

STATE OF THE TOWN - 2022

Good Morning, everyone. Thank you for coming and for your continuing support and commitment to our community.

Let me begin by thanking everyone associated with this event. Special thanks to our hosts, the BRBC, Dan Onofrio and Kate Pipa and The Trumbull Chamber of Commerce. Thank you, Fred, for your kind introduction. Finally, a thank you to Tashua Knolls and all their staff.

It is great to be here today and to make this address to our business community and to all our citizens. Trumbull is a wonderful community, and I am honored and humbled to be the First Selectman of this fine Town.

I want to thank our businesses for your investment and your confidence in Trumbull. I thank you for the jobs you create, for the goods and services you provide, for all you give back to the community and most of all, for your perseverance these last two years.

Also, before I begin my formal remarks, I would ask us all to recognize the heroes who stepped forward in our time of need, our first responders, our health professionals, our teachers and administrators, our Town employees, our business leaders, and so many of our citizens who stepped up to support their neighbors. Please join me in a round of applause for all of them.

We are always grateful to our veterans and our first responders for their sacrifices. The pandemic has brought new training requirements for our first responders and a need for more services for our veterans. We are many steps closer to the construction of the Veterans and First Responder Center on Kaatz Pond.

I want to thank Senator Moore for her leadership in securing \$1.5 million dollars in state funding for the construction of the center. We also thank our state legislative delegation for their support of this project and the state funding. As you know construction costs are escalating, and this project is no exception. What was initially a \$3 million dollar project is now a \$4.5 million dollar project.

That is why I am thrilled to report that Congressman Jim Himes has selected this project for the Member Driven Community Project funding program. We hope to receive the remaining \$3 million dollars to construct the facility from this program. Stay tuned. This is very exciting for everyone.

Let me now begin my formal comments.

My vision for Trumbull is unchanged. It is a simple vision consistent with our community values and appropriate for a small New England town.

My vision is that of a safe community, welcoming to all, affordable to all, with excellent schools, ample recreation opportunities, and quality, comprehensive services delivered in a fiscally conservative fashion.

In other words, the kind of community where people want to live, raise their families, and conduct business. I am pleased to say, that it is happening right now.

Our finances are strong, economic development is robust, our students continue to excel, and people are coming to Trumbull to live work and play. Our outstanding police, volunteer fire departments, EMS and public works employees both keep us safe and, if we are in need, are quick to render assistance. People and businesses are coming to Trumbull because they know, as we do, that Trumbull is a special place to be.

As members of our business community, you have a keen interest in the health of our community. Let me address some of the elements that make Trumbull this special place.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Led by Rina Bakalar, our Director of Economic and Community Development, supported by our Economic and Community Development Commission and my administration, we continue to make strong progress.

Over the past year, we continued to see businesses locate to Trumbull from other towns and existing Trumbull businesses expand. We welcomed Kyber Security, Synergy Healthcare, Lindquist Supply, M&M Mechanical, Neuropathy Associates, AFC Urgent Care, Evolve Physical Therapy and Sports Rehabilitation, Marianna's Pantry, The Clean Earth Project, Women's Healthcare, Pure Skin Medical Spa, Ecco Restaurant, Guacamole Mexican Restaurant, Madison Pharmacy, Studio 35, Jeff Works at Hawley Lane Mall, the most special Next Chapter Bookstore run by the Trumbull Board of Education, and many other businesses.

Despite the challenges, we have continued to focus on underperforming and vacant properties. Over 800,000 SF of commercial space has been redeveloped and/or reoccupied over the past five years.

I want to highlight one area today to show how planning, focus and partnership has brought outstanding results to one of our most underperforming areas of town. In 2017, our southern industrial/commercial zone that encompasses Reservoir Avenue, Lindeman Drive, Oakview Drive and Cambridge Drive was over 60% vacant. The area had 315,000 SF of unoccupied space that was losing value for almost a decade.

Thoughtful planning and regulation brought changes that allowed for mixed use development. The area is now sought after. Ten Trumbull, the 202 units of luxury market rate, 1- and 2-bedroom apartment units is fully occupied. The project was built on a 10-acre site that had a 70,000 SF obsolete office building that had been vacant since 2014.

The former Henderson Lumber Yard is now The Woodside. It is comprised of 199 apartments and town houses and has leased ahead of construction. The River Valley Resort Community is a 55+ Independent Living facility (the cruise ship on land) on a site of a vacant 40,000 SF office building. But this area it is by no means all housing.

