

## State of the Town

2023

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 vibrant community, and I am honored and humbled to be the First Selectman of this wonderful Town.

Before beginning my formal remarks, I again ask all of us to recognize the heroes who stepped forward in our time of need and, in fact, each and every day. Our first responders, our health professionals, our teachers and administrators, our Town employees, our business leaders, and so many of our citizens who support their neighbors. Please join me in a round of applause for all of them.

I want to thank Senator Moore for her leadership in securing \$1.5 million dollars in state funding for the construction of the new Veteran's center. We also thank our state legislative delegation for their support of this project and for helping to secure the state funding.

I want to thank Congressman Jim Himes who was instrumental in securing \$750,000 in federal funding under the Member Driven Community Project funding program.

We are still in the process of securing additional grant funding from the state and federal government. I am confident more good news will be coming soon about this important project!

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 and for all you give back to the community. Special thanks for your perseverance these last three years.

In 2019, prior to COVID, when I made this address, I explained my vision for Trumbull in a simple phrase:

**TRUMBULL IS THE PLACE TO BE.**

If you are a young family looking for a place to settle and raise your family...

**TRUMBULL IS THE PLACE TO BE.**

If you are a single person looking for a community with access to roads and trains...

**TRUMBULL IS THE PLACE TO BE.**

If you are a senior looking to remain in our community or if you are a senior looking for a community to join...

**TRUMBULL IS THE PLACE TO BE.**

If you are a business looking for a place to locate...

**TRUMBULL IS THE PLACE TO BE.**

If you are a business currently calling Trumbull home and are looking to expand...

## **TRUMBULL IS THE PLACE TO BE.**

My vision for Trumbull is a simple one: a safe community, with excellent schools, a diverse housing stock to meet every need, ample recreation opportunities, efficient services, and a sound financial profile.

Three years later after enduring a worldwide health and economic crisis these same words and thoughts are truer than ever.

Let me state unequivocally that the state of our town is excellent!

**Our finances are strong.**

**Economic development is robust.**

**Our investment in education is paying off well.**

**Trumbull is a community of choice.**

**Trumbull is a safe Community.**

**Trumbull is a special place.**

Let me speak in a bit of detail on these subjects.

**Economic Development, is one of the many reasons why Trumbull is a thriving community.**

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.

We continue to encourage safe, smart, and focused, economic growth that concentrates on both redevelopment and new development in keys areas of town.

Some of this development has been initiated by long-term planning studies including the Long Hill Village District Plan and the Trumbull Center Corridor Study among others.

**We planned the work and worked the plan.** These improvements are visible all over town. A few examples include:

The Long Hill Green area

Madison Village Shopping Plaza

CVS, Starbucks Plaza

Lindeman, Reservoir, and Oakview area.

Our Corporate Parks

The former United Healthcare facility on Rt 111

Amazon Distribution Center

In the last 6 years, over 800,000 ft.<sup>2</sup> of commercial space has been re-developed or reoccupied generating significant tax revenue for our community.

Due to this redevelopment and some properties being reoccupied Trumbull had the lowest office vacancy rate (class A and B space) in Fairfield County during the first quarter of 2023. Our vacancy rate was over 40% when I took office in 2017. Today that rate is 11.7%

Over 130 new small businesses have located in Trumbull over the past 6 years. These businesses represent healthcare and medical, technology, manufacturing, environmental, fuel, construction, recreation, restaurant, service, education and other industries. We have recently welcomed Golftec, Bareskin, Cerreta Builders, Abrakdoodle, Fraser Lane, North Star, Transpak, APTAR, and Fire and Ice Card Store.

Seven national (some international) corporations have located to Trumbull since 2018 including Henkel Corporation, Amazon, Image First Healthcare Laundry, Fuji Film, Power Home Remodeling, Kone Elevator, and Transpak.

Our Trumbull Corporate Park is seeing a resurgence, the area around Lindeman Drive has come to life. We have more to do, but significant progress is being made in these previously underperforming areas.

We completed the Long Hill Green Village District Plan in 2018. We have followed that plan and the area is thriving. We have new sidewalk connections, a signal and intersection improvements underway.

We have additional green infrastructure and redesign of the public green space also underway. Most of these improvements are grant funded. They improve safety, they improve the business environment, and they improve the resident and visitor experience to the area.

Like any community, there are concerns. The Trumbull Mall is among those concerns but there is cause for optimism.

We are undertaking a world class Trumbull Mall Area Market Feasibility and Land Use Study to help position this area for the future. A number of key stakeholder meetings have already taken place.

The first public meeting was held yesterday from 4-7 at the Trumbull Mall. The study team will explore future investment and potential tenants for the mall area. Of great importance, the new mall owners are actively engaged in the study process. We are setting a vision and attracting interest and investment.

