern is coming from fishermen in the area. According to a report from WTNH, some fishermen have reported damaged equipment from the Block Island Wind Farm. Mike Gambardella, a local fisherman and owner of Gambardella Seafood Wholesalers, says that the “turbines interfere with radar and fishermen worry the fish stock could be affected.”

Connecticut plans to continue to bolster its renewable energy resources, and wind farms are just one part of the larger plan that includes other alternative sources like solar energy.
Although it is February, that doesn’t mean that we are free from the threat of a snowstorm by a longshot. Between March 11 and 14, 1888, the entire East Coast was hit with a blizzard that produced snowfalls of 50 inches in some places and snowdrifts as tall as buildings. In any amount of snow, it’s good to have a plan like Bloomfield’s Winter Ordinances, which provide a helpful guideline no matter where you are. Most towns and cities may eliminate any or all street parking during snow emergencies, not only to protect citizens, but also to facilitate clean up once the snow has stopped. Places like Downtown New Haven have signs with lights that when lit warn drivers that there is a parking ban in effect. In Bloomfield, they ask that you not park any vehicle on any public street in excess of thirty minutes between the hours of 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. One major part of cleanup is the removal of snow in public areas. The tenant, occupant, owner or agent of any premises where there is a sidewalk must remove snow within two hours of the end of the storm or within three hours after sunrise if the snowstorm happened at night. Additionally snow must be removed from fire hydrants if they are on your portion of the street within the same timeframe. They need a three foot radius around the fire hydrant so that fire fighters have easy access should a fire emergency occur. Where you place your snow is just as important as removing it. It would be considered obstruction to traffic, a finable offense, if you were to place all the snow you just shoveled off your sidewalks back onto the streets. Other tips and requests are that you place trash and recycling bins at the edge of your driveway if you have one, and not in the roadway. Also, removing basketball hoops during these months can prevent obstruction or damage in the case that it gets tipped over into the street or onto a car. Most importantly though, residents should stay safe by preparing for a snowstorm if possible, and then remaining in place if the weather is severe enough. Many municipalities like Bloomfield offer e-mails that will update you on policies like Winter Ordinances, closures or severe weather warnings. Whether it is just a few inches or a once-in-a-century storm, it is everyone’s duty to facilitate the safety of all and the ease with which the town can get back to work.

Fake plastic coyotes dot Middletown park

Pretty much everyone has heard of a scarecrow, but have you ever heard of a scare coyote? The city of Middletown has come up with a unique looking solution to a rampant goose situation in the Butternut Hollow Park by placing fake plastic coyotes all around the park to keep them away from designated areas. The goal is not to eliminate the geese from the park, but to stop droppings from causing deleterious effects like algae blooms. According to a report from the Hartford Courant, the city buys the fake coyotes from Dicks Sporting Goods at around $130 a pop, and they have a poseable tail that moves in the wind for a more realistic effect. While coyotes are not exactly known for their smarts – at least in the cartoons – geese have seemingly outwitted the plastic predators: “One day last week as a few families were visiting the playground, the flock walked from an open area across the street from the park past the fake coyotes to the side of the pond abutting an apartment complex, seemingly cautious of the decoy but still undeterred.”

The city has focused so much attention on this one park because its extensive renovations have led to increased use by residents. Of the many projects part of the renovation include stocking the pond with fish, a brand new playground, walking paths, and a pavilion picnicking area. Because of the investment in public use, the park’s managers felt it was important to keep the geese away from areas where humans would be playing and eating.

One of the other reasons to keep the geese away is because of how nutrient rich geese droppings are. As noted in the Courant piece, the droppings are essentially a type of manure that act as plant food. When the water in the pond gets oversaturated it leads to algae blooms, which can be detrimental to the stocked fish, and the entire ecosphere in the pond. Since the program has started, the algae levels are down, and human use is up, proving once again that what is good for the goose is good for the gander.
When it comes to potential flooding, West Haven residents who live upstream of Sea Bluff Beach and Bradley Point Park will soon have some peace of mind. The State Bond Commission recently approved $3.9 million in state funding for a new Cove River tide gate system. This project, part of the city’s Coastal Resiliency Plan, will protect the tidal wetland from flooding and causing any more damage to surrounding homes, businesses, and roads.

State Rep. Dorinda Borer, D-West Haven, announced the funding at Sea Bluff Beach alongside state Reps. Charles J. Ferraro, R-West Haven, and Michael A. DiMassa, D-West Haven, Mayor Nancy R. Rossi, and Mark E. Paine Jr., assistant to acting Public Works Commissioner Lou Esposito. “I am proud to have worked with my colleagues to secure these funds,” Borer said at the news conference.

Replacing the failing, 45 year-old tide gate system has been a long-time goal for city officials. The gates are meant to regulate the tide where the Cove River flows into Long Island Sound. Without a functioning system, the surrounding infrastructure is left unprotected and upland property is at risk for flooding. One area of concern is West Haven High School because of its close proximity to the river. Its track and fields flooded in October 2012 after Superstorm Sandy overtook the tide gates.

“Our shoreline is our greatest asset and pride and joy,” Rep. Borer said. “Recent storms highlight the need for a reliable system to protect West Haven neighborhoods from property damage and the potential loss of life. I applaud the Commission for approving this grant and I’m glad to be part of our legislative delegation’s efforts,” said Rep. DiMassa.

Efforts to rehabilitate the Cove River salt marsh have been in effect for over six years. Led by Paine, the city has restored the natural salt grasses and eliminated most of the invasive species there. Shorebirds and waterfowl have even returned to the area since its restoration.

Plans for the new tide gate system also include self-regulating tide gates so that the city can control the height of the tides – an aspect very important to the health of the marsh. A new concrete footbridge is also in the works to allow pedestrian access from Sea Bluff Beach to Bradley Point Park. The former bridge was built over a century ago and closed in the early 80s.

“This area, with its rich history, should be preserved, and I am grateful the state prioritized our funding request to get this critical project off the ground,” Rep. Borer said.

“Our shoreline is our greatest asset and pride and joy,” she said. “Proactively improving the functionality through self-regulated tide gates and replacing the pedestrian bridge, which has been closed for over 20 years, will generate countless safety, environmental and quality-of-life benefits.”

The project, starting in early summer, will take up to eight months to complete.
Where Does It All Go?

Trash diversion looks for a smarter solution, this is our only Earth, and sometimes you have to think about what you’re throwing out, even if you don’t want to.

One of the things that we don’t ever want to think about is trash. We all create it, and every week we put our bins out on the side of the street, but where it goes after that is out of sight, out of mind. That trash does go somewhere though, whether to a recycling plant or a dump, and it is starting to become a problem for the towns and cities of Connecticut. Landfills are filling up and there’s talk about beginning to utilize out of state locations, and recycling plants are inundated with materials that they just can’t handle. But some municipalities are looking at re-educating the public and alternatives for a greener future.

New Haven is one such city that has put an emphasis on recycling. Not only are public trash cans popping up with recycling capabilities, but they’ve wanted to make sure that everyone knew what was appropriate to recycle and what wasn’t in their own homes. The first thing to know is what can go in: plastic bottles, containers, and one use cups can go in. So can food boxes, even pizza boxes if they are clean. Aluminum foil is in. Cans and bottles made from metals are also in. Glass jars can also be recycled. A good idea is to check for the recycle logo on all of your goods.

But it’s really the things that can’t be recycled that are clogging up the system. Some things might surprise you. A tub of ice cream cannot be recycled. Paint cans are obviously a no go, but so are the lids of yogurt tubs. Tissue paper and paper cups cannot be recycled and many plastic items like prescription bottles, loose soda caps, and plastic utensils cannot be recycled. These items are shifted away from the recycling streams and then sent to the same landfills as the rest of the trash. This costs cities like New Haven money, because it is an added trip away from the recycler.

That is why New Haven has spent the summer of 2018 stickerering their blue recycling bins to let people know these rules. These rules may be tricky, sorting the ice cream cartons (bad) from the cereal boxes (good), but in the end, this is really for the environment. It will have you thinking about making responsible choices for the future.

Other towns are dealing with trash streams that are simply becoming too much. Towns like West Hartford and New London have put on the table a “Pay-As-You-Throw” option, where town residents will have to purchase specific trash bags. Despite receiving the acronym SMART, Save Money and Reduce Trash, plans like these have seen less than enthusiastic consent from townsfolk. Much of the problem stems from being forced to buy specific trash bags at set prices.

But the savings add up for the city. According to a report in the Hartford Courant, a town like West Hartford would see savings of up to $560,000, and an additional $1.6 million in revenue from a SMART system. The numbers added up so well that a West Hartford panel suggested an 18-month review of the program, but there was so much negative feedback it didn’t get off the ground.

By 2024, towns are going to need to divert 60 percent of their trash streams to reach a state goal. A Pay-As-You-Throw program could divert up to 50 percent of a current trash stream, putting towns and cities within reach of that goal. Connecticut residents who went to Farm Aid in Hartford this past September heard from farmers around the state about composting, which is one of the best ways to divert trash. Whatever the solution, this is our only Earth, and sometimes you have to think about what you’re throwing out, even if you don’t want to.
In 2015, Amazon announced plans to start letting customers rent goats to mow lawns and clear brush. Three years later, the idea has caught on as a quirky, cost-saving measure. In New Haven’s Edgewood Park goats are eating invasive species and poison ivy. In Pomfret the goats will have the distinct pleasure of dining with the dead: they’re being used to clear brush around delicate and centuries old gravestones at Dennis Cemetery.

Though the centuries old cemetery only holds seven headstones, their advanced age makes taking care of the stones that much more difficult. Each individual in the plot was born in the 18th century, with a majority being born before the United States of America was even a country.

First Selectwoman Maureen Nicholson commented in a piece from the Norwich Bulletin that, “weed whackers can damage stones and herbicides aren’t the best way to deal with the issue,” and seeing a herd of goats at a neighbor’s house, “was a little like divine inspiration.” The only problem according to Nicholson is that “not every cemetery has a heard of goats nearby.”

Per the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB), “a general rule of thumb is that ten goats will clear an acre in about one month.”

At the June 18 Board of Selectmen meeting the board unanimously approved the application for a grant from the Neglected Cemeteries Account in the amount of $2000. The money would go towards brush clearing and stone and wall repairs in cemeteries, of which there are about 10 that officials have struggled to maintain, per Nicholson.

The grant is expended by the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) for neglected burial grounds and cemeteries, where there are more than six places of interment, there is no controlling association, and has become dilapidated or overgrown with brush, briars, or weeds.

