

STATE OF THE TOWN -2024

Good morning and thank you for coming to the Town of Trumbull's annual State of the Town address and for your continued support and commitment to our community.

Let me begin by thanking everyone associated with this event. Special thanks to Dan Onofrio and the BRBC and the Trumbull Chamber of Commerce.

Thank you to the sponsors of this program, Aquarian Water Company, M&T Bank, and United Illuminating. Thank you, Dan for your kind words, and finally a thank you to Tashua Knolls, and all their staff.

It is great to be here today to share my remarks with our business community and all our citizens.

Trumbull is a special place, and I am honored to be the First Selectman of this wonderful town.

Before beginning my formal comments, I would ask all of us to recognize our first responders, our health professionals, and

our teachers. Please join me in a round of applause for all of them.

Thank you to all our elected officials and members of our Boards and Commissions who have joined us this morning. Your steadfast focus on the important issues facing our town makes our community even better.

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.

As I've said many times over the past seven years, my vision for Trumbull is a simple one, a safe community with excellent schools, varied housing options, ample recreational opportunities, efficient services, and a sound financial profile.

Four years after enduring a worldwide health and economic crisis the same words and thoughts are more important 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 continues to pay off.

Trumbull is a safe community.

Trumbull is still the place to be!

Trumbull continues to be a community of choice receiving noteworthy distinctions for its schools, quality of life, and business relocation attractiveness. Trumbull continues to see some of the highest move-in rates in Connecticut.

The Trumbull housing market is not experiencing a slowdown in market value. Average sales price rose 4% this year. Inventory remains low, making Trumbull's efforts to diversify housing stock for seniors and the workforce more important than ever.

Just a few weeks ago, Realtor.com named Trumbull the 16th hottest zip code in the nation for people wanting to purchase a home. This designation is based on market demand data including the number of unique viewers seeking property and the days a property remains on the market.

Trumbull truly is the place to be!

Economic Development, is one of the many reasons why Trumbull is a thriving and desirable community!

When you have a balanced community that offers a solid value and high quality of life like Trumbull, this is no surprise. We are a safe community with excellent schools, parks, and services.

We have a diverse base of over 3,500 businesses from major corporations like Lockheed Martin/Sikorsky, Cooper Surgical, Henkel, Amazon, Transpak, Yale New Haven Health, and others, to small locally owned and operated businesses in our village districts and commercial areas. Our business community is stronger today than it has ever been.

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

When I came into office in 2018, I emphasized the need to fill the many vacant properties throughout town that were a result of an exodus of businesses from 2013-2015. In our Trumbull Corporate Park, we had over 400,000 square feet of vacant space. We have under 100,000 square feet of space remaining to reoccupy.

In the area of Lindeman/Oakview and Cambridge Drive, we had 60% of properties vacant in 2017. I am proud to say today that we have turned this around with only minor vacancies remaining.

We are working with Howard Rappaport, the developer/owner of Ten Trumbull to document the turnaround story of the Lindeman/Oakview Drive area as a case study of best practices for other communities to learn from.

We attracted almost \$180,000,000 in investment. Created a mixed-use neighborhood. Brought 12 new businesses to the area. And Connecticut Educational Services (CES) this year expanded its footprint to 40 Oakview Drive, opening the Oakview School servicing 150 children from 40 towns.

We have more to do, but the turnaround of this once underperforming area in seven years (not 30 or 40 years) is astounding. A true Trumbull success story.

We have had another year of new business locations and expansions throughout town.

So far this year we have welcomed Integrated Dermatology, Thrive, Aspire Living and Learning, 123 Pronto, Lobo Reyes, TLC Homecare, Nephrology Associates, Snipes, Choice Pet, Ross Dress for Less (is coming soon), Trumbull Academy of Karate, Natural Kitchen, Sana's Beauty, Black Pearl Bubble Tea, Fun Spot Arcade, Nathan's, Denta's Flowers, Naturally U, Trumbull Convenience and Lottery, and others.

In 2023 we had 496 new business registrations in Trumbull, a major uptick from 2018 when there were under 300 annually.

We have several projects fully approved, the Gateway Commons mixed-use development on the Trumbull Monroe line, 48 Monroe Turnpike housing for seniors, and the Trumbull Center mixed-use development, that we anticipate will get underway over the next year as interest rates come down. We are working closely with each owner/developer to support their efforts.