Another concern is Trumbull Center. We completed the Trumbull Center Corridor Study last year. We are using that study to guide improvements to the area. We are working with the State DOT and pushing for the re-signalization of the Daniels Farm/White Plains Road intersection.

We are in the process of applying for significant federal funding to advance improvements in Trumbull Center. Those funds are competitive, but the planning we have done gives us an advantage in pursuing these dollars.

The Trumbull Center landlord sought, and The Planning and Zoning Commission recently approved a new overlay zone regulation which allows for potential mixed-use development in Trumbull Center. That mixed use development is currently at the Inland Wetlands and Watercourse Commission.

We have seen Fatty Patty, Next Chapter Books, Emma's, Pure Skin Medical Spa, Paul's Haircutters,(which is coming soon) Peerless Cleaners, Unique Beauty Salon, The Cigar Shop, all locate to Trumbull Center since 2018. We have had Starbucks, CVS, Trumbull Café and Grill and Hartford Healthcare Urgent Care expand to a new locations in Trumbull Center.

I don't look at the Mall or Trumbull Center as challenges. I look at them as opportunities for our community.

**As we have done across our community, we take a careful thoughtful approach to economic development. By planning, by thinking before we act, by listening before we talk and by taking care to consider the long-term ramifications of what we do, we get better results for our citizens and our businesses.**

**Let's take a moment to discuss infrastructure.** We strengthened our town's infrastructure by focusing on pedestrian and vehicular safety upgrades.

A few examples of these improvements include:

The long-awaited traffic light and trail improvements at the Fitness Edge Plaza, which are almost complete. I promised to get that done, and we have. The project will be complete this summer. This project is State funded.

Also, I spoke earlier about the signal and intersection improvements at the Whitney Avenue and Main Street intersection, and the installation of sidewalks in the Long Hill Green area.

Also, the installation of sidewalks from Christian Heritage School to Twin Brooks Park on White Plains Rd. This adds to the sidewalks already installed on White Plains Road through Trumbull Center connecting to the Pequannock River Trail. All these projects are grant funded.

**We have accelerated the paving of our roads.**

We have paved and completed drainage work on miles of our town roads including the following major arteries:

Madison Avenue

Moose Hill Road

Chestnut Hill Rd

Teller Road

Shelton Road.

Strobel Road. On Strobel Road, in addition to paving and drainage improvements, we installed a new traffic light at the intersection of Daniels Farm Road to again improve traffic and pedestrian safety.

Lake Avenue and many other side roads will be paved this summer in accordance with our annual capital road paving plan.

Under the American Rescue Plan Act, more infrastructure projects and community improvements have started, or will start soon including:

**The road paving preservation program.**

**Major repairs to Tashua pool.**

**A new splash pad at Beach Pool**

**Structural and safety improvements to the Trumbull Library, The Trumbull Health Department, and the Nature and Arts Center.**

**The Police Department also received funding for various safety upgrades and new equipment as did the Fire Marshals' office.**

**Many of these initiatives are invisible to the public but they are essential.**

Social Services is also the beneficiary of the American Rescue Plan Act. The Senior Center's Meal program, the Food pantry, the Local Meals Program, and Emergency Assistance Funds Program also received funding under the American Rescue Plan Act.

**Our parks are an important part of the character of our community.**

**Twin Brooks is undergoing a major renovation project that is expected to be completed in the next few weeks.**

New trees under our 1000 trees for Trumbull program have been planted. Take a drive through the park you will not be disappointed!

Indian Ledge Park has also been updated. All the paving is complete. Sidewalks from the playground to the upper parking lot have also been completed.

**Let's talk a moment about recreation.**

We have constructed new tennis courts at Tashua Knolls, Unity Park and Island Brook Park. Two of these courts will be under the lights at Tashua Knolls. New basketball courts have been built at Tashua Knolls and Island Brook Park.

By the end of this month, Trumbull will have 20 new outdoor pickleball courts to accommodate the demand of the fastest growing sport in the US. Eight of these courts will be under the lights at Tashua Knolls.

All of these wonderful projects and more are just examples of our commitment to meeting the recreation needs of all of our residents.

**Strong financial performance makes all of this possible. Strong finances are the hallmark of a healthy community.**

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 \$29 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 and positions us to improve to a triple A bond rating in the future.

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

Last year's state mandated revaluation led to a tax increase for some while others saw little to no increase or even a decrease.

This revaluation was required by state law and came at a time of an unprecedented increase in residential property values during the pandemic. I challenged this revaluation with state officials. We tried very hard to convince our state leaders that the revaluation should be pushed forward or canceled entirely.