A goat could cost anywhere from $25 for a kid or upwards of $300 for a breeding doe. If Pomfret gets their $2000 grant, they could reasonably purchase between 7 and 80 goats, depending their choice of goat. UAPB says that a typical charge to rent goats is $1 per goat per day.

I’ll Bleat You At The Cemetery Gates
Using nature’s lawnmowers to keep weeds and brush in check
GOVERNANCE

(Just Like) Starting Over

Brookfield looks to reinvigorate growth with easy-to-understand rules

Sometimes starting from scratch is the easiest way to build back up. A poet will find a new page, a painter will gesso their canvas, but the process is much harder in government. Addendums and amendments can obfuscate rather than clarify; language and technology change creating a gulf between law and reality. It is for this reason that Brookfield has decided to modernize and clarify their Zoning Regulations.

Starting in 2016, the town aimed to update the regulations, which had become a hurdle that many businesses and homeowners found unnecessarily difficult to navigate. According to First Selectman Steve Dunn, quoted in the Danbury News Times, the town’s rules and regulations were contained in a book that was five to six inches thick.

Recognizing the difficulty in parsing a book of that size, the Zoning Rewrite Ad Hoc Committee was created in March of 2017 with the goal of reducing time, costs, error and need for technical assistance in order to understand and comply with regulations. They identified many problematic standards and regulations, including small sheds and pools, chickens and roosters, outdoor music, and Historic District enforcement among others. Also identified were provisions needed for outdoor wood furnaces, Town Center sign design guidelines, and ADA accommodations.

Throughout the process, the new rules were written with Plain English in mind, meaning that it is free of technical jargon and should be easily understood. With a year’s worth of rewrites and revisions, the regulations zoning book lost four to five inches in thickness, coming in at just under 250 pages.

Not only will the law be more easily understood, but residents will have the option to fill out paperwork online. This process is currently limited to applicants who are looking to make small changes such as backyard sheds and room additions, according to the News Times. Furthermore, they will not have to appear before the land use boards if the zoning laws are followed.

Dunn notes that by removing simple decisions like sheds, that gives the zoning board much more time and flexibility to discuss larger matters.

The new Zoning Regulations went into effect in December 2018, and if the conversion is successful, Brookfield will see reinvigorated investment in development and growth.

Contact Andy Merola: 203 498-3056, or amerola@ccm-ct.org for additional information.
On The Right To Vote
Manchester adds voting district to ensure enfranchisement

Of the highest responsibilities of a democracy is ensuring the right to vote for all eligible voters. While all American citizens have been guaranteed the right to vote since 1924, there still have been hindrances to ensuring that right is guaranteed. That is why it is important to celebrate towns like Manchester who have done what they can to ensure that their citizens are not disenfranchised.

The issue starts with the 2010 Census when Connecticut was redistricted, and Manchester went from ten voting districts down to eight to accommodate new State House districts. There had been initial complaints about long lines and waits in 2012, which the Board of Directors and Registrar of Voters sought to ease by adding additional checker lines and election greeters.

It was made clear in 2018 that those measures had not gone quite far enough to alleviate the long waits. There were additional problems for the residents of the Spruce Street neighborhood, many of whom had no transportation to the Highland Park school, which was not accessible by bus line.

At the meeting of the Board of Directors in November of 2018, some residents implored the town to act quickly on adding a new district, with one resident saying that, “it is very important that we send a message to voters in [the Spruce Street neighborhood] that their voices are important”.

The message was loud and clear. While election law prevents you from changing election centers in the middle of an election season — i.e. between a primary and general election — the Board of Directors and Registrar of Voters gave suggestions for voting locations and district boundaries, and voted on the matter in the December 2018 meeting, where the measure was passed.

The new district will go into effect in 2019, and the voting will take place at the Bennet Academy. The boundaries split the Highland Park district that had more than 5,500 voters into two districts with just more than 2,000 each. To put this into hard numbers, if every eligible person voted, the Highland Park school would have to handle 392 voters per hour, or nearly seven people a minute. Splitting up the districts will make it a much more manageable three.

This will happen just in time for the 2020 election, which can be expected to be a historic turnout year, at minimal cost to the city, but to the great benefit of all of Manchester’s citizens.

Paraphrasing Lincoln at Gettysburg, it is of utmost necessity that a government of the people, by the people, and for the people should not cease to exist. The way we ensure the vision of Lincoln, is to ensure that the right to vote is accorded to every eligible person.
Dreaming Of A Cleanly Plowed Street

Wilton prepares for snowfalls by optimizing routes

On January 8, 2018, more than a foot of snow dropped on the town of Wilton. The total, while large, is not an unheard of amount in New England. The snow that must have been fun for the residents under the age of 18, was mostly a nuisance for those that had to shovel out their cars or driveways, whether or not they had a snowblower. Even once they got out, there was nowhere to go since the snow had practically shut down the entire city, even for emergency personnel who have to be on hand no matter what. The other people that have to be on hand are the people in the plows clearing the streets to get the town back up and running. And that’s why Wilton, along with the rest of the towns in the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) worked together to find out the best routes for snow removal in a model of regionalization.

As reported in the Wilton Bulletin, the regional agency is working on a program to optimize snow removal on a town by town basis, in a study funded by the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management. By optimizing the routes, not only can these mayors and first selectmen get their towns back up and running sooner, but they can also save money on things like efficiency costs: those big snow plows don’t exactly have the same miles-per-gallon as a Toyota Prius. Avoiding hitting the same roads twice can add up to huge savings, especially in years where the state gets a lot of these bomb cyclones that have a tendency to drop large amounts of snow in short periods of time.

According to the Bulletin, “each municipality worked with the consultant, Axiomatic LLC, to adjust snow removal routes using route optimization software, FleetRoute by C2Logix. Preliminary findings have shown that many of the small- to medium-sized municipalities already have very close to optimized routes, while many of the larger municipalities, with more than 25 routes, found efficiencies by adjusting their routes.” But very close to optimized routes can still find room for improvement, and it doesn’t mean that every recommendation will be heeded for the simple reason that sometimes humans know things that computers don’t.

If the Farmer’s Almanac is to be believed, then we are headed for a very snowy winter, saying that Connecticut is going to experience a very long, cold, and snow-filled winter.” The Farmer’s Almanac is not to be confused with the Old Farmer’s Almanac (they were founded in 1792, a full 26 years before the Farmer’s Almanac), which predicted almost the exact opposite.

Being prepared for whatever weather may come will be much easier for the towns and cities in the WestCOG, knowing that they will have the most efficient snow routes, and will have them up and running as quickly as possible.
Rome was not built in a day, and neither was The Haven, the high-end outlet mall planned for West Haven’s shores. But with the recent approval of the site plan by the Planning and Zoning Commission, it looks as though the project has an end in sight from when it was first proposed in June of 2014.

The luxury outlets were developed by the Simon Property Group, owner of Clinton Crossing, and the Haven Group, and saw their fair share of quagmires along the way. This included the passing of one of the initial investors, eminent domain discussions from three holdout property owners, illegal dumping, and the transference of city-owned property (a playground built with federal tax money) to local ownership.

And through it all, West Haven did not let a good thing slip through its hands, and continued to work with the developers on a plan that worked for the city and the investors. The city ended up with a plan that represents 235,000 square feet of new retail and restaurants, which would provide hundreds of jobs in the city, and nearly 1000 construction jobs all from contractors based in-state.

Before this development, West Haven’s portion of New Haven Harbor included mostly residences and a few businesses, such as Hallock’s appliance outlet and Bilco doors, both of whom have moved to other parts of the state. The Haven plan dramatically opens up the views of Long Island Sound with a waterfront promenade, billing it as “America’s first upscale waterfront outlet mall,” emphasizing the importance of West Haven’s coastline to this project.

This includes an amphitheater to be placed directly on the water, and the possibility that there would be full boat docking service for those who wish to cruise on over to the shops.

In a joint press release from the Simon Property Group and The Haven Group, President Ty Miller of the Haven Group said “we are very excited to move this project forward after years of behind-the-scenes effort. Today’s submission represents our best proposal yet.”

Quoted in the same press release, Mayor Nancy Rossi said the following: “This is a major step forward for a project of this magnitude, which lies along the eastern gateway to the city right off I-95 along the waterfront, making it a destination location that will complement three-plus miles of beaches.

“This prime site is also minutes from the downtown business district, regional train station, and campuses of the University of New Haven, Yale University West and Veterans Affairs Hospital. Since taking office, my staff and I have done everything we can to assist the developers, and we will continue that effort until that project is complete.”

On that front, the projected completion date is Summer of 2020.
In 1971, an actor playing a Native American looked at America’s littered landscape and wept in a now infamous commercial created by Stamford, Connecticut’s own Keep America Beautiful. The non-profit organization, which counted Philip Morris and Coca-Cola as founding members, wanted to show the effects of pollution and littering. The tagline was “People Start Pollution. People Can Stop It,” but today is more remembered for the single tear that streamed down the actor’s face.

This commercial might not be the first call to action in the war on litter, but it certainly fit in well with the post-’60s pro-Earth revolution. People bemoaned the “hippies” with their Earth Day — first celebrated on April 22, 1970 — but something clicked in the American psyche.

By 1971 Oregon had introduced the bottle deposit on soda and beer bottles to incentivize recycling and the program finally had a logo, a Mobius strip instantly recognizable by people all around the world.

That was the tipping point. Municipalities around the country began to offer curbside recycling and even mandate it. By 1990, the theme of the 20th Earth Day was recycling, and curbside programs in the United States are exploding. Americans recycle and want to recycle. 1991 was the year that Connecticut mandated recycling, and many young Nutmeggers have never known a world without it.

Left out of the discussion is where the recycled waste went. For years, recyclers could ship their recyclables to China at a profit. The market for recycled goods in China made sense because the processed products would stay in country to be made into new raw consumer goods.

Then in 2017, the Chinese Government announced The National Sword, a policy that limits the kind of recyclables the country accepts. No longer will the country take on what it terms “foreign garbage,” limiting the amount of impurities in recyclables in order to protect its own environment, which is the world’s most polluted (rated by CO₂ emissions, America is number two).

Like America in the 1970s, China is having a moment where pollution and belief in global warming are incentivizing green investment, but it is having far reaching effects from Europe, to Oregon, and it is beginning to be felt in Connecticut.

“Everything’s been flipped on its head.”

“It’s collapsing right before our very eyes.”

Those were just some of the things Milford Mayor Ben Blake and Bethel First Selectman Matt Knickerbocker had to say in a phone call to CT&C about the implications of China’s new policy. It was a theme that was threaded through every town official or recycling expert’s comments on the situation.

Getting right to the heart of the matter, Blake said that recycling went from a positive to negative.