As the neighborhood came alive, businesses followed. The Learning Experience pre-school opened. Six new businesses located to the area. Cooperative Educational Services purchased the vacant 40 Oakview Drive to create a school for special education needs. I am very excited to report, the eyesore, that was still remaining vacant in that same neighborhood, 6 Cambridge Drive a 60,000 SF building that the town was pursuing foreclosure action on, has gone under contract for purchase. The reuse will not be housing.

The area is scheduled for paving in 2023 and we are working on other public improvements to support walkability and quality of life in the area. This did not take 20 years to turn around, it took 5 years. Planning, focus, and partnership.

In other parts of town, we have significant progress as well. I am happy to report another victory regarding the former United Healthcare property at 48 Monroe Turnpike. Last week, the town won another appeal, this time on the Inland Wetlands approval.

There is still one more appeal in process that we hope to win. Once the appeals are clear the \$120,000,000 redevelopment project can get underway. The development will bring a continuum of housing and related services for individuals that are 55+. It will add millions in tax revenues to the town.

I want all our businesses and residents to know we have not forgotten that the COVID recovery is still underway. We continue to innovate and find ways to bring real help and support to our businesses and residents.

Our Main Street Dollars pilot program brought almost \$10,000 to three of our local small businesses. We are seeking additional resources to continue this effort with other small businesses in town.

Our Local Meals program, funded by a \$200,000 grant sought after and received from the State of Connecticut, which provides lunches and dinners for residents in need, from our Trumbull restaurants, has purchased 4,491 meals since July 2021. 294 residents impacted by Covid-19 and/or low- or moderate-income residents have been helped. \$129,000 in business has gone to our nine participating restaurants.

I want to read you, just one of many comments from a resident who participated in the program:

“A quick note to let you know how wonderful this has been for my family. On December 23, a day after my chemo infusion I was the first in the household to come down with Omicron. It swept through the household – seven of us! This program was a help to keep everyone nourished during this time. We remain grateful.”

I want to thank all the staff, volunteers, and restaurants involved with this program. This is really what it is all about. Helping each other. Making a real impact on the ground.

We are certainly not without our challenges. But we face these challenges with an eye toward opportunity. In Trumbull Center, we just completed a comprehensive plan for the area. We are seeking grants and resources to improve traffic flow, walkability, and business vibrancy in the area.

We have four new businesses that have located to Trumbull Center since January. I am pleased to announce that Pat Fahy will open the former Bianco Rosso restaurant space. Pat is an experienced restaurant owner and Trumbull resident. He will be bringing a new family oriented gathering place concept to the location. He hopes to open in late summer. We appreciate Pat’s investment in Trumbull and the investment that all our businesses bring to town.

The Westfield Trumbull Mall is both a challenge and an opportunity. We are happy to see The Residences on Main project go vertical. The 260-unit luxury apartment development will bring new life to the property. We expect they will open up leasing in the fall. This is good news, but we have much more to do to secure the property for the future.

We will be inviting you to participate in a world class market feasibility and planning study. We have secured significant funding to embark on this effort. We will craft a vision and plan to transform the area with your help. We will let the market know what the community wants to see in terms of transformation in the future. We are not sitting back and waiting.

We are supporting our business environment in other ways as well. We have sought and been awarded millions of dollars to improve our commercial areas. From roadway improvements, to sidewalks, to safe crosswalks to other beautification efforts. We have more in the works, so stay tuned.

We have an exciting year ahead and I appreciate your ongoing partnership. My door and my staff's doors are open to you. Your success is our success.

Let's all give Rina a round of applause for her continued excellence and outstanding results.

FINANCES

Trumbull is in excellent financial shape. Independent third-party rating agencies confirm this and have been consistent in their praise of my administration for its stable, conservative approach to Town finances.

Our General Fund, our Town's rainy-day fund is a healthy \$24.3 million dollars, the highest it has ever been. It is well above the 10% threshold expected by the rating agencies. This has helped us to retain our AA+ bond rating.

When I was elected in 2017, our General Fund was \$18.6 million dollars. This 31% increase in our general fund over the past 5 years, is a function of several factors including strong tax collection, economic growth, and conservative budgeting.

This strong position in our General Fund gives us flexibility in these challenging times.

We have kept our taxes and spending in check while still maintaining a healthy investment in our community and keeping our services intact.

In that regard, we have held the line on taxes. Over the last four years we have averaged a 1.5% property tax increase yearly and in 2020 we had no tax increase at all. I want to thank our Finance Department led by Maria Pires for all their hard work in these very challenging times.

Financially, Trumbull is the place to be.

