

## STATE OF THE TOWN - 2019

I want to thank the Trumbull Chamber of Commerce, in particular Jeff Bishop, and the Bridgeport Regional Business Council for hosting this event this morning, and thank you to the event's corporate sponsors, Aquarion Water Company, Crown Castle, BL Companies, and Sikorsky Credit Union. And a special thank you to all of you for joining me today.

I am honored and excited to be here and share with you the good news about Trumbull.

At our recent business breakfast, 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. I will address each of these in a moment.

To strengthen this vision, we need strong economic development. I will address this first.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Upon taking office, one of my top priorities was the reoccupation and redevelopment of several of our underperforming or vacant buildings.

I am pleased to say that under the leadership of Rina Bakalar, our Economic and Community Development Director, and with the strong support of our outstanding Economic and Community Development Commission, progress has been made. Here are a couple of examples:

The long-vacant 110,000 square foot former call center at 55 Merritt Boulevard was purchased and will become the Trumbull Tradesman Center, Trumbull's first shared workplace concept for businesses like landscapers, plumbers, carpenters, HVAC contractors and others that need more space to expand their businesses.

101 Oakview Drive, vacated by Sacred Heart University, and the adjacent 109 Oakview Drive were purchased by Resort Lifestyle Communities, a Nebraska-based company. They will construct a new 132 unit Independent Living Facility for residents 55 and older.

I am very pleased that 48 Monroe Turnpike, the former United Healthcare Facility and vacant since 2015, has been purchased by Senior Living Development with a plan to repurpose the existing 250,000 square foot building.

The plan is to convert the existing building into a 55+ community with components of active adult living, independent living, assisted living and memory care. They have created successful developments of this type in other communities in Connecticut.

With an increase of millions in tax revenue, no impact on our schools, and with increased business for nearby stores and restaurants, it is a perfect development for that site.

If that was not enough, this outstanding development, along with the Oakview drive facility, will give our seniors much needed housing options for their future. More on this later.

When this all comes to pass, we will have taken 360,000 square feet of underperforming or vacant space and transformed it into a vibrant part of our community generating significant tax revenue for all our citizens. Once again, I thank Rina Bakalar and our Economic and Community Development Commission for their outstanding efforts.

### **But that is not all.**

We welcomed the expansion of the Henkel Corporation, Bow Tie Theaters, William Raveis Realty, Higgins Group Realty, Technique Tigers Baseball Academy, and Newbury Rain.

We had over 20 new businesses open their doors in our town, including:

- Three new restaurants.
- Educational Businesses like Code Ninjas and the Fairfield Trumbull School of Music.
- Healthcare-related businesses such as DaVita Dialysis and Dolce Vida Medical Spa.
- Recreational Businesses like D-Bat in the Trumbull Corporate Park.
- And two new pre-schools, Educational Playcare in the Trumbull Corporate Park and the Learning Experience on Lindeman Drive.

In the first two months of 2019, we welcomed Fuji Film and Central Communications to locations on Trefoil Drive. The new Barbershoppe opened in Long Hill Green and we have some new tenants coming to Hawley Lane Mall in the coming weeks.

More good news, the long-awaited redevelopment of the former Marisa's Restaurant site appears to be back on track. The owners of the Mex on Main complex have purchased the property and will be coming back to Planning and Zoning in the coming months with some revisions to the previously approved project.

It is my understanding at this point, the new development will be very much in line with what was previously approved, just a reduced footprint. You will be hearing more about this in the coming weeks.

Large businesses and small business have found that:

**TRUMBULL IS THE PLACE TO BE.**

Lest we forget, we, the citizens of Trumbull, have a critical role to play. We must support those businesses who have chosen to become our neighbors. Please familiarize yourself with the excellent products produced by Henkel Corporation and Unilever, to name just two. Show your support by purchasing those products.