The mayor isn’t saying that recycling is a bad thing (he has some good ideas to turn this back into a positive, but more on that later); he’s referring to tipping fees.
Those responsible for the disposal of recycling waste will know what a tipping fee is. Waste Management defines it as the “fee charged for the amount of waste disposed of by customers at a landfill,” but this process goes one step further for recycling. Once the products are sorted, they could then be sold to another party who would use them downstream. That revenue gets shared back to the municipality.

But that’s not true anymore because of China’s National Sword Policy.

Tim DeVivo, owner and operator of Willimantic Waste Paper with his brother Tom, a Windham Board Member, said to the Hartford Courant that markets for certain recyclables are “the lowest [they’ve] ever seen.”

Put into hard figures, Tom Gaffey of the Materials Innovation and Recycling Authority (MIRA) which is in charge of 70 towns and cities in the Hartford area said that just two years ago you could expect a return of $170 a ton for old newspaper, which is down to just $30 today, leaving little to no margins for the municipalities. In many cases it’s cost them money.

Seeking out a reason for this cost difference, CT&C contacted Jennifer Heaton-Jones, the executive director of the Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority (HRRA) located in Brookfield. She explained, “the root of the problem is contamination cost money.”

“The poor markets have increased tip fees and forced transfer stations and Material Recovery Facilities (MRF) to implement contamination fees on the haulers. The haulers are not going to eat the increased tip fees and contamination charges, they will pass those fees onto their customers whether they are a municipality or a resident.”

Essentially, because of China’s new policy, certain recyclables like mixed papers and plastics were considered contaminated, and needed to be sorted out. This not only increased facilities costs in sorting the products, but the ability of those facilities to sell the products.

In every corner of Connecticut, there has been news about the changing tide of recycling. This year, Stamford paid to process its recycling materials, compared to last year when they were making money off the practice.

Another example is the Borough of Naugatuck. In the middle of last year, before the problem hit an apex, Naugatuck was being asked to pay $55 per ton by their former recycling provider after years of being paid $16 per ton.

Mayor Hess told us that the borough struck a deal in which they agreed to pay $23 a ton to MIRA who already handled their trash removal. It’s a lesson in cost analysis: “The $23 is a bargain compared to the $70 a ton we are charged for non-recyclable waste removal.”

Still, recycling needs to go somewhere, and that means landfills or barges. First Selectman Knickerbocker was exasperated at the thought: “That’s no solution!”

China’s policy, aimed at cleaning up their pollution problem, has proven a headache for recyclers around the world, not just America. What’s concerning is that it risks sending the wrong message: recycling is bad. Recycling is still a necessity, but it just needs to get smarter.

CT&C wrote about programs in cities like New Haven to get residents informed about what you can and cannot recycle. Many people will be surprised to find out that many items once assumed to be recyclable are simply not feasible in this post-National Sword era. Things like shredded paper, prescription bottles, and even plastic plates cannot be recycled feasibly and end up clogging up the system.

In Stamford, they issued a similar notice out to their residents of items that are no longer recyclable, which alluded to the China Sword: “Because of a collapse in the market for reusable materials, these common items are no longer recyclable in Stamford and must be discarded in the trash.”

Their notice included waxed paper, six-pack holders, synthetic tear resistant mailers, and many items that Stamford residents used to be able to throw into a single-stream recycling bin.

Towns and cities across the state are attempting to mitigate this problem by eliminating the offending products or separating them from the recycling stream altogether.
GOVERNANCE

A simple Google search will return a list of municipalities that are moving forward with plastic bag bans. The supermarket and drug store staples are one of the items that cannot be recycled when going to a facility like MIRA or HRRA. They clog up the sorters and are considered low quality. Norwalk, Stamford, New Haven, Hamden, and Hartford are all considering bans, while Greenwich and Westport have bans in place.

Barring any action at the state level, First Selectman Knickerbocker told us that he is ready to vote on a local ban of plastic bags this year. He also says that “single-stream is no longer feasible,” and looked pointedly to glass as a big culprit.

“Cardboard is no good if it’s contaminated with broken glass,” he said. It loses all value and goes right into landfills.

The HRRA is looking to divert glass out of a single-stream system. Heaton-Jones said that “glass has always been a problem, but when the markets were hot and profits were high, it was easy to ignore it. Now that the markets have washed away, it has exposed the glass issue.”

Her recommendations are to incentivize residents to utilize the bottle deposit system, and further, to include all glass beverages, something Knickerbocker supports. “Bottle redemption glass is 100 percent recyclable, and we have a company here in Connecticut, Strategic Material who buys and processes bottle glass.”

This brings us back to Mayor Blake who wants to turn recycling back into a positive. If the China market is never going to expand back to pre-Sword levels, why not process those materials here? In our conversation, he said he’d “welcome and appreciate these new industries.”

The National League of Cities (NLC) has written on this issue extensively, and one of its recommendations is to do exactly that. “Collaborate with your local economic development office to evaluate your current markets and identify new local and regional opportunities for unconventional or novel uses of your city’s recycling commodities.” They even suggest that tax breaks and recycled materials minimums in procurement might help foster the creation of new markets.

One of NLC’s case study cities is Austin, Texas, which has led the way in this type of adaptability. They created the Materials Marketplace, which is an “online platform that connects local individuals with businesses to divert, reuse and/or repurpose materials that are difficult or impossible to recycle or compost.”

Giving new meaning to the phrase “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure,” Austin has found a way to once again turn certain recyclables into a profitable market, while at the same time benefitting local businesses and creating jobs. With ingenuity like this, no one loses.

The National Sword is just getting started. According to NLC’s reporting, additional restrictions will be rolled out continually through 2019 until 2020, when “China aims to halt all solid waste imports.”

There’s some thought that other countries might pick up the market that China is abandoning, but in light of the Paris Accord, it’s hard to see the market returning to 2016 levels.

The state of recycling needs a renewal itself.

Towns and Cities cannot afford to have recyclables become a greater expense, one that matches solid landfill waste. There are ideas out there for municipalities to lessen the tipping fees for their towns; in one case that means banning certain items entirely, in another you remove an item like glass from the stream altogether.

But this can also be seen as an opportunity. Americans produce more municipal waste than any other country in the world, according to the NLC. There should be a push to create local markets as they have in Austin.

Connecticut is not about to stop recycling. We have too much invested in our natural beauty and resources, our rivers, lakes, and forests to let recyclables pile up in landfills taking up more and more of the finite resource of our great State’s land. Seeing that would be enough to make anyone cry.
Cross Your T’s And Dot Your I’s
Filling out paperwork properly is key to speedy application process

Many times the problems with holdups and long lines at places like Town Halls is the paperwork. It is one of the least well liked activities anyone could participate in, and not everyone is an Amy Santiago-level professional in preparing paperwork, so things can be missed. But the Town of East Hampton is aiming to nip that in the bud in order to speed up the building permit application process.

Headed by Town Manager Michael Maniscalco, the move to speed up the process was in response to a litany of complaints from town residents and developers who had suffered delays that they believed were due to bureaucratic feedback loops.

In comments to the Middletown Press, Maniscalco said that “it is clear there is an issue with the application process. It’s taking a bit of time for people getting their permits. There is an ugly cycle of going round and round and round.”

One of the aims was to have applications accepted at the counter only if they are completed. This small change will have exponential utility for both the town and builders: if a permit has to go through the system more than one time because of an error or incomplete form, it’s as if it was more than one permit. “A false sense of completion was given to many applicants when they turned in their application only to find a couple of weeks after it was not complete.”

Additionally, only those builders with approved applications will be required to pay the permit fees. This will ideally prevent follow up calls from those who had already paid for their permits looking to see where they were in the process. Maniscalco said “we’re trying to break it out and make it clearer.”

In order to facilitate the process the memo Maniscalco gave to the Town Council announcing these changes called for checklists to be created for “applicants and staff to review, together, that will ensure clear expectations for everyone regarding what is required.”

The Building, Planning & Zoning department is open Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Tuesday 8:00 a.m. – 6:30 p.m., and Friday 8:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., and can be reached at (860) 267-9601 for those with any questions.

Don’t Spend the Day At The DMV
West Haven and Milford open new branch locations to lower wait times

The Department of Motor Vehicles has a reputation to say the least. While the services it provides are absolutely essential, the wait times for those services can stretch hours, if not days as had happened in the past when a system would go down. Upgrades have taken place, but without adding locations, it’s a problem without solutions. So why not just add locations? That’s exactly what the DMV has been doing, including a new branch at the Nutmeg State Financial Credit Union in Milford and City Hall in West Haven.

By executing strategic partnerships with businesses like the Nutmeg State Financial Credit Union and West Haven City Hall, the DMV is dispersing the need for services at its main branch location. Officially called the DMV Express, they will have the ability to do license renewals, license replacements, and address changes. They cannot process Commercial Drivers’ Licenses (CDL), Licenses with endorsements/restrictions for public passengers, suspended drivers’ licenses, or “Drive Only” license services.

The locations are available to all Connecticut drivers and ID holders, per the Nutmeg State website, and there is a small $5.00 service fee for using the express location, which is waived if you are a member. West Haven City Hall may charge a convenience fee up to $8.00 per DMV transaction.

Most helpful of all, Nutmeg State has introduced an appointment app, much like setting a reservation for dinner that will allow visitors to choose a time that is most convenient for them, reducing the need to set aside whole days, just in case. The location is open Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m., and Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. The West Haven location is only available on Wednesday and Thursday between 9:00 a.m. to 4 p.m.

All they suggest is that you bring all necessary documents with you to avoid any hold up. Those can be found at the DMV website, http://www.ct.gov/dmv/site/default.asp
Connecticut is breaking ground with the development of new housing, and Bethany is its lucky location. “Rocky Corner” will be the first cohousing community in the state. It will join the list of 148 cohousing communities already built in the United States. The 33 acre plot on Meyers Road was once a dairy farm, but will now become an environmentally friendly complex of 30 private homes, one common house, and an organic farm. Rocky Corner will be multigenerational and pedestrian centered.

The small homes, starting at 810 square feet, will include a bedroom(s), living room, kitchen and bathroom. Residents will also share a 4,500-square-foot common house which will include a commercial kitchen, a large dining area, and activity rooms. Another feature of the complex is an organic farm that will be worked by its residents and offer plots for farming and gardening.

After going through the approval process for years, the state finally granted $2.6 million to the project. The idea for the cohousing community arose in 2006. It was not until creative housing expert David Berto of Housing Enterprises Inc. was hired that the project really picked up the pace.

Green Haven Inc., made up of future residents, is the nonprofit developer of the project. Its President Dick Margulis called the complex “a neighborhood built on purpose.” “Cohousing promotes close relationships amongst neighbors with an emphasis on sustainable construction and land use,” he said.