Just last week, the Planning and Zoning Commission approved a new 12,000 Square Foot Medical Office building in Long Hill Green adjacent to the Long Hill Market Plaza. This new build will help an existing Trumbull business, Pediatric Healthcare Associates, expand in town. They hope to be in their new building by this time next year.

We continue to have our challenges in Trumbull Center and at the Trumbull Mall. As I have said, while these areas have challenges, they are significant opportunities. We continue to work with property owners in both areas to support transformation.

In Trumbull Center, in addition to the approved mixed-use development that I previously mentioned, we have Next Chapter Bookstore and Café expanding. Orthodontic Boutique of CT is also coming to the space above Webster Bank.

We are continuing to work with the Connecticut Department of Transportation to improve the intersection of White Plains and Daniels Farm Road, and we are seeking funding to bring a variety of improvements to the Trumbull Center Corridor.

Our Trumbull Mall Area Market Feasibility and Land Use Study is being finalized. This extensive deep dive has resulted in a transformative vision for the area. Over time, we have the opportunity to add over 1,000,000 Square Feet of infill development to the mall property.

The area will transform from a group of buildings in the center of a large sea of parking, to a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood. Over the next few months, my staff will be meeting with Planning and Zoning to forward some regulation changes for the area that will set the stage for investment.

In collaboration with property owners, we are taking this opportunity to the marketplace to attract new tenants and investors. I will be working with our state legislative delegation, to seek a partnership with the State to support the transformation of the Trumbull Mall.

Trumbull's economic success is a collective success. Everyone here today is a part of that success. We appreciate all your investment in Trumbull.

I want to recognize Rina Bakalar, our Director of Economic and Community Development, for all her efforts and successes in making Trumbull a place where people want live, work, and play and businesses want to do business!

As you just heard there is a lot of good news in Trumbull and I'm just getting started! I will continue by highlighting some of the significant projects, programs, and ongoing initiatives.

Public safety is my highest priority, and we continue to fully fund our police force and emergency medical services. Last November we restored a pension to police officers hired after July 1st, 2014 and going forward. Trumbull, like other communities across the country has had difficulties hiring police officers. The return of the pension will help to facilitate recruitment and retention of qualified officers. That has already begun!

There are also important infrastructure improvements continuing across town. Including new sidewalks, crosswalks, safety signage, traffic signals, and more. All these projects continue to improve pedestrian and vehicular safety. Many of these projects are grant funded, providing tax relief to our residents and businesses.

The traffic light, crosswalks, road signage and trail improvements at the Fitness Edge Plaza are now complete. Infrastructure work is continuing in the Long Hill Green area initiated by the 2018 Long Hill Green Planning Study. Additional sidewalks are being installed as well as the long-awaited traffic signal at Whitney and Main Street.

I am also pleased to announce a new grant award in the amount of \$842,000, which will allow us to construct a sidewalk/trail connection from Dunellen Road down Whitney Avenue to the Pequannock River Trail. Not only is this an important safety improvement but it also connects our commercial center with our trail system which will be a benefit for businesses, residents, and visitors in the area.

Also, we continue to work on the grant funded project for 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.

Trumbull has the most recreational and open space per capita in the state of Connecticut. We have refurbished parks, repaired bridges on the rails to trails pathway, renovated basketball courts, built new tennis courts, and as I reported last year, we have the most outdoor Pickleball courts of any town in the state of Connecticut.

The new multi-use turf athletic field at Indian Ledge Park, partially funded with American Rescue Plan funds, is spectacular and we will be celebrating its opening soon. A new turf football field, which includes a new track was installed at Trumbull High School's McDougall Stadium over the summer.

We opened the new Trumbull Farmers' Market in May at a beautiful location in Twin Brooks Park. The park provides the perfect backdrop for this market. As you may know Twin Brooks underwent a major renovation last year and I hope you have had an opportunity to visit there as well as our other recreational areas.

There are many town projects and programs that are being funded through the American Rescue Plan Act, otherwise known as ARPA, including our road preservation program, police equipment, library improvements, emergency assistance funds, improvements to the Nature and Arts Center, the Health Department, Tashua pool upgrades, a new splash pad at Beach Pool, grants to non-profits, and many other important town initiatives. Again, funding these programs and projects through ARPA provides tax relief to our residents and businesses.

I'm also pleased to report that we broke ground last spring on the new Trumbull Veterans and First Responders Center. And again, thanks to Rina Bakalar's vigorous pursuits, the greater part of the funding for this project is being provided through grants from the State of Connecticut and the Federal government.