Shop at our stores, enjoy our restaurants and patronize our Mall. Let's show them we care and we are thankful for them. We all benefit when we do. Let's demonstrate to our businesses, large and small, in a tangible way that:

**TRUMBULL IS THE PLACE TO BE.**

You can sense the enthusiasm for Trumbull in our business community. We had two very successful events in 2018. Our Annual Business Appreciation Breakfast in October saw a record crowd.

Our Business and Commercial Broker Economic Development Bus Tour in July was a major success and has generated significant interest in Trumbull commercial sites.

Nothing is accomplished without hard work, and my administration is committed to doing just that.

The Long Hill Green & Village District Enhancement Plan was completed last June to guide improvements to safety, traffic flow, walkability and green space. Almost \$1,000,000 in grant money has been secured to implement five projects which will begin this spring, including the much needed right hand turn lane at Whitney and Main. This process was done hand in hand with neighbors, property owners and businesses.

I requested two similar plans be undertaken to guide development and transformation in areas that were experiencing high vacancy rates, both Industrial Zones.

One plan is nearing completion for the Reservoir, Oakview, Lindeman Drive area. The other plan kicked off last month in our Trumbull Corporate Park.

We want these areas to be vibrant and successful. These planning efforts have already helped drive investment and business location to these areas and are creating a healthy dialog and shared vision between property owners, residents and businesses.

By working together, we can grow our grand list and enhance the quality of life in Trumbull.

I want to thank all our volunteer board and commission members, including our Planning and Zoning Commission and land use boards. A tremendous time commitment goes into serving in these roles. Property owners and developers have a right to propose changes and development. These hard working volunteers have the difficult job of sorting through the details of proposals and weighing the best interests of the town.

Our good news must be tempered with a sober understanding that we, like every other community, face headwinds that, if not recognized and addressed, can derail even the best of plans. I will take a moment to address a few of these.

## HEADWINDS

**THE MALL:** Our Mall, our largest taxpayer, faces serious challenges. The retail environment is not favorable with competition from online retailers putting significant pressure on existing malls across our nation.

If that were not enough, a brand new mall in Norwalk will be opening their doors in the fall of this year. Our Mall, like so many others, is reimagining itself and looking to create an environment where people can live, shop and play.

In May 2018, the Mall proposed a zone change that would permit the construction of 580 two-bedroom and one-bedroom apartments with dens.

### I felt this was too much.

Rather than simply say yes or no to our largest taxpayer and hope for the best, I and my economic development team met with the Mall representatives with the hope of significantly reducing the scope of any potential project.

The proposal was reduced to permit the construction of up to 260 apartments of the one- and two-bedroom variety. There will be no dens permitted. In addition to this change, we also negotiated the following:

- Insisted that the Mall reveal the potential developer and their early concept for housing to the Planning and Zoning Commission and community.
- Insisted on larger setbacks and requested a reduction in building height.
- Strongly pushed for any housing development to have intentional and safe connections to the Mall and urged that the development have a neighborhood feel, improving the gateway to Trumbull.
- Pushed for a Master Plan requirement to guide the ongoing transformation of the zone.

- Performed extensive research and commissioned a third-party independent review of the Mall zone request and the transformation of malls throughout the country.

With these modifications, our Planning and Zoning Commission, under the leadership of David Preusch, approved in a bi-partisan fashion the zone change requested.

Some things should transcend politics. Complicated and rapidly changing issues, such as the decline of malls and the disruption to the traditional retail industry, are often difficult to comprehend and communicate to the community.

A successful, vibrant Mall is important to our community and we are working to achieve a result that will permit flexibility without altering the character of our community.

As of this speech, there is no application before the Planning and Zoning Commission regarding the construction of these units.

**ANOTHER HEADWIND IS TAX APPEALS** from some of our largest taxpayers that are currently being decided. These began under the previous administration, and one in particular should have been settled long ago.

While the Town remains confident in our position, nothing is certain and we have to be prepared. Our strong General Fund balance and our fiscally conservative approach to both spending and bonding will allow us to handle whatever comes our way.