“The Rocky Corner community is specifically designed to maximize open space and to provide opportunities for interested residents to participate in organic gardening and farming. The homes will be highly energy efficient, resulting in minimal heating and cooling costs. The site design implements low-impact development, an advanced approach to water conservation,” Margulis stated in a press release.

First Selectwoman Derryl Gorski and Connecticut’s commissioner of housing Evonne Klein praised the new housing project. Gorski and Klein were especially excited by the affordability of some of the homes. “This allows us to continue our economic diversity,” Gorski said.

Eager residents will be able to move into Rocky Corner by this time next summer. According to Margulis, there are still homes available for all family sizes, ages, and income levels. For more information visit www.rocky-corner.org or call 203-903-2646.
Turning Swords into Ploughshares
Hartford and New Haven invest in goodwill and public safety

Connecticut as a state has taken the lead on gun safety, with Senators Murphy and Blumenthal fighting for higher standards in background checks, and advocating for the banning of bump stocks, which the president’s administration followed suit with. While neither the president nor the senators are looking to take away the rights to a gun, there has been a movement to get illegal guns off the streets in two Connecticut cities, with New Haven and Hartford initiating gun buybacks at the end of last year.

A gun buyback program is unique in that it is a voluntary forfeiture of firearms with the promise of some sort of offer, most commonly gift certificates. According to an NPR story from early 2013, these programs date back as far as the 1960s, offering the community a chance to do something about gun violence. The most important feature of the program is that the police will take back the firearm with no questions asked about how the returner came to be in possession of that particular firearm.

In New Haven, police offered $25 for smaller pistols, $50 for rifles and shotguns, $100 for magazine and revolver-style handguns, and $200 for assault weapons, with similar amounts in Hartford. Both the Hartford and New Haven buybacks were held in partnership with The Injury Free Coalition for Kids of New Haven, Yale-New Haven Hospital, and the Newtown Foundation.

Reports from the two police departments put the number of guns voluntarily handed in at 262, which includes seven assault rifles between the two departments.

In recent years, Hartford and New Haven have seen dramatic reductions in their gun related homicides with just 32 in 2018, when New Haven had 32 in 2011 alone. Everyone agrees that even one death is too many.

Gun buybacks are just one facet of gun reforms that will help stem violent gun-related homicides. In Australia, these programs became part of a move to stem a gun violence epidemic in the mid-’90s, and the country saw a dramatic reduction in gun deaths, from 2.9 per 100,000 in 1996 to 0.9 per 100,000 in 2016, according to TheConversation.com, which took a look at the effects of the country’s suite of laws.

Most importantly, in America, the Second Amendment commonly understood provides the right to bear arms, and as such the benefit of a gun buyback is that no one is asked to relinquish their right to legally own a gun. The 262 guns that were handed in, were handed in of the free will of those that possessed the guns.

The goal of a buyback isn’t to imperil those rights, but to increase safety. If we look to places like Australia as a model, then gun buybacks will surely lead to safer cities.
Neighborhood Watches may take on a new meaning if the Bristol Police get what they want. Announcing the Community Watch Team (CWT), the city of Bristol Police Department is asking residents and businesses to register their personal external video surveillance systems with them. The department wants to utilize information that may have been caught on the growing number of homes with video surveillance. Per the announcement, they believe that “video surveillance is a valuable tool in the detection, identification, apprehension and conviction of criminals who plague our City with crime.”

Not quite Orwellian in scope, the CWT is a completely voluntary registry, and the Bristol Police Department will not be able to access your cameras at will. The procedure involves registering a camera, and if there is a crime committed within the purview of that camera, the police then contact the participant requesting to view the camera footage. They are careful to note that, “in accordance with CT Law, all personal information collected will remain confidential.”

To register, you fill out a form notifying the department where the camera is located, and whether that faces the roadway, whether it covers a residence or business, and if the system is already monitored by a security company. In addition they will need to know when the camera records and how long that information is retained. You can request a sticker advertising your partnership.

Like body cameras, having a video record is tantamount to having an official record of a crime whereas testimony can be considered flawed. The hope on the part of the Police Department is that this will expedite the solving of crimes, or even preventing certain crimes. Berlin had implemented a similar program earlier in the year, but it’s still too soon to say if the benefits of a registry of video cameras had the intended effects. Programs like this one are being started all across the country, in places like Fort Worth and Berkeley, in response to the growing popularity of personal security cameras.

Speaking to the Bristol Press, Police Chief Brian Gould said that he’s “always exploring new initiatives and new ways to partner with the community.” And with a program like this, participants might have the ability to say they helped solve a crime, and keep the town safe.

Those interested in the program can sign up on the police department’s website, there is a link to the Community Watch Team underneath the Police Help Center. Simply fill out the registration form linked at the bottom of that page.

The Bristol Police Department is committed to the mission, “To Protect and Serve the Community with Integrity and Professionalism”
Look Listen Learn
Newtown educates about fire prevention

In honor of National Fire Prevention Week, Newtown educated its citizens about fire safety and handed out free smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors for those who could not afford them.

The week has been observed for nearly 100 years, since 1922, when President Calvin Coolidge made the week a national observance. This is, according to National Fire Prevention Association, the “longest-running public health observance” in the United States. It is observed in October as a commemoration of the Great Chicago Fire that was started when, as lore has it, Mrs. O’Leary’s cow tipped over a lantern. The fire spread and damaged a great part of the city, proving the destructive forces of an unchecked fire.

As part of the week, Firefighters across the country seek to educate both the young and old in safety precautions that could very well be life saving. Per the Newtown Bee, representatives of the five local volunteer fire companies — Botsford, Dodgingtown, Hawleyville, Newtown Hook & Ladder, and Sandy Hook — visited schools across town in this mission.

This year’s campaign is, “Look. Listen. Learn. Be aware. Fire can happen anywhere.” The tenets of this campaign urge people to “look around your home [and] identify potential fire hazards and take care of them. Listen for the sound of the smoke alarm,” and “learn two ways out of every room, and make sure all doors and windows leading outside open easily and are free of clutter." While this couplet might be easy to remember for children, it is the adults in the house who must take care of potential hazards and making sure exits are free of clutter. Fire safety is everyone’s business.

Making sure that smoke detectors are running is of the utmost importance as the NFPA says that three out of every five deaths happen in homes with no working smoke detectors.

Smoke detectors must be installed in every bedroom and on every level of the home, including the basement, but keeping them high on the wall away from the kitchen. You should be testing them once a month, and most modern smoke detectors only need to be replaced once every 10 years. So as long as you are testing them and replacing the battery, you will be prepared should a fire ever occur.

Per the Newtown Bee, local residents in need who want a smoke detector or a CO detector for their homes should go to the fire marshal’s office at Newtown Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Street within Fairfield Hills. The office is open Monday through Friday, from 8 am to 4:30 pm, and can be reached at 203-270-4370.

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- Facilities management • Temporary staffing

Contact Andy Merola: 203 498-3056, or amerola@ccm-ct.org for additional information.
Public Safety

Open Borders To Stop Crime
East Lyme, Waterford, and New London agree to cooperate

Municipal borders have been a hot topic as the need for regionalization becomes increasingly important. These lines drawn on maps are superficial on the ground — save for a sign welcoming you to town, neither roads nor people drastically change from town to town. Sharing services makes sense because it saves money and makes services more efficient no matter the cartography. It could also mean safer residents, as East Lyme, Waterford, and New London look to break down barriers in fighting crime.

The three municipalities began work on an agreement that would support regional police cooperation late last year in response to the changing times, both in terms of regionalization and the way crimes such as narcotics dealing occur.

As the law stands, there is limited power of police departments to detain a criminal that has crossed over municipal boundaries. These include the “hot pursuit” laws that make it necessary to follow a dangerous suspect, but otherwise protocol mandates that they call for backup from whatever town they are currently in as they would not have the authority to arrest the criminal.

The agreement would make necessary changes so that East Lyme, Waterford, and New London could share full arresting powers.

In a quote to WTNH, New London Police Chief Peter Reichard said, “I think it enhances what all three agencies can do.”

He goes on to note narcotics dealing in particular, as that has changed over the past 20 years stating “everybody’s using cellular phones. They’re using digital media. They’re using Facebook selling their drugs. They go from town to town in two or three minutes.”

This kind of cooperation will help foster the end of the narcotics epidemic that has rattled the entire nation in the past 20 years by getting the drugs and drug dealers off the street quicker. Because of that, this agreement has already been signed by Waterford First Selectman Daniel Steward, passed the City Council in New London, with East Lyme looking to move this along early this year.

The municipalities also have the support of the editorial board of the New London Day which has, “long advocated for regional municipal collaboration and cooperation in a variety of areas. [...] This regional policing agreement would take one more step in the right direction and could serve as a model program for other municipalities seeking improved inter-town public safety.”

Summing up the case for cooperation, Chief Reichard said to WTNH, “ultimately all these arrestees will be in the same courthouse underneath the same prosecutor before the same judges.”

Fighting the terrible drug epidemic in Connecticut should be a priority for police forces across the state, and any agreement that fosters cooperation and success should not just be embraced, but championed.
A new crop of students will be taking the firefighter's entry level test at the end of June to see if they have what it takes to fight fires. For those brave men and women who pass the test, there will be 11 different municipalities that they can take a job with.

Announced in April, Branford, East Hartford, Fairfield, Naugatuck, New Canaan, North Haven, Mansfield, Westport, and Wilton Fire Departments, and the South Fire District in Middletown have come together for a fire testing consortium.

Combining the testing periods is a cost saving measure for the town departments. The town of Mansfield says that “historically, municipalities conduct independent tests for Firefighter applicants. This process is time consuming and expensive for department and human resource staffs.” The consortium has moved the costs of the testing to an outside firm, IO Solutions, and the applicants will have to pay a fee to take the test.

Often, the pool is small and involves more testing periods because the same individuals keep returning. Having both urban and rural communities in the same testing pool greatly increases the pool of candidates. Towns with small populations or with less diversity will have a greater chance to recruit candidates across the applicant pool.

Benefits work both ways as qualified candidates will not have to spend more on application fees. If they took the test with a particular town, and passed, it was not a guarantee of a job offer due to limited spaces. With the consortium, more applicants will have job offers simply by virtue of more towns participating.

Firefighters exams consist of oral and written portions, scored out of a maximum 100 points. Per the town of Mansfield, “the individual department and communities make the final selection per local hiring rules and this may include a separate interview by the Department, Fire Commission or Human Resources Department” in each respective hiring municipality.

