



Connecting Fairfield

News from First Selectman Bill Gerber

Photo: Habitat for Humanity's four-home construction site on Greenfield Street. Fairfield First Selectman Bill Gerber joined Board of Selectmen members Christine Vitale and Brenda Kupchick, Economic Development Director Mark Barnhart, CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Coastal Fairfield County Carolyn Vermont, Director of Construction Matt Slattery, and United Methodist Church Coalition volunteers to mark the "wall raising" on Saturday, February 10.

A Personal Note

Dear Fairfielders,

My schedule has been packed with meetings with department heads, Boards and Commissions, and residents' groups. There is so much positive energy in these meetings, with dedicated individuals working collaboratively on projects that will benefit all of our citizens. This is why I tell people at least once a day how much I love this job.

As we continue to work on the 2024-2025 budget, we are comprehensively trying to address the Town's needs, while evaluating a list of things that have unfortunately languished on the to-do list for years. That list includes large-scale projects such as HVAC modernization; necessary investment in the Town's decades old sewer system; flood resiliency plans including tide gate maintenance and repair; drainage detention in the Town's flood prone areas; aging buildings in need of maintenance and upgrades, and other infrastructure needs.

Prior administrations have passed on the opportunity to undertake these crucial projects when the cost would have been one half or one quarter of what they will cost today. We are beyond the point when many of these projects can be delayed any longer, forcing us to take action now.

We'll be releasing the First Selectman's budget the middle of next week, then the Board of Selectmen will hold budget hearings on February 26, 27 and 28. You'll be able to attend these meetings or join on [FairTV](#).

Your thoughts and concerns matter, and I want to hear from you. You can reach me at firstselectman@fairfieldct.org.

Bill Gerber
First Selectman

Primary Issues

Penfield Pavilion

The construction contractor has begun mobilizing his materials, equipment and crew, with work scheduled to commence on the Pavilion by the end of the month. The first priority will be to remove the existing decks, railings, and stairs. This will make it easier to access beneath the building for the foundation work needed. Throughout the construction period, the project team will make every effort to minimize any inconvenience to our community. As a reminder, beach parking is available across the street. Please follow the signs posted to access the beach.

UI Monopoles

On Thursday, February 15, the Connecticut Siting Council voted to issue a Certificate to United Illuminating for the Hannon-Morrisette Alternative, which would move the monopoles from the south side of the railroad tracks to the north side in a "double circuit" design. UI has

acknowledged that there is no plan or design yet for this route. Four Council members voted in favor, one opposed, and two abstained.

I believe this approval does a grave disservice to the Town and its residents. The Siting Council made a decision and voted with no information as to what the pole heights will be, where the poles will be located, and what the potential impacts will be. Since UI has not yet designed this alternative route, property owners to the north could be facing significant impacts on their properties without any due process rights.

The move to the north side was never suggested by any member of the grassroots organizations that have been actively working to fight this project. The Siting Council's move from south to north cannot divide the Town in our unified opposition to this project. We continue to believe that undergrounding is the best option. We are discussing an appeal with our legal team.

United Illuminating contacted the Town immediately after the meeting with this statement:

"Now that the Connecticut Siting Council (CSC) has issued their draft decision and order, starting Monday, 2/19/24, UI staff will proactively be going door-to-door distributing Fairfield to Congress Project information updates to residents and businesses abutting the north side of the CTDOT tracks. Brief project informational sheets will be inserted into clear plastic bag door hangers to provide a status update of the Project based on the recent CSC decision.

UI will be spending the next several months redesigning and engineering the new approved route. Therefore, UI will not have any specific project information about pole locations, heights, or easements at this time. However, we are committed to providing the community with transparent and timely information as it becomes available. At which time new land surveys, Geotech borings, and due diligence efforts in the area become necessary, we will proactively alert the Town as well as all impacted residents and businesses.

UI representatives will display company ID badges and branded hard hats for easy identification."

It is still very important to email Governor Lamont with your opposition to this project. You can email the governor [here](#).

If you would like to remain up to date on all details of the proposed monopoles plan and be a critical part of the grass-roots opposition, please fill out a membership [form for Empowering Fairfield here](#).