Community Investment

EDUCATION

For our business community and for our citizens alike, it is imperative that we not only keep spending in check but that we continue to strategically invest in those things that matter to our community and act as a catalyst for growth.

One of the critical factors to being a community of choice is a strong education system. As a longtime advocate for education, I made the decision to resume investment in education that began under the leadership of First Selectman Ken Halaby and continued under First Selectman Ray Baldwin. The amount my administration has allocated to education far exceeds that of my immediate predecessor.

It is one thing to invest but, the proof of the wisdom of any investment is the results. Our results are impressive. Our students excel in both academic and athletic competitions. After graduation, our students succeed in college, the military, and in business.

Thank you to our teachers, administrators, and the Board of Education who support them.

The Trumbull Public School System is delivering the results that warrant continued investment. Besides the success noted above, families choosing a community in which to live, are choosing Trumbull. Trumbull had the second highest move in rate in CT in 2020, just behind Westport.

These new members of our community bring energy and ideas to our Town. From a business perspective, they shop in our stores, they eat in our restaurants, and they take advantage of the Trumbull businesses that cater to their needs. All of this is good for business.

Educationally, Trumbull is the place to be.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure is a vital part of a healthy community. My administration has focused on paving both the roads most highly travelled by our citizens and our side roads.

As examples, Moose Hill Road, Teller Road, Strobel Road, and Chestnut Hill Road are completely repaved. Madison Avenue has been paved from the Monroe line to the Canoe Brook area and, once school closes, that project will continue.

A portion of this work is being paid for by State money or grants minimizing the impact on our taxpayers.

Timing for the pavement of our side roads can be found on the Town website. In addition, we are working with our Public Works Department not only to pave these roads but to do so in a way that has them last longer.

We invest not only in new projects but in maintenance as well. Under the leadership of George Estrada, our Director of Public Works, and Dimitri Paris our Director of Parks and Recreation we continue to enhance and improve our town buildings, our parks, and our recreation facilities.

New pickleball courts, new tennis courts, beautification projects, and restoration of areas like Long Hill Green and our Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Site are ongoing. There are major projects underway at Twin Brooks Park and Indian Ledge Park as well.

We will be reviewing next month the funding we received from the Federal government under the American Rescue Plan Act with the Town Council, Board of Finance, and the public to discuss how the community will spend these funds on town projects and programs.

There also will be funding available from the Federal infrastructure bill, which will address other important town infrastructure needs.

Trumbull continues to move forward and that is just another reason why **Trumbull is the Place to be.**

PUBLIC SAFETY

A safe community is a healthy community, and, thanks to our police led by Chief Michael Lombardo, our EMS led by Chief Leigh Goodman, our Health Department led by Health Director Luci Bango and our Volunteer Fire Departments, Trumbull is a very safe community.

Our police are second to none and they have the full support of my administration. We fund our police and see that they have the equipment and the training they need to continue to keep us safe.

Recently we brought our EMS services in house benefiting our citizens both from a perspective of better service and from improved cost efficiency.

Our Volunteer Fire Departments, like our police, take a back seat to no one. This group of community volunteers exemplifies the meaning of community service through their dedication to keeping us safe every day.

In the height of the pandemic our Health Department supervised the administration of vaccines to our citizens. This is just an example of this wonderful resource available to the citizens of Trumbull.

We are also working diligently to improve road safety, adding crosswalks, better road signs and intersection improvements like the one at Daniel's Farm Road and Strobel Road. The light, fully funded by the State of Connecticut, at the Fitness Edge Plaza is finally out to bid and construction of that light and new sidewalk and crosswalk improvements will begin soon!

Also, we are working with the State of Connecticut on improvements to the traffic issues at the White Plains Road/Daniels Farm Road intersection and the intersection at Main Street and Whitney Avenue.

Whether you are a citizen of Trumbull or an employee of one of our businesses, your health and safety are our priority. If you want a safe environment in which to live or conduct business, **Trumbull is the place to be.**

HOUSING

I believe we need a variety of housing options to attract residents to our community. Young people looking to put down roots and seniors who wish to downsize and remain in our community need options.

The apartment developments on Reservoir Avenue and Oakview Drive that I spoke of earlier filled a need for young people and seniors alike. Introducing people to our community or allowing people to remain in a community they love is good for property values, good for business, and good for our Town.

While the predictions that the multi-family developments would result in dire consequences for our schools and services have proved to be incorrect, my administration took the position that we must tread carefully going forward. We supported an apartment complex at the Westfield Shopping Mall and firmly believe that like the other developments, the Residences on Main will lead to increased business development in that area and help our mall reimagine itself.