For instance, the town of East Hartford has a long list of qualifications to become a firefighter. These include becoming certified as an EMT, obtaining Q driver’s license endorsement, successfully pass CPAT, and, of course, take the entry level test. The town recommends that you “prepare yourself for a career in the fire service by going to school, gaining medical and fire training, staying out of trouble, and staying healthy.”

The town of Mansfield says that “Fire Service careers are tremendously rewarding and a great opportunity for those who have a desire to provide emergency services to the public.”
The Enfield Police Department is looking to try a novel approach to the opioid epidemic by taking a page out of the efforts to decriminalize marijuana. As of May 28, 2018, a person may not be arrested for the simple possession of personal use opiates, and in fact may call on the Enfield Police Department in their time of need.

The full statement posted on the Enfield Police Department Facebook page on June 4 reads:

“Under the direction of Chief Fox, our agency has recently adopted a new protocol, where people in need of addiction assistance are welcome, without fear of arrest, to either come to the Police Department, or otherwise contact us, and we will assist them in obtaining medical care for whatever addiction they are wrestling with. We will provide a ride to a local hospital that specializes in addiction services. We are in this fight together.”

Those who are caught using or buying opiates are under the discretion of the officer and may still be referred to a treatment facility in lieu of arrest. “Officers will consult with their supervisor to determine whether an arrest, medical referral, or both, are appropriate under the facts of a given interaction.”

Modeled after other programs across the country, the individual would be offered treatment rather than jail. This is based on the principal that an arrest or punishment of any kind might perpetuate the cycle of addiction, whereas treatment has at least the chance to abate the chain. Keeping people out of the system, and in treatment, is starting to look more and more like the logical and moral thing to do.

Per the Justice Policy Institute, not only do programs like these work, but the benefits of treatment versus incarceration are almost incomparable. Nearly two-thirds of drug offenders are repeat offenders, and many return to prison by a technical violation of their sentence. It goes on to say that “while imprisoning offenders may provide comfort to some in terms of public safety, it does little to reduce the cluster of issues which will see these people cycle in and out of the nation’s corrections system.” This does not take into account those paying the ultimate price for their addictions.

A program like the one implemented in Enfield has the ability to save lives, and it will create a new cycle, a virtuous one. As found in the conclusions of the Justice Policy Institute’s paper, when a town emphasizes treatment, it will greatly reduce probation and parole violations, which in turn will save a town money. These savings can be used to expand treatment programs that helped save the lives in the first place.
Norwich Offers Narcan Training
City looks to stem tragic end of opioid addiction

Norwich is offering Narcan kits and training to local businesses as part of a measure to help the city deal with the opioid crisis. The city was the recipient of a $7,500 grant from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut requested by City Manager John Salomone.

The full amount of the grant went toward purchasing 100 kits, many which were given to city employees in the case of need. The remaining kits going to local businesses will be concentrated in the downtown area because it has had the highest concentration of overdoses. This is a problem area for many towns and cities, as evidenced by the event that took place on the New Haven Green last summer that resulted in nearly 100 overdoses where Narcan was used extensively.

But Youth and Family Services Coordinator Angelo Callis said in a statement to the Norwich Bulletin that an overdose can happen anywhere. The impetus for requesting the grant was an incident that happened at the Norwich Library, where they had to use Narcan on an overdosing person less than a month after it made the decision to begin carrying the life-saving drug.

The total opioid deaths for the state of Connecticut are projected to be around 1,000, remaining level with 2017, but even a single death is a problem. Many illicit drugs such as heroin have been linked to this crisis, but the major cause has been fentanyl, a synthetic over-the-counter opioid that is many times stronger than heroin, and it accounted for more than two-thirds of overdoses in 2017.

Administering Narcan will give those who had overdosed on an opioid a second chance at life, but it is the last line of defense in the opioid crisis. Preventing people from getting hooked on the drug has been the focus of cities like Norwich, and those around the state. But preparedness is a necessary step as municipalities and the state take measures to stop the problem before it starts.

The trainings are meant to be short, so that businesses know what to look for when identifying opioid overdoses and how to go about administering the drug. Businesses that have already taken advantage of the free training include a coffee shop, co-working space, and a coin and jewelry shop.

According to Youth and Family Services, the remaining Narcan kits are being handed out on a first-come, first-served basis, and more trainings are being planned in the coming year.
The Columbus House broke ground on a new extension of the Connecticut Valley Hospital in Middletown on March 28th.

Columbus House is a New Haven based housing group that goes back to a shelter at 200 Columbus Avenue. Throughout the years it has grown in reach and capabilities, adding men’s seasonal overflow shelters, outreach and engagement programs, and transitional living programs.

The program was instrumental in ending “chronic” homelessness in the state. Connecticut was recognized by the Federal government as the first state in the union to do so.

Eight years prior, Columbus House took the Middlesex Family Shelter under its wing that helps upwards of 50 families with 150 or more dependent children move towards permanent housing.

The project at the Connecticut Valley Hospital will increase its abilities throughout Middlesex County.

Construction and renovation will center on the Mary Shepherd Home, which was originally built as housing for nurses. It will now house 32 separate apartments that will be Veteran priority housing.

The 26 one-bedroom and 6 studio leased apartments were most recently used as temporary housing.

One major difference is that Columbus House supports a Housing First policy which means that no matter who shows up, they are moved directly to their own apartment. This differs from the old approach of increasing independence through homelessness programs.

Case workers will be from St. Vincent de Paul in Middletown.

Other partners include: Brad Schide, LLC, DeMarco Management, Enterprise Builders, and Northeast Collaborative Architects.

Getting the ownership of the home to Columbus House involved, the state transferred the ownership of the property to the City which was then able to give the deed to Columbus House. The first part of this transfer was done by state legislature and had a requirement that this house be used for housing.

Per the Columbus House, this project would not have been completed without the help of outside funders: CT Housing Finance Authority, CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, CT Department of Housing, National Equity Fund, US Park Service, CT Department of Economic Development, Historic Preservation, Middletown Housing Authority, Corporation for Supportive Housing, CT Trust for Historic Preservation, Eversource, and the Home Depot Foundation.
Now more than ever, Connecticut residents must take care of themselves, but sometimes that means seeking help from the community, especially children who may not be sure how or who to seek advice from. As part of a unanimous vote, the town of Columbia reaffirmed their relationship with Andover Hebron Marlborough Youth Services, or AHM-Youth. The non-profit group has had a relationship with the town since 2014, and has been working for over three decades to support the youth of Northern CT.

From their website, the mission of AHM is to: “provide mental health and positive youth development services that assist children, young people, and their families in creating a supportive and caring environment, for them to reach their maximum potential as members of society.”

The AHM 2017 annual report says that over 6500 individuals sought services from AHM-Youth, and over 1900 pounds of drugs were gathered at Take Back events over the previous five years. One Columbia parent noted that the AHM Summery Youth Theater program, which has been running for 35 years, had many positive effects on her daughter. It was a place where “positive self-esteem and team-building skills” were applied, leading to new friendships and a positive outlook despite a recent diagnosis of Lyme disease.

There is also an AHM Social Worker based at the Horace Porter School two days each week providing mental health intervention services and positive youth development activities, such as: Play Ground Mentors, several different Leadership and Service Clubs, Internet Safety Presentations for students and parents, Reaching for Respect and most recently, a Let’s Get Outside Club.

Columbia is not a full partner, according to the Willimantic Chronicle, along with Andover, Hebron and Marlborough, and instead “chooses from a ‘menu’ of services.” Most of the programs are offered to Columbia residents, but they must go to the Hebron office. The individual and family counseling is available to Columbia residents, and other offerings include “a program through which youth ages 15 and older can assist senior citizens with chores, including house and yard work, and get paid minimum wage for doing so.”

Unfortunately, like many other non-profits, AHM recognizes that communities around the state “have been hit hard by budget cuts.” But when towns like Columbia invest in programs like AHM they recognize the powerful work they are doing and their responsibility to their citizens in good times and in bad.
Most people are aware of Meals on Wheels and the good work they do. For those who don’t know, “Meals on Wheels America is the leadership organization supporting the more than 5,000 community-based programs across the country that are dedicated to addressing senior isolation and hunger.” That important work has been happening in Northwestern Connecticut for over 40 years in Torrington, which is unique amongst Meals on Wheels providers.

The city of Torrington provides an invaluable resource in the Sullivan Senior Center for elderly citizens in need of services. From their informational website, it says: “The mission of the Edward E. Sullivan Senior Center is to provide an environment to enhance and enrich the lives of older adults by offering recreational activities, nutrition services, educational and wellness programs and social services to meet the diverse needs of all people.

“Health programs are coordinated with local agencies to include full physicals, health and wellness screenings, foot care clinics, in-home assessments, nutrition counseling and flu and pneumonia immunizations. Educational classes and seminars are scheduled to keep people up to date on the latest information affecting their well-being and to teach foreign language and develop computer skills. Volunteer opportunities are numerous and contribute to the overall socialization within the center and community.”

The Meals on Wheels program is unique in that Torrington funds the program as a municipality through nearly $1.5 million in state and federal grants. Quoted in a Register Citizen of Torrington piece, director Joel Sekorski says nearly 400 people receive upwards of 700 meals every day. In addition to getting citizens unable to cook for themselves the proper nutrition, the program is a check on the vulnerable among us, making sure they are in good health and able to live alone.

On the Torrington website, they provide testimonials from those who have taken advantage of this service, which is naturally glowing. Ross and Drusilla, for instance, said, “We are grateful for the healthy hot meals your organization provided after Drusilla had an unexpected hospitalization. She was able to rest instead of planning meals, shopping, preparing food and cleaning up. Just knowing we were going to get two healthy, satisfying meals a piece each day helped keep us from feeling overwhelmed which also helped in her recovery. It was a treat to meet your drivers when they delivered the meals as they unfailingly had a friendly smile and something cheerful to say.”

The program, which has been running since nearly the beginning of the Meals on Wheels foundation (which was founded in 1974), is a necessary lifeline for Senior Citizens. The program is available to all homebound seniors regardless of income. They must be sixty years of age or older with a doctor’s recommendation, and their spouses and disabled dependents are also eligible. There is a suggested donation of $5.00 a day for two meals.
In Hartford, you won’t be able to buy a pack of cigarettes until you can buy a beer, as the municipality raised the legal age to 21 to purchase tobacco products.

There is plenty of evidence that smoking tobacco products like cigarettes and cigars, chewing tobacco, and other products containing nicotine are highly addictive. These products are also known carcinogens, which increases the danger of getting hooked on them in the first place.

Raising the age at which people can buy tobacco products hopefully puts the dangerous substance out of the reach of young people who are more susceptible to addiction. According to the Truth Initiative, which has been a leader of anti-smoking campaigns for years, “nearly all smoking initiation occurs before the age of 26. The younger that someone is when she or he starts using tobacco, the more likely she or he will become addicted.”