We have paved and completed drainage work on miles of our town roads including our major arteries. We are continuing the road preservation program. This program makes it possible to maintain the integrity of many of our roads, allowing us to pave other roads that are in greater need of attention.

Ultimately, this will change the course of our road paving program, allowing us to pave more roads.

I would like to thank George Estrada, our Public Works Director for all he does to maintain and improve the town's infrastructure. In addition to their daily activities the Public Works and Parks departments have demonstrated their skills in dealing with all kinds of events from a bombogenesis to the recent microburst. The rapid response to that microburst is a shining example of the skill of our public works and parks employees.

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

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

Our general fund, our towns rainy day fund is a healthy \$32.5 million. It is well above the 10% threshold expected by the rating agencies. This has helped us to retain our AA+ bond rating.

The strong position in our general fund gives us flexibility in these challenging times.

Municipal budgeting is challenging under the best of circumstances. Responding to rising insurance and energy costs, fluctuating interest rates, and inflationary pressures all create a difficult budgetary environment.

We continue to be diligent, and 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 2024-2025 fiscal year, 34.68, was set in May by the Board of Finance.

This represents a tax increase of 1.55%. This increase is 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.

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

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

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 seven years, my administration has increased the allocation to the Board of Education by over \$24 million.

This year's allocation was one of the largest increases both in terms of percentage and dollars. It is important to note that since I took office, we have consistently increased our investment in education and that investment has paid off.

Our school system is ranked seventh in the state of Connecticut. Trumbull High School is ranked in the top 5% of the nation. All our schools are State of Connecticut Schools of Distinction.

Of course, the real credit belongs to our incredible teachers, administrators, staff and to our students and parents. I want to recognize our schools' superintendent Dr. Semmel, and the Board of Education for all they do for our students and families.

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.

As I said earlier and its worth repeating, public safety is my highest priority.

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 continue to fully fund our police force and we have made sure that our officers are properly paid, trained, and equipped. Since my administration took office crime is down. My commitment to public safety and our first responders will always be a primary focus of my administration.

I want to recognize Chief Michael Lombardo for his outstanding management of our police department and all that he does every day to keep our community safe. Also, we have a new EMS Chief, Colin Basset who is doing an exemplary job in this very important position.

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.

Trumbull continues to take a balanced approach to diversifying our housing stock so we can retain residents, especially our seniors. We also want to attract young people to settle in our wonderful community and we want workers like our Police, EMS, teachers, trades people, and others to be able live here in town.

The community survey conducted as a part of the state mandated affordable housing plan revealed that residents want to focus on all aspects of senior housing options including affordable housing for seniors. The survey also showed considerable support for workforce housing efforts.

To this end, we are working to advance regulations and projects to create more options for our seniors including designated affordable units. We are also looking at opportunities to prioritize workforce housing.

As we have done previously, we have encouraged such efforts in areas that will be a catalyst for other economic activity and areas that have appropriate infrastructure such as the Trumbull Mall area. We have also opposed projects that don't meet those standards.

We continue to closely monitor the impact of the apartment complexes 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 our apartment complexes were previously in Trumbull schools. We will continue to monitor this and a partial moratorium for larger projects remains in place.

As First Selectman I depend on so many of our wonderful town employees to make sure we are delivering the services our community relies on. I've recognized some of our town employees already. I would ask all our Town employees here today to stand and be recognized for the outstanding jobs they do every day for our community.

On Tuesday, November 5th, at the general election the Town of Trumbull will hold a referendum concerning the approval of the appropriation and bond authorization for the planning, design, and construction of a new Hillcrest Middle School.

This Wednesday evening, September 25th, there will be a Community Forum at Hillcrest Middle School at 7 PM to discuss this project including the financial impact on our taxpayers. This important forum is open to the entire town.

In conclusion, let me state unequivocally that the state of our town is excellent!

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 keep us safe and, if we are in need, are quick to render assistance.

We have a town with wonderful people who continually give back to make this great town even better.

As for the future, I am committed to making sure Trumbull remains a thriving and affordable community. We will continue to work with state officials to make sure Trumbull gets its fair share of state revenues, we will continue to grow our grand list and we will continue to keep spending in check.

It is my intent to work with the Town Council and Board of Finance in a bipartisan fashion to bring forward a referendum to the Town next spring to approve the construction of a new Trumbull Senior/Community Center.

I am committed to the success of our residents and our businesses. Trumbull is a wonderful community, and I am confident in its future.

I am humbled and honored to be the First Selectman of this great community!

Thank you!