Flood Resiliency



The Rooster River near Stratfield Avenue

We are fortunate to live in a Town with abundant natural beauty, including upland forest, lakes, rivers, salt marsh, wetlands and meadows throughout inland and coastal Fairfield. As a result of its geography and topography, the Town is susceptible to flooding, especially during coastal storms and heavy rainfall. Our riverine areas are being challenged with heavier rainstorms: as an example, we received eight inches of rain in December, and another eight inches of rain in January.

With flood resiliency, there's no one solution; rather, there's a toolbox with many solutions. We need to bring multiple strategies to the table to maintain safer homes built in flood-prone areas while respecting the boundaries of nature.

Rooster River

The Rooster River remains an area of flooding concern, with plans to build detention basins along the river at Tunxis Hill Park and the Fairchild Wheeler Golf Course. The Town has been waiting for permits from the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), but the review time has been significantly delayed. Today we received comments on just one portion of the project, which was submitted to USACE in fall 2022. Although currently ARPA funds have been designated for this project, the Town is required to allocate the money by the end of 2024 and spend the funds by the end of 2026. We are committed to funding this project even if the ARPA funds need to be reallocated due to the time requirements. The planned work will proceed when the USACE permits are received to address the flooding impacts throughout the neighborhoods along the Rooster River.

Fairfield's Floodplain Management Plan

Town staff as well as the Town's Flood and Erosion Control Board collaborated on a flood plain management program which includes prevention, property protection, floodplain management regulations, structural and natural systems protection, education and awareness. The plan is available for public review on the Town's Plan and Zoning Department webpage under the Forms and Documents tab. You can [access it here](#).

Appeal Period for Revised Flood Insurance Rate Maps

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is proposing revised Flood Insurance Rate Maps for the Saugatuck Watershed area of Fairfield. This is limited to riverine areas only: coastal areas were not re-studied as part of this mapping.

A 90-day appeal period begins on February 16, 2024. Any owner or lessee of real property who believes his or her property rights will be adversely affected by the proposed flood hazard determinations may file an appeal. The sole basis for an appeal is the possession of knowledge or information indicating that the proposed flood determinations are scientifically or technically incorrect. All appeals must be forwarded by the Town to FEMA during the 90-day appeal period.

The new proposed maps are available for review in the Town Plan and Zoning Office at Sullivan Independence Hall. They can also be viewed online via [instructions found on the town's website](#).

Anyone with questions regarding the new mapping of appeals can contact Assistant Planning Director Emmeline Harrigan at 203-256-3050, or at eharrigan@fairfieldct.org.

You Should Know

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS TRAINING



FREE

COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TRAINING

***Saturdays, March 2nd through April 6th. 8am to 2pm at
Fairfield Regional Fire School, 205 Richard White Way.***

Join Fairfield CERT for free disaster preparedness/response training. Learn basic disaster response skills such as: fire safety, light search & rescue, team organization, disaster psychology, emergency shelter operations, and more.

Learn more and register at
fairfieldrecreation.com/programs/adults/cert_.php

Community Emergency Response Training

Fairfield's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) is a nationally supported, locally implemented initiative that teaches people how to better prepare for hazards that may affect their communities. Fairfield CERT programs train and organize teams of volunteers to assist their families, neighbors, co-workers, and other community members during emergencies when professional responders may not be immediately available to assist. You will learn how to prepare and care for yourself and your community. Upon completion of the CERT Basic Training course, participants are eligible and invited to join the Fairfield CERT Team. The training is free and open to those 18 and older.

The Fairfield CERT mission is to assist first responders during emergencies and disasters under the direction of the Fairfield Office of Emergency Management. "We know disasters can happen at any time, and take different forms—hurricanes, blizzards, flooding, shootings, chemical spills—and that the key to a rapid response is having trained personnel available to help. Our trained CERT volunteers play a vital role and multiple our manpower capabilities during a crisis," said Deputy Fire Chief, Deputy Fairfield Emergency Manager and Fairfield CERT Coordinator Kyran Dunn.