Eighteen is a long-standing transition age as it is the year when you can first vote, enter the military, and prior to 1984, the drinking age. That too was raised nationally when Ronald Reagan signed the Minimum Drinking Age Act that mandated the drinking age of 21. The law has been a resounding success with drunk driving accidents plummeting by 50 percent after the passage of the law, with the greatest drops in 16- to 20-year-olds according to the National Institute of Health.

The age of 21 is strategic in that many high schoolers reach 18 before graduation. The prevalence of smoking in high school creates a culture of acceptance, and risks some kids even thinking it is “cool” to smoke. The three year gap greatly limits the access of cigarettes to those in high school.

While Hartford is the first municipality in Connecticut to raise the purchasing age, it is not the first in this trend by a long shot. According to the Hartford Courant “six states — California, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Oregon, Hawaii and Maine — have adopted similar rules, along with dozens of municipalities, including New York City, Washington, D.C., and San Antonio.”

Locally, Central Falls, R.I. has approved similar legislation.

While the federal law states that tobacco shall not be sold to a person under the age of 18 years, it is not illegal for people of any age to smoke tobacco.

Other campaigns have decreased smoking in teens in recent years as half as many high school students were smoking cigarettes from 2011 to 2017, but electronic cigarette use has been on the rise in that same time, outpacing cigarettes by nearly 300 percent according to the Centers for Disease Control. These products are part of the Hartford ban as well.

The city hopes to become a leader in the state in trying to reduce children from getting hooked on tobacco products, but a bill to raise the age statewide failed last year.
An Ounce Of Prevention
Norwalk looks to stop cyberattacks before they happen

Located in the heart of Fairfield County, the City of Norwalk is a diverse community rich in culture and personality. The city, one of Connecticut’s largest, is home to many municipal employees across many different fields. The Norwalk IT Department is tasked with providing IT services to all those city departments and agencies except the Board of Education, and they needed a good solution for cybersafety.

“We take the safety, security, and privacy of our residents very seriously. We must safeguard the public from those who wish to use their data and information for nefarious reasons,” said Norwalk Mayor Harry W. Rilling. “Norwalk is not in a unique situation as municipalities across the state and country are under constant cyberattacks. However, we have shown our commitment to keep Norwalk ahead of the latest digital threats by investing in new software and technology. I am fully supportive of our IT staff and the great work they do every day.”

Like many other IT departments, their mission statement includes:

• Delivering high-quality, effective, reliable, sustainable, and secure information systems
• Developing and promoting consistent technical standards
• Fostering innovation and leadership in e-government in support of residents, staff, visitors, businesses, and other government agencies
• Providing effective and efficient technical services and support to city departments and staff
• Reducing operating costs and promoting efficiency

The City of Norwalk’s partnership with Digital BackOffice began in 2004 with the installation and operation of a Gigabit Ethernet wide area network connecting 34 city and school district buildings. The fiber optic metropolitan area network operated by Digital BackOffice now operates at speeds up to 10 Gigabits to some sites. Digital BackOffice also provides internet gateway services to the City of Norwalk with a managed Palo Alto Networks Next Generation Firewall.

In 2017, Karen Del Vecchio, Norwalk’s Director of Information Technology, engaged Francis Palacio, President of Digital BackOffice, to assist in identifying a solution that could protect endpoint devices in the police and fire departments, public library, and city hall departments. Digital BackOffice makes a practice of only promoting products they themselves have in production and truly believe in, so Palacio knew Palo Alto Networks' advanced endpoint protection solution, Traps, would be a good fit. Palacio explained, “We are truly convinced that the Palo Alto Networks platform is the best platform for the City of Norwalk, not only based on reports from organizations like Gartner and NSS Labs but from our first-hand experience with helping organizations recover from successful attacks.”

After evaluating several anti-virus vendors, the City of Norwalk selected Palo Alto Networks Traps. Although there were many factors that went into making this decision, Del Vecchio specifically spoke to the solution’s ability to integrate with their Palo Alto Networks Next Generation Firewall service, the built-in threat intelligence using Palo Alto Networks WildFire, the cloud-based management software which allows for automatic updates and the functional reporting that can be generated on a regular cadence.

A little over a year into their Traps deployment, Del Vecchio was particularly animated about the value Norwalk gets out of the Traps Management Service (TMS) console and its ability to manage security events and monitor endpoint health. The TMS provides weekly, automatic reports that detail the thousands of attacks that have been detected and prevented. The report identifies the source of each threat, the intended destination of each threat and the number of attempts each threat made. These tools help the city identify suspect endpoints, allowing the customer to remediate problem devices while preventing replication to other endpoints.

“We have not had any ransomware attacks and no signs of infection on the network since deploying Traps,” Del Vecchio said. This was all made possible through Digital BackOffice’s partner-managed offering, which gives the City of Norwalk the ability to consume the solution as a service. She concluded by saying, “Working with Francis and the DBO team was great. Their depth of knowledge and experience in cybersecurity was incredibly helpful.”
New Year, New You
Pomfret, Thompson, and Putnam line up for new websites

In a move that’s sure to excite the mobile and tech savvy; Pomfret, Thompson, and Putnam upgraded their websites for 2019. The websites were created by CivicPlus, which was recognized as a GovTech 100 Company for 2019, which recognizes companies looking to improve the public sector, marking the fourth consecutive year on that list.

Noting the changing media landscape, CivicPlus offered this: “At a time when YouTube is replacing cable viewership, and the average citizen has seven social media accounts, your website users’ expectations for engaging, valuable content has never been higher.”

They suggest that being your own biggest critic is the easiest way to know if you are meeting your citizens’ expectations. This includes keeping information up to date and easy to read; if you find it too cluttered, everyone else probably does too.

In addition to streamlining the website for viewing on computers, CivicPlus has integrated mobile formatting so that the website retains full functionality whether the user is on a computer, tablet, or smartphone. Making the website compatible with new technology means that more people can use it.

This transition is important because as tech evolves, where people access the internet has changed. From 2009, when the iPhone first gained prominence, to 2018, the percentage of web pages served to mobile phones has gone from 0.7 percent to 52.2 percent, according to a report from Statista.com.

Making sure that the website has a user-friendly interface is another major concern, and the redesigns have put the most important information front and center. Each website differs slightly, but some of the main features allow residents to look for online payment portals, minutes & agendas, or even employment opportunities, while businesses can look for bids/RFPs.

Pomfret was enthused by the changes, posting: “Pomfret’s website is boasting a new look! We will continue to offer the same great content, eAlerts, and timely news — with the added feature of compatibility with phones and tablets!”

They added that they will be integrating a social media platform as well as a Selectman’s Blog in the future.

Cited in a Norwich Bulletin article, First Selectman of Thompson Ken Beausoleil said that based on a recent branding study done by the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments, there’s an understanding that a town’s website can either raise up or hurt a town.

By making the website more accessible and easier to use, Pomfret, Thompson, and Putnam have decided to move their websites into the future.
Social Media isn’t something that is particularly new when you think about it. Societies have always found ways to share information quickly throughout their village, town, city or what have you. The position of Town Crier, Paul Revere’s Midnight Ride, the local newspaper, and television have all been ways for people to disseminate information quickly.

Far from one if by land, when Facebook opened its doors to everyone on September 26, 2006, you can let people know exactly what you were doing through a status update. Twitter was essentially a ticker tape for the modern age, brief messages, often in shorthand because of the limited characters. Instagram a bulletin board.

What has changed is the personalized touch you could put on the message, the speed with which the message can spread, and the ability to connect with people in their homes without having to bring in a tricorn hat and bell. You put up a status update, tweet, or Instagram and, as long as you don’t have your page set to private, anyone could see what you have to say. If they found it interesting or pertinent, it could be shared to their friends. Studies show that views grow exponentially if it is shared by enough people.

These platforms have far reaching effects for municipalities that decide to adopt strong social media presences. They can brand a city, showcase positive stories for media, announce town meetings, post public service announcements, foster conversations amongst residents, generally help CEOs connect with their constituents, and even let us know if the British are coming in an extraordinarily unlikely situation.

Here are a few stories about towns and cities that have successfully adopted social media platforms.

**We’re Not In Kansas Anymore**

For all the extreme weather that Connecticut gets, you’d think we’d be ready for anything. We have weathered blizzards, hurricanes, and heat waves, but the one weather pattern that catches nutmeggers off guard is the tornado. Maybe it’s because of the Wizard of Oz, but the typical tornado happens in the Midwest. As a matter of fact, Connecticut averages one or fewer per year while stretches of Texas and Oklahoma can see upwards of nine per year.

So when a rash of tornadoes hit Connecticut on May 15th, no one was expecting the damage to be as severe as it ended up being. But that didn’t prevent Curt Leng of Hamden from being on top of the storm, letting his constituents know what was going on with the emergency response and clean-up. When it was confirmed to be a tornado, he went right to Facebook to let people know what had happened, and that there appeared to be no serious injuries.

Many of his followers thanked him for his continued updates, urging others to “be kind and patient,” and also praising town employees for their “outstanding job of dealing with this weather event that brought areas of Hamden to its knees.” His efforts earned him a write-up on CTnewsjunkie.com, where they lauded his ability to quickly and effectively post “scores of updates on road closings, power outages, school closings, emergency center openings, police and fire updates.” His efforts have not stopped in the days and weeks after the tornado. In June, Leng was updating Hamden residents on the Public Works department prog
Another Town Sees Clicks, Makes Fix

New Britain helps residents report blight with new app

by Chloe Capuano, CCM Communications Intern

While walking or driving along our roads, we often wish there was a quick and easy way to get rid of unwanted potholes. Fortunately for New Britain residents, this dream is now a reality. New Britain has launched their own version of the app and website, “SeeClickFix.” Since 2007, this New Haven-based company has partnered with over 300 towns and cities across the country. New Britain joined the partnership in June 2017 when the city’s mayor signed a $22,979 annual contract with the company.

The city has implemented this new technology to help its residents report complaints, such as poor road conditions and fallen tree branches, directly to its public works staff. All you have to do is download an app and take a picture. The service allows individuals to communicate with public officials and address city-wide complaints on a mobile platform.

“We’re thrilled to partner with another mid-size city in Connecticut. New Britain is a community of highly engaged citizens with a youthful energy for improving their hometown. SeeClickFix will be a perfect fit for New Britain,” said SeeClickFix CEO Ben Berkowitz.

Users can report blight, potholes, graffiti, and other issues they see by a simple photo or text submission. The information is then passed along to the respective City Hall department for a response. The app’s GPS helps organize these reported complaints, allowing officials to properly locate and address them.