Also, the seniors in our community will benefit from new developments like the River Valley Resort Community and the proposed development on the former United Healthcare Site. These developments will give seniors options for housing at different stages of life while generating revenue for the Town to keep taxes in check.

To control development we took two actions, first, we put in a moratorium on large apartment complexes so we could study the impact of those already approved.

Second, we restored the land acquisition committee, the purpose of which is to recommend the possible purchase of large tracts of property so the town can control development and be in charge of our own future.

CHALLENGES

As I said earlier, Trumbull, like any community faces challenges. Our success in becoming a community of choice has been a blessing but one that poses challenges as well.

As you all are aware, residential properties are rising in value. Our success in creating a community of choice makes this increase in property values particularly true for Trumbull.

As we all know, there has been nothing normal about the past two years. The recent, State mandated property revaluation in Trumbull is no exception.

Trumbull housing prices have grown exponentially. The value of business property has grown as well but overall, not as much as residential property. This reality has shifted the tax burden to residential homeowners to a greater degree than to business property owners. It means that some Trumbull households will experience a tax hike just due to the increased value of their homes before any increase to the Town's budget.

Inflation poses another threat. The cost of gas, electricity, and other commodities are rising. We expect the cost of healthcare for our employees will rise as well. These increasing costs will have an impact on budgets going forward.

The ability to attract and retain highly qualified employees is another challenge faced by many communities including our own.

Our Mall is experiencing difficulties much like most other malls. As our largest taxpayer, careful attention must be paid to insuring the mall's future success.

COVID-19 seems to be on the wane, but the impacts—personal, social, and financial—will be felt for a very long time.

We recognize that we are not out of the woods yet. Our businesses and our individual taxpayers are still recovering. As I said earlier, thanks to strong fiscal management, we have a healthy general fund that allows us to work our way out of the financial impacts of COVID-19 while continuing to invest in our community.

THE FUTURE

I am committed to ensuring that Trumbull remains a thriving, affordable, and safe community for all our residents and businesses. I will continue to advocate for financial relief for our taxpayers by working collaboratively with State and Federal officials. I will:

- Help our residents who need additional relief by utilizing American Rescue Plan funding in innovative ways.
- Work to continue our grant-funded Local Meals Program.
- Expand relief efforts through social services for residents who need assistance for utilities, rent, and medical expenses.
- Review our Senior Tax Relief program.
- Continue to grow our grand list to offset budgetary pressures.
- Continue to practice conservative budgeting and restrained spending.

Trumbull's future is bright. I have spoken of some of our successes and there are more on the way.

Our pool and senior center committees are working to see how best to address the long-term problems of an inadequate senior center and the failed Hillcrest pool.

The owners of Trumbull Center are coming forward for a plan to redevelop and reimagine the Center.

We will work with the Board of Education on a plan to renovate those schools in need.

My administration has faced challenges before from weather emergencies to the pandemic. We have proven equal to those challenges, and I remain confident that we as a community have the resources, the people, and the spirit to overcome any challenge. I remain optimistic that Trumbull's best days are ahead of us.

We are committed to keep spending in check.

We are committed to growing our Grand list.

We are committed to public safety.

We are committed to excellence in education.

We are committed to a community that is welcoming to all.

We are committed to our citizens, and we are committed to our businesses.

Trumbull is the special place to be!

Finally, I'm going to turn to the presentation of the First Selectman's Award for Community Service.

This award recognizes individuals in our community whose selfless service makes Trumbull the great community that it is.

This award is named in honor of all the First Selectmen who have held this office. As any First Selectman will tell you, volunteers are the backbone of our community. Our honorees today exemplify that spirit of service.

This year's First Selectman's Award for Community Service is awarded to Trumbull's Certified Emergency Response Team (CERT).

CERT are volunteers who are trained to first help, their families, their neighbors then their community. They are trained in first aid, sheltering, mass care, crowd control to name a few. They meet and train monthly. You will see them at events throughout town including the Memorial Day Parade, Trumbull Day, THS graduation. They are always around to help a lending hand. They volunteer hundreds of hours to the town of Trumbull each year.

This year the public saw CERT in action at several Town emergency events, including our COVID Vaccine clinics and the distribution of the COVID home test kits to the community. They take time away from their families to help the community at a moment's notice.

Thank you all for what you do, generously volunteering your time to help all of us.

I would like to ask Megan Murphy, our Emergency Management Director, who oversees CERT and a Trumbull CERT representative to come forward to accept this ward.