No community should have been forced to conduct a revaluation during a pandemic, however my pleas were not heard, and we were compelled to follow the law and implement the revaluation.

When residential property values rise faster than commercial values, it causes a shift in the tax burden and puts greater responsibility on residential taxpayers.

It is important to note that most of the impact on taxes was not caused by increased spending, but by the change in the percentage of the total grand list that is attributable to residential property coupled with improvements made to each owner's property since the last revaluation in 2015.

For many in our community, the purchase of their home is one of their most significant investments. In Trumbull this investment has paid off. It is important to remember that residential property values increased, on average, by 16% since the last revaluation, and this value has been maintained.

Municipal budgeting is challenging under the best of circumstances.

This year, the economic environment of increasing interest rates and rising inflation presented additional challenges. With these factors in mind, we continue to be diligent in making decisions that are right for both the long and short term, remaining laser focused on controlled spending and delivering

the critical services our community has come to rely on and expect.

The new mill rate for the 2023-2024 fiscal year, 34.15, was set on June 12 by the Board of Finance. This represents a tax increase of 1.52%. This increase is far below the rate of inflation and is nearly the same as the average yearly increase since I took office in 2017. This includes no tax increase at all in 2020 when both our citizens and businesses were struggling.

I want to thank our Finance Department led by Maria Pires for all their hard work in these very challenging times.

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.

My commitment to education is clear. Over the last six years my administration has increased the allocation to the Board of Education by over 19 million dollars.

Clearly this was money well spent. I am proud that our award-winning school system is ranked number four in the state of Connecticut and that Booth Hill School was presented with the 2022 National Blue-Ribbon Schools award. Several of our other schools were identified as 2021–2022 schools of distinction by the Connecticut Department of Education.

These achievements are a testament to the hard work and dedication of our teachers, administrators, staff, students, their parents and our Board of Education.

I believe investment in education, while balancing the needs of all our citizens, is critical to our community. This investment ensures that Trumbull remains a community of choice.

Trumbull is a community of choice because we are a safe community due to the outstanding efforts of our police, emergency medical services, and our volunteer fire departments.

We have ensured that our officers are properly paid, trained, and equipped.

Today like many police departments, we are having difficulty attracting and retaining qualified officers. The lack of a pension for our officers hired after July 1, 2014 plays a role in that situation.

My administration has taken steps to improve both recruitment and retention at the police department. We commissioned a study to determine the impact of restoring a pension plan for officers hired after July 1, 2014. As we study the right way to proceed, we have taken the following steps:

We carved out the existing pension plan so that no future administration will be tempted to modify it. This will help in the retention of our officers.

We initiated a sign on bonus of \$30,000 for newly hired officers.

We improved the Town match to the existing defined contribution plan for officers hired after July 1, 2014 to 10%.

My commitment is steadfast to all our public safety departments.

Let's talk about housing needs in Trumbull.

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 filled a need for young people and seniors alike.

We supported the apartment complex at the 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 give seniors options for housing at different stages of life while generating revenue for the Town to keep taxes in check.

Trumbull continues to diversify its housing stock as we work to create affordability. We are doing this in a balanced way and closely monitoring the impact on town services. To date, while there is impact, that impact does not rise to the fears of some. The data is showing that the number of school children is within projections and many of the school age children living in apartment complexes were previously in Trumbull schools. We continue to monitor this and a partial moratorium for larger projects remains in place.

We recently completed our state mandated housing plan. In keeping with the public input around that effort we will be prioritizing housing for our seniors. We want our seniors to be able to stay in our community.

We also have an approved mixed-use development on the Trumbull/Monroe line. That development has a percentage of units set aside as affordable.

Currently, the mixed-use development in Trumbull Center, if approved, also sets aside 10% of units as affordable.

Diverse housing options support our families, our workforce, and our seniors.

## **THE FUTURE**

I am committed to ensuring that Trumbull remains a thriving, affordable, and safe community for all our residents and businesses. I will do this by continuing to advocate for financial relief for our taxpayers by working collaboratively with State and Federal officials, growing our grand list, and keeping spending in check. During this last year my administration did the following:

- Helped our residents who needed additional relief by utilizing American Rescue Plan funding in innovative ways.
- Worked to continue the Local Meals Program.
- Expanded relief efforts through social services for residents who needed assistance for utilities, rent, and medical expenses.
- Continued to grow our grand list to offset budgetary pressures.

- Continued to practice conservative budgeting and restrained spending.
- Advocated with our State delegation and State elected officials to increase our education cost sharing dollars.
- Applied for grant funding to offset additional costs for our residents and businesses.
- And much more!

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

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.

Trumbull is a wonderful community, and I am confident in its future.

We are committed to our citizens, and we are committed to our businesses. Trumbull is the place to be!