“We’re excited to bring our public works department to the 21st century but more excited about our citizens being involved in our day to day operations,” said New Britain Mayor Erin Stewart. “This SeeClickFix app and website will further make New Britain a technology-driven city, in which individuals can quickly and efficiently interact with City Hall to get the services they need.”

The Department of Public Works received positive feedback from some residents when they conducted a trial run of the app before it officially launched.

“Not only does it bring us information in real time but I like that it really closes the loop on a problem. If you report an issue on SeeClickFix, you automatically get emails about the progress of it and when it’s complete,” said Mark Moriarty, New Britain Department of Public Works Director.

The app and website also give residents the ability to pay their tax and water/sewer bills online, gain access to the city’s website, and get in touch with neighbors and police.

The “New Britain SeeClickFix” app is available for download in the Google Play and Apple App stores. Residents can also report issues online at: http://www.newbritainct.gov/new_britain/seeclckfix.htm
Putting The System To The Fullest Use

Seymour Implements Data Saving Measures

We are barely three decades since the mass adoption of the internet, and there are many for whom a dial-up modem will strike up feelings of nostalgia. In this short time, the internet has gone mobile with WiFi and Smartphones and put in everything from watches to refrigerators. But with this growing technology, there is a greater chance of using the platform to commit crimes known generally as cyberattacks. These attacks have hit major department stores, credit rating bureaus, and social media networks; exposing people’s sensitive data. For municipalities, this is certainly a frightening prospect, but there are measures to be taken. Seymour’s public schools decided to take a precautionary step to protect their student’s data by teaming up with Palo Alto Networks.

After consulting with an IT adviser and Palo Alto Networks partner Digital BackOffice, Seymour gained a full picture of the vulnerability of their old system which had become obsolete, a symptom of the rapidly changing world of technology rather than a school system that had lagged behind. The picture that was painted suggested that upwards of 43,000 vulnerabilities were being passed through the existing firewall and being caught by Palo Alto Networks’ Next Generation Firewall. This includes 57 high-risk applications that could introduce ransomware, and threats from virtually every corner of the world.

According to a press release, Rob Dyer, the director of technology for the school system, and Kurt Miller, the first selectman, decided that the report was enough. Miller noted in the release that “the report was written in such a way that a lay person could read it and see there was a problem. [...] We simply had to find a way to fund the next-generation firewall and stop those attacks.”

Dyer said in that same statement, “what we saw was very eye-opening. [...] With the Complimentary Security Lifecycle Review, we suddenly could see how big a target we really were. It was clear we needed to take action.” The solution: “an integrated approach to security that was cloud-connected to stay current with definitions and updates and enable real-time threat prevention.” For him, that meant signing up with Palo Alto Networks.

Even with increased security, the town and school system found ways to save money by merging the school system and town networks to use the same infrastructure. Palo Alto Networks then went in to the back end of the system, and configured it to have “two instances” or two full systems sharing the firewall, but keeping the traffic separate.

The effects of the new firewall were immediate, with Dyer saying that they were able to identify infected computers that were trying to ping outside sites. Being able to pinpoint those computers, they were able to reconfigure them, freeing up bandwidth, and ultimately preventing a large scale attack from effecting their computers or having their computers be used to attack other networks.

In addition to cleaning up infected computers on day one, the new system allowed Seymour to stop the attacks before they happened. The firewall filters out malicious content, and blocks out applications that “would never be used legitimately by the school system or town.” Preventing a malicious app from downloading at all, the system reduces the risk once again that a bug will bounce internally from computer to computer, or that that bug could get on the system to begin with. The safety that the enhanced firewall has brought to the town and school system is certainly priceless, but as Palo Alto Networks said in the release, “through consolidation and cooperation, Dyer and Miller found a way to use resource sharing to gain efficiencies that enabled these important investments even with a very tight budget.”

“If you truly value your data, you do a security review like we did and find out just how vulnerable your infrastructure is. That clear evidence makes it much easier to convince stakeholders to make the necessary investment,” Dyer said. “But, you still have to find the money. By merging infrastructure for our two organizations, we reduced the cost burden substantially within our individual budgets.”

Miller added: “The Palo Alto Networks platform has brought us a secure, efficient infrastructure that enables our employees to be more effective and productive, and through our resource-sharing approach, with very small net impact on our budget. If you compare how far we’ve come to our actual cost, it’s been worth every penny.”
Parking in New Haven has always been a hot topic, but it might have hit its apex in 2018. Two programs introduced this year are aimed at giving city residents and visitors access to parking citywide at reasonable prices.

The first is a plan to adopt a dynamic pricing strategy along the lines of what companies like Uber use when calculating meter fees. Introduced by Doug Hausladen of the New Haven Parking Authority in response to the continuous struggle between the city’s residents and employees, the pricing structure will effectively act like Uber’s pricing by raising the cost of parking in high need zones and times.

According to reporting from the New Haven Independent, the Parking Authority has data on close to 20,000 parking spaces throughout the city, which “is virtually the same throughout the city no matter how much demand there is throughout the day.” This incentivizes drivers to seek out lower cost or flexible alternatives in less trafficked areas of the city and reducing the parking crunch.

It is one of the rare plans that the Parking Authority feels would benefit everybody. Many would still pay for premium parking, with the money going to city coffers; while others would seek out cheaper parking, saving themselves money, and opening up more parking.

Almost as a referendum to this idea, the city voted to approve what it calls “Democracy Parking.” Residents will be able to park free at the lot at 32 Elm St. to attend municipal meetings.

The proposal was requested by Alder Jeanette Morrison, and supported by six other Alders, with much of the plan coming from Hausladen.

Some residents had voiced the opinion that the cost of finding parking to attend the public forums effectively priced them out of the democratic process.

Although the price of parking was only $3, the vote in support of “Democracy Parking” sends an important message that there should be no barriers to participating in city politics.

Participation is the key function of this offer, and a validation system will be put in place to ensure that the program has not been taken advantage of. Hausladen had already soured on an idea to place the free parking on the street because those not participating would seize the spots without any recourse from the city.

According to Morrison, the plan would lose $35,000 in parking fees to cover the cost of about 90 meters in the area. Theoretically, with the dynamic pricing strategy, the extra income from the premium parking will help cover the lost revenue from those taking advantage of “Democracy Parking.”

For residents and the many who commute to work in the city who know the pain of circling blocks hoping for a space to open up, any strategy that moves to make parking a little easier would be welcome.
Enrique Penalosa, the Mayor of Bogota, Colombia, had once said that an advanced city is one where everyone uses public transportation, exclaiming in a TED talk that buses represent democracy in action. Norwalk is an example of a city that understands that concept and is looking to develop two projects to put public transportation in the forefront.

The first project is a new microtransit system called “Wheels2U” that takes the idea of buses into the Uber age. Other cities such as Boston, New York, and San Francisco are piloting microtransit programs like this one, putting Norwalk at the forefront of this emerging technology.

In the press release from the city, Mayor Harry Riling said that “Norwalk is the first city in Connecticut to launch a microtransit service. This innovative and modern approach to transportation is an investment in Norwalk. Residents and tourists can explore many of the amenities Norwalk has to offer without having to worry about parking.”

The system does not work like a typical bus system, meaning there are no bus stops or daily routes. Instead, riders request a pick-up and drop-off via the app, while the app updates the driver to optimize the route. That means efficiencies in service and minimized waiting.

Because it is currently in the testing phase, it has a smaller footprint, but from their website, they aim to improve the connection between South Norwalk, the Maritime Aquarium, the Sono Collection, Wall Street, and other main attractions in the city. One of the benefits during this testing phase is that rides are free. If the app is a success then there will be a cost associated with the trip.

It runs Thursday through Saturday, 5 p.m. to midnight, and on Sundays, noon to 9 p.m.

In order to foster a community that wants to take public transportation, you might want to develop positive connotations with buses early on, and there’s no better place to start than with school buses. Norwalk’s school district has an app for that too, that allows parents or guardians to stay updated on their child’s bus route.

The app, called FirstView, was created by First Student Inc., and aims to help parents stay apprised of their child’s trip from school to home. With parents or guardians assured that their students are making their way home safely, they will be better able to plan to meet them or call them when they get home. Which ensures that they arrive home safely.

In the future, there is an option to add increased value to this program if students had student IDs they could swipe to get on and off the bus. That way there is no child left unaccounted for.

Students, especially younger students, knowing that their parents or guardians will be there to greet them will foster positive feelings about taking the bus, and maybe they will grow into users of public transit themselves.

Buses, whether a school bus or public transit bus, are integral parts of a fully functioning transit system. The former shuttles the future to and from school, the latter improves the mobility of all vehicles by lessening the amount of cars on the road. Penalosa is right to say that buses are democracy in action, they are efficient,
One of the major themes of the 2018 Gubernatorial race was transportation and infrastructure. According to a CNBC study, Connecticut ranked as having the fourth worst infrastructure in the United States. That means that many of the roads and bridges in the state are in dire need of repair. The Town of Hamden recently finished repair on one bridge, and accepted grant money in order to repair another with the safety of the residents and drivers in mind.

In May of 2018, the Skiff Street Bridge had to be closed because of the appearance of a major crack that might have led to a collapse under daily stress. The bridge was already under duress and in the process of being replaced, but the fissure had made officials concerned for public safety.

The break was what town officials deemed an “inconvenience,” but considering the timing and the cost to fix a bridge that was in the process of being replaced shows the importance of assessing and fixing the thoroughfares as needed.

The town recently accepted a grant to repair another bridge, the Chatterton Way Bridge, that the Department of Transportation had deemed in “fair to worse” condition, strongly recommending that the entire structure be replaced.

Bridges on municipally maintained roads are the responsibility of the towns and cities that maintain them, according to the Department of Transportation website, and this puts added cost onto towns like Hamden who have many smaller bridges over smaller brooks and streams that the Chatterton Bridge crosses, and rivers like the Mill River that the Skiff Street Bridge crosses.

According to a report in the New Haven Register, half of the funding will come from the 2018 State Local Bridge Program, originally created in 1984 to help municipalities pay for bridge repair.

But a town like Hamden will be throwing money at a bridge that will be taken out of service in two years. Add to this that Hamden nearly didn’t receive more than $300,000 in Town Aid Road Grants last year when exiting governor Malloy held them back.

Ultimately, the funds were released, but their delay made it difficult to secure contracts in a timely manner. It raises the question of whether or not towns are losing out on repairs.

With some of the worst roads in America, it’s worth it to remember that the ultimate cost of poor road conditions is significantly more over time than the cost to maintain those same roads in good condition.