**A THIRD HEADWIND IS OUR STATE:** I am guessing we are all familiar with the serious challenges facing our State and some of the proposals being put forth that directly and negatively impact Trumbull.

As of this speech, the State is proposing to slash our Education Cost Sharing allocation by \$656,000. Further, the State is proposing to allocate \$511,000 of the cost of the Teacher Retirement System to Trumbull. The total net impact to us, in both loss of revenue and additional expense, is \$1,200,000.

Unlike other communities, I have fully accounted for the full impact of these proposals in my proposed budget. While I retain the hope that all or at least some of this impact will be reduced, you cannot budget on hope. You have to budget on the facts as they are known. That is the fiscally conservative thing to do and that is what I did.

I have met with the Governor and the Lt. Governor, and I have spoken to our State Treasurer. I will continue to work with our State delegation in the Senate and the House to reverse, in whole or part, these proposals.

### **I NEED YOUR HELP**

We all need to work together to achieve the result we desire. I need all of you, businesses and citizens alike, to contact the Governor, the Lt. Governor, the Treasurer and the leaders in both

the House and Senate to urge them to reject these proposals. Shifting costs to communities or suddenly cutting long established funding sources is not progressive but punitive.

While I know that is not the intent, it is the result and we have to find a better way. I will be contacting the leaders of communities who are facing impacts similar to our own to see if there is a way to work together for our mutual benefit. I ask again, please contact the State leaders and urge them to reject these ideas.

I make this pledge: if we are successful in mitigating the impact of these proposals, I will work with our Board of Finance and the Town Council to do the following:

- Any restoration of ECS funds should be allocated to the Board of Education.
- Any reduction in the Teacher Pension cost will be returned to the taxpayers in the form of a reduced tax increase. If the entire cost share is reversed, that could reduce our already low 2.15% tax increase to under 2%.

I do not know the chances of success in reversing these proposals. I do know that if we do not work together there will be no chance whatsoever.

## **VISION**

As I said earlier, 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. Let me address these elements.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

My first priority, as with any First Selectman, is public safety. Trumbull is blessed with outstanding Police, Fire, EMS and Public Works employees who share my unwavering commitment to a safe community.

In Chief of Police Lombardo, our Fire Chiefs, newly installed EMS Chief Leigh Goodman, and Public Works Director John Marsilio, Trumbull is blessed with experienced, dedicated leadership. Their teams are among the best in the state. I sleep well knowing these dedicated men and women are on the job.

I will continue to work with these outstanding individuals in reinforcing the culture of commitment and hard work that are the hallmark of our Town public safety teams.

A couple of updates. We will be installing at Twin Brooks Park, at Tait Rd., and Quarry Rd. a video surveillance system to deter anyone with bad intent from entering our parks or the trail, and to give our police another tool to assist in investigations when they are needed. We will continue to address our Town's security needs in the coming year.

I directed the engineering and Town staff to apply for grant funding to install a light at the Chip's Plaza. The project also includes the redirection of the trail and trail crossing to the newly

envisioned traffic light. We were informed yesterday, the project is fully approved and our commitment to fund letter is on its way. We are moving swiftly to full design and once that is complete, the project will go to construction bid. This long-promised improvement will now become a reality and the safety of the area will be greatly improved.

The renovation of Police Headquarters will be underway soon. In our operating budget we continue to invest in the equipment and training we need.

Other initiatives are underway and, for the sake of security, I will not detail them here. I will say that whether you are a business or a resident, Trumbull is and will remain, a safe community.

## **EDUCATION**

Our education system is a jewel of our community. It gives our young people the skills they need to compete in college, the military and the job market. It acts as a magnet for families, thereby enhancing the property values for all our taxpayers, and brings to our community the energy and new ideas of these new residents.

Under the leadership of Superintendent of Schools Gary Cialfi, and our wonderful teachers and staff, our school system continues to receive accolades for our student performance. Whether it is college admission rates, scores on standardized tests or the success of our academic and sports teams, Trumbull is viewed as an exceptional school system.