New Governor Lamont made frequent pledges to get more infrastructure bucks into the state, something that might ultimately mean tolls across our highways. Right now, towns and cities across the state will continue to keep a watchful eye, make repairs when they can, and keep making inroads on a problem.
Connecticut is one of the most interesting states in the union: it’s small, old, has coastline, rivers, bits of a famous mountain range, famous institutions, and the best pizza in the country. It is a great place to come see a baseball game or a concert, go to a few museums, or visit a fair, and that means it’s a growing tourist spot. Revenue from tourism has brought in $1.7 billion tax revenue per the Tourism Economic Study done by the state, including $910 million in State and local taxes: a 20 percent increase over the last five years.

That means that tourism is an essential part of Connecticut’s economy. Many of our towns and cities have taken advantage of local features, or homegrown entire industries to bring people in, either for a day or a week. We at CCM decided to give you a brief overview of all that Connecticut has to offer.

Discovering CT through Museums

One of the most important facets of a vibrant tourism strategy is culture. The arts, education, plays, and concerts all have the ability to bring in huge crowds. For instance, museums across America account for 850 million visits each year, which according to the American Association of Museums (AAM), makes up more than the attendance of all major league sporting events and theme parks combined. They contribute $50 billion to the economy every year, generating more than $12 billion in tax revenue, of which one third goes to state and local governments; this is why AAM has taken to calling them “economic engines.” Connecticut is fortunate enough to have unique and historical museums that make up a vibrant and enlightening part of our tourism.

One could take a trip back to 1832, the year one of the state’s most important galleries opened. The Yale University Art Gallery was founded when John Trumbull donated 100 paintings to Yale College. Trumbull was famous even at the time for his paintings of figures like George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, and events like the signing of the Declaration of Independence. After a major renovation, the New York Times said that it had the “aura of a destination. New Yorkers […] will want to start checking New Haven train times.” A train ride to see Picasso, Van Gogh, and other art from around the world for a ticket price of free. This kind of attraction makes spending the day a very easy proposition.

Another university-sponsored museum is the Ballard Institute & Museum of Puppetry at the University of Connecticut, which is the only college in the country that offers a degree in puppetry. It houses over 2,500 puppets from all over the world, and boasts the largest collection of media on puppetry in the United States. The museum was named after Frank Ballard who held puppet productions of Shakespeare’s plays and Wagner’s operas. A handful of graduates worked for Jim Henson’s Muppets, and his wife Jane Henson taught in the school leading to the display of Scooter from the 1970s and The Wizard of Id.

With a museum about puppetry, one might think that there couldn’t be an even more obscure museum, but up in Litchfield County, there is a museum dedicated entirely to Tort Law. Located on Main Street in the Winsted portion of Winchester, Ralph Nader founded the American Museum of Tort Law in order to “education, inform, and inspire Americans about two things: Trial by jury; and the benefits of tort law.” If you’ve ever wondered why you don’t see television ads for cigarettes, why your coffee cup says “contents may be hot,” or why there aren’t many vintage Ford Pintos at the hot rod shows, then this museum will have a lot to teach you.

Representative John Larson said in a remark to the House of Representatives: “[the museum] has attracted national acclaim […] Thousands of

Leonardo da Vinci, The Annunciation, ca. 1475–79, is on view at the Yale University Art Gallery from June 29 through October 7, as part of their exhibit Leonardo: Discoveries from Verroccchio’s Studio
people have come away educated, entertained, and impressed by its presentation.”

And from 1832, you can travel to the present day to Ridgefield, where the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum has been promoting innovative artists since 1964. Per their website, it is the only contemporary art museum in Connecticut, and one of the few independent, non-collecting contemporary art museums in the United States. The Aldrich is what they call a “laboratory,” a place where emerging artists can work on innovative ideas and techniques. Since its opening, they have worked with more than 8,000 artists, including some that have gone on to be world-acclaimed like Eva Hesse, Robert Smithson, Frank Stella, Olafur Eliasson, KAWS, Mark Dion, and Shahzia Sikander.

Discovery is one of the most important aspects of a museum: the prospect of discovering a new artist or even an old one, or looking at a beloved art from your childhood in a completely different way, or even learning about an important part of our legal system. Those intellectual tourists will come to your town or city, and discover more than just the museum.

**Trail Blazers**

When it comes to tourism, some people are looking for a nice visit close to home. One way towns and cities bring in those tourists is trails, both literal and figurative, and Connecticut has its fair share of both types.

One of the major trail thoroughfares that runs through Connecticut also runs through the entire eastern seaboard of America. The Appalachian Trail is one of the most famous trails in the world, spanning 2,174 miles from Springer Mountain, Georgia all the way to Mt. Katahdin, Maine. For those that want just a taste, you can hike 51 miles of the trail in Connecticut, which run the full gamut from beginner to expert; there’s even a section of the trail that runs through Falls Village in Canaan that is wheelchair accessible. It’s a great way for everyone to get in great views and hike a world renowned path.

On the other hand, Gillette Castle has a bit of a different history. Known for the large castle that stands at the end of one of the trails, it was named after William Gillette, a stage actor most famous for playing Sherlock Holmes on stage. With his fame, he took to the Connecticut River to build a home for himself, completed in the first quarter of the 20th century. The castle was an amalgam of styles, creating a one of a kind dwelling. When Gillette died, leaving the building and nearly 200 acres of land to no one, the state bought it, making it open to the public. Visitors can enter the house, which has been impeccably maintained for almost 100 years.

These aren’t the only kinds of trails in Connecticut. Sometimes a trail is a designated area that adopts one motif as the reason for visiting. Two of the most famous are the Connecticut Wine Trail and the Woodbury Antique Trail.

While there are wineries all across the state, there is a collection of six wineries that cover New London County. From Preston to Stonington, you can make a day of visiting, traveling from winery to winery, sampling their offerings — though hopefully not too much — and buying wines made right here in Connecticut. Included in this circuit is Jonathan Edwards Winery located in North Stonington. It has been named one of the best wineries in America by FlipKey.Com, a Trip Advisor website, and best winery in state by Connecticut Magazine.

One of the most interesting trails in Connecticut is the Woodbury Antiques trail, which features almost forty distinct shops that have specialties from Folk Art to Mid-Century Modern furnishings, and everything in between all situated in a three-mile long trail along Route 6. These shops take advantage of Connecticut’s
long history of craftsmanship and art, preserving the legacy of those goods for future generations that will appreciate them.

Of note is Mill House Antiques, which won best Antiques Dealer in Connecticut Magazine. There you can buy a simple pine chest, or a beautifully ornate piece of Victorian furniture. If you want something a little more up to date, you can visit the exquisitely displayed George Champion Modern Shop, who buys and sells items made mostly after the 1950s.

What all of these trails do, regardless of whether they are a hiking trail or a wine trail, is get people moving around town: good tourism means using what you have to bring people into your town.

Fairs/Festival

Not many will know the deep roots of fairs in America, but a little information might explain why they are so popular in New England, and Connecticut in particular. Writing for Patch.com, Philip Devlin gives a little etymological history lesson: “the most likely source of ‘fair’ is ‘feria’ — Latin for ‘free day’ or ‘holy day.’ It was a “blending of agriculture, commerce, and religion in ancient times,” notably happening around harvests or plantings. By the 19th century, our young country began holding free exchanges of ideas, using the popular fair format.

The Windham County Agricultural Society was established in 1809, and held the very first Brooklyn Fair that same year making it one of the oldest. Depending on who you ask — there is some controversy over exact dates — it might be the oldest continually active fair in the United States. Not much has changed over the last two centuries.

To this day, one of the major features of the fair is the livestock competition. Though farming has largely industrialized, there is still an ox pull, horse pull, and pony pull. They also have Cattle, Dog, Sheep, Swine, Working Steer, and Poultry & Rabbit categories. They also have categories for vegetables, beer, handwork, baking, and quilt contests. There’s even a skillet toss with six age groups. Skillets will be provided by the fair.

If you’re more into heritage fairs, just one town over you can join the Scotland Connecticut Highland Games that honors Scottish heritage for one day every fall. They too have competitions, but in the Highland Dance, Bagpipes, and athletic areas. Bagpipes and drums provide the sound of Scotland throughout the day, and the 2018 Scotland Games feature North Sea Gas, one of “Scotland’s most popular folk bands,” and Charlie Zahm, a solo folk artist. This kind of festival you do not see just every day, nor will you ever see more kilts in one place.

You cannot talk about fairs in Connecticut without talking about the Durham Fair. It’s probably only out-shone in all of New England by the Big-E Fair held just over the border in Massachusetts, but not by much. Because of its size, it is able to draw some heavy hitters to play the festival. Past years have had performances by Blake Shelton, Pat Benatar, George Jones, Bill Monroe, Loretta Lynn, .38 Special, Charlie Daniels, The Guess Who, and Foreigner. This year, the headlining act will be Grammy Award winning Melissa Etheridge.
Since the Hartford Whalers left just over 20 years ago, Connecticut has had a dearth of professional sports filled mostly by minor league baseball. We have had the New Haven Ravens, Bridgeport Bluefish, New Britain Rock Cats, and more, but perhaps it is Hartford’s Yard Goats who have the best claim to fame as their home field, Dunkin’ Donuts Park, was voted the best minor league ballpark this year.

The award, handed out by Ballpark Digest, had the Yard Goats narrowly edge out the Springfield Cardinals’ Hammons Field by a 53-47 vote. In the bracket-style competition, Dunkin’ Donuts Park ousted Canal Park (Akron RubberDucks), Whataburger Field (Corpus Christi Hooks) and Dr. Pepper Ballpark (Frisco RoughRiders) along the way to their title.

Most impressively, Dunkin’ Donuts Park has won the award two times in just two seasons of play, the first Minor League baseball facility to ever go back-to-back. The only other team to accomplish this feat was the Major League Pittsburgh Pirates in 2015-2016. But even they had to wait more than a decade to earn the top spot.

The publisher of Ballpark Digest, Kevin Reichard said that “the team has inspired great loyalty, and they put on a great show at a great ballpark every night.”

On the numbers side, the Yard Goats had 41 sellouts in 2017, and have 20 so far in 2018. They lead the Eastern League in total attendance with 216,370, and are continuing on a path of success in front of Connecticut audiences. Watching future pros, or even the sport-hopping oddity of Tim Tebow who plays for the Binghamton Rumble Ponies, is a major draw to Double-A games.

This was before the opening of the New Haven-Hartford train line which provides even easier access for people to get up to the state capitol to watch a baseball game.

The success comes after delays and quagmires forced the team to play their entire first season on the road, with owners fearing they might have to move the team without a completed stadium to play in. But as it turns out, it was worth the wait to have the facilities pick up first place two years in a row.