I want to make it clear right now, I am opposed to any kind of forced regionalization. Regionalization should be decided by the communities involved and, as the history of our State shows, communities will make good choices without incentives or coercion. Regionalization is wrong for Trumbull.

For the 2019-2020 budget I am proposing continued investment in our school system by increasing the Board of Education budget by over 2 million dollars, a 2% increase. This is the second highest increase in the last four years. The highest was my investment last year. This increase was less than what the Board of Education desired. I respect their role in creating that request, but as I have said, we have to live within our means. As I said earlier, if we are successful in whole or in part in reversing the cut to the ECS formula, I will work to restore that amount to the Board of Education, furthering our investment for 2019-2020.

When you make any investment, you measure the success of that investment by the returns it generates. With strong property values, outstanding student performance, and post-graduate success in Trumbull, our community investment in education has proved to be a wise one for everyone.

## **HOUSING**

If Trumbull wants to be competitive in a rapidly changing world, we need to make sure we have a diverse housing stock from which to choose. When I campaigned in 2015 and 2017, one thing was clear: greater choice was needed.

For seniors looking to downsize, the development on Oakview and the proposed development of 48 Monroe Turnpike, noted above, will give our seniors the opportunity to remain in the community they helped build and that they love.

These much needed developments will also attract seniors from other communities looking for a community in which to reside.

Seniors currently make up a significant percentage of our population and those numbers continue to grow. We have a strong varied supply of homes to purchase and condo developments. We have some assisted living facilities and mixed facilities that combine active adult independent living and assisted living. We also have a memory care facility. However, demand is strong and we need more, and these developments will meet that need.

One of the most currently underserved demographics from a housing perspective in Trumbull are singles and young professionals. By all accounts, this group prefers to rent rather than buy, wants easy access to mass transportation and highways, and seeks communities with restaurants, shopping and recreation opportunities. Having a major city nearby is an important attraction.

As any young person will tell you, supply is limited and the cost nearly prohibitive. Surrounding communities like Fairfield, Westport, Milford, and Darien are building apartment complexes to compete with Stamford and Norwalk to meet this need.

If we want to attract businesses, both corporate and retail, and if we want to remain competitive, we need to address this young demographic.

**However, we must proceed with caution.**

Under the previous administration, the zoning on Lindeman Drive and Oakview was changed to permit up to 600 units of rental housing. The first of these units is currently under construction and will become available later this year. The remaining units are still in the early stages.

In making this application, estimates were made with respect to impact on our schools. A similar projection was made for apartments at the Mall.

**I believe those estimates were overly optimistic.**

While these apartments may become available over a few years, our Town needs time to digest those already approved. To give us that time, I requested a one-year moratorium on any new requests for apartment developments.

**While encouraging diverse housing, we must never go so far as to compromise the character of our community.**

I believe we can strike the right balance between the need for more variety without sacrificing all that we enjoy. Trumbull in the past has shown the ability to move from a farm community to a suburban one. We can navigate this change as well as long as we work together.

### **Parks and Recreation**

Our parks and our recreation programs are another crown jewel of our community. I want to thank Dimitri Paris, his team, and Mary Markham for their outstanding efforts on behalf of Trumbull.

In recreation, Mary stepped into her former job on a part-time basis to fill the void due to resignations in the department. Her knowledge and experience was invaluable during this time, and with her assistance we were able to navigate a seamless transition.

Unlike the recent past, pools opened on time. Our recreation programs continued without missing a beat. When the crisis passed, Mary stepped aside.

Dimitri Paris is an amazing individual. His love for our parks is second to none. His attention to detail unsurpassed. He is responsible for restoring our fountain near the library that was long neglected. He and his team of outstanding Trumbull employees, and our Parks and Recreation Commission, deserve our respect and our thanks.

Given the natural alliance between Parks and Recreation, I have combined the leadership of both departments under Dimitri's direction. I am certain this will insure an outstanding experience for our citizens while reducing some expenses.

### **EFFICIENT SERVICES**

All of our Town departments deliver services to our residents with diligence and efficiency. However, herein lies an opportunity.

For years, we have talked about the possibility of combining services with the Board of Education to eliminate redundancy, improve efficiency and save our taxpayers money.

The time for talk is over; the time for action is now. Given the uncertainty of the State finances, there is no better time to start the process. I have had some preliminary discussion on the matter with Dr. Cialfi and we will be forming a joint task force from the Town and Board of Education to study this matter and make recommendations.

On a similar note, the same opportunity may exist with surrounding towns.

This is all preliminary, but it is important that we think strategically and long term. I understand how this may be frightening to some and, there may be circumstances that prevent this from happening, but we will not know until we look. I also promise this: we will take no action without thorough study and open transparent communication to all.

### **FINANCES**

In speaking of finances, let me quote the 2018 S&P ratings of Trumbull.

According to S&P, Trumbull has:

- Very strong economy.
- Strong management with good financial policies and practices.
- Strong budgetary performance.
- Strong budgetary flexibility.
- Very strong liquidity.
- Strong debt and contingent liability position.

Fitch Ratings Agency has similar praise for the job my administration is doing as a steward of the taxpayers' funds. I am proud of these results and want to thank Maria Pires and her team for their diligence and excellent work product.

Let me add that our General Fund has never been stronger. The interest we are earning on our savings is exceptional and I thank our Treasurer, Anthony Musto, for his outstanding effort.

Tax collection is strong and taxes stable. In short, our financial position has never been stronger and continues to get better.

A word about pensions. Our two plans, while showing improvement, remain underfunded. We will continue to fund both at the ARC and before this fiscal year is through, I will fulfill my promise to put a portion of our budget surplus into the pension plans over and above the required ARC contribution. The ratings agencies felt this was an important next step in solving our pension funding deficit.

Capital Projects: I have formed two committees: one to study our community facilities and the second to study our aquatic facilities. My goal is to think strategically with respect to the needs of our pools, our library and our senior center. I have also re-established our Land Acquisition Committee.

By taking a comprehensive look at our short- and long-term needs we will avoid acting reflexively, emotionally or politically with respect to these important subjects. Our taxpayer dollars are precious and we must be fiscally responsible in setting priorities. Our ratings agency praised our approach to capital planning.

I appreciate very much your attention during this presentation. However, this is the part that I enjoy the most: 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 honoree today exemplifies that spirit of service.

A woman of tremendous accomplishment, both professionally and personally, our honoree is a native Trumbullite whose family has a long history of service to our community. Her mother, Clare Hampford, for example, was a member of the Trumbull Board of Education and is widely regarded as a model for other Board members to emulate. So I guess community service is in her DNA.

An accomplished executive, as President and CEO of Hampford Research, she doubled the business in her 12 years at the helm. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Society of Chemical Manufacturer's and Affiliates, and has been awarded the President's Leadership Award for Advocacy by that organization. Kate is also the Chairman of the Board of the Bridgeport Regional Business Council, and was recognized by the BRBC as a Woman Business leader. She has also been recognized as a Women of Innovation by the Connecticut Technology Council.

In a very interesting note, she was a Senior Vice President of American Movie Classics, among her wide-ranging experiences as an executive.

In Trumbull, she is the Chair of the Board of Trumbull Community Television and on the Board of Directors of the ACE Foundation, the Academic Challenge for Excellence, a foundation that raises money in support of our academic teams in the Trumbull Public School System. She volunteers at the First Selectman's Golf Classic, which raises money for our academic and sports programs.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that she is a tireless volunteer working with our renowned We the People Constitutional Studies team. That team has won multiple state championships and will be competing at the national level this coming April.

She is an extraordinary business woman, wife, mother, and volunteer. It is my honor to present the First Selectman's Award for Community Service to my friend, Kate Hampford Donohue.

**Let me close with this. I respect our past, I have pride in our present and I am confident in our future.**

**Trumbull truly is the place to be.**