CERT is a federal initiative to promote citizen emergency preparedness. The Fairfield CERT Team has more than 100 trained volunteers and is one of more than 2,700 teams nationwide. For more information, contact Norma Peterson, Fairfield CERT Liaison at citizencorps@optonline.net. Register online [here](#).

United Illuminating Street Work List

The following streets have been submitted to the Town by United Illuminating as scheduled for pruning and removal of dangerous trees in 2024. United Illuminating's Utility Protection Zone Program is intended to reduce the amount of vegetation that threatens utility lines during storms, and fair-weather events. Before any work begins on your property, you will receive a Notification of Consent. More information on United Illuminating's Utility Protection Zone Program is available [here](#). Or contact Fairfield's Tree Warden, Jeffrey Minder, at jminder@fairfieldct.org.

Abbey Rd	Lamplighter Ln	Salem Rd
Arrowhead Ln	Lilac Ln	Samp Mortar Dr
Black Rock Tpke	Lindamir Ln	Sasapequan PI
Bronson Rd	Lyman Ln	Sasapequan Rd
Brookside Dr	Meeting House Ln	Saxonwood Rd
Buckboard Ln	Merwins Ln	Senese Dr
Burr St	Mine Hill Rd	Shetland Rd
Canterbury Ln	Mohican Hill Rd	Short Hill Ln
Cascade Dr	Morehouse Dr	Siacus PI
Cherry Ln	Morehouse Hwy	Springer Rd
Congress St	Mountain Laurel Rd	Steiner St
Cross Hwy	N. Benson Rd	Stroll Rock Cmn
Deepwood Rd	Nepas Rd	Surrey Ln
Dell Dale Rd	Nonopoge Rd	Tahmore Dr
Dunham Rd	Old Academy Rd	Tahmore PI
Florence Ln	Old Black Rock Tpke	Tanglewood Rd
Galloping Hill Rd	Oriole Ln	Taquoshe PI
Governors Ln	Pansy Rd	Timber Ln
Greenfield Hill Rd	Papurah Rd	Towne House Rd
Guydan Ln	Park Ave	Trail St
Hemlock Rd	Pheasant Ln	Trillium Cir
Hillside Rd	Ponuncamo Rd	Trillium Rd
Hollydale Rd	Primrose Ln	Valleyview Rd
Horseshoe Ln	Redding Rd	Wampus Way
Hoydens Hill Rd	Richard PI	Winnepoge Dr
Hoydens Rd	Rock Ridge Rd	Winoca Rd
Indian Point Rd	Rolling Ridge Rd	Woodridge Ave
Joan Dr	Romanock PI	
Lakeview Dr	Romanock Rd	

Snowstorms and Snow Removal

We have a few weeks of winter remaining, and snow is still likely. With 275 miles of roads in Town, during and after snowstorms the Department of Public Works is out clearing roads as quickly as possible for emergency vehicles and safe access. We thank you for your patience and for calling to let us know when there's a problem. You can find the answers to most of your snowstorm and snow removal questions on the [DPW website pages here](#). Our emergency number is 203-256-3177. You may also use this number for non-emergency issues, or to report sidewalks that have not been cleared 24 hours after the end of snowfall. Please know that your calls are reviewed and addressed in order of urgency.

Senior and Disabled Homeowners Program

We are accepting applications for the Senior and Disabled Homeowners program. Applicants can apply in the Assessor's Office from now through May 15, 2024. State and local laws provide real property tax relief programs for Fairfield residents who are age 65 and over or totally disabled and whose annual incomes and assets are within specified limits. These programs are designed to help seniors and the totally disabled remain in their homes. Town tax relief programs are defined in Section 95-15 of the [Town Code](#) and are administered by the [Assessor's Office](#). [Details can be found here](#).

Free Tax Assistance at Fairfield Public Library

On Tuesdays through April 9 from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., free tax preparation help will be available to library patrons through the services of AARP/VITA/IRS Volunteer Tax Assistance Program. This service is especially suited to seniors and low-to-moderate income households. No appointment is necessary; patrons will be helped on a first-come, first-served basis. Patrons requesting assistance will need a government-issued ID (e.g., driver's license, US passport, CT State ID card); Social Security cards for all household members, and any necessary tax documents, such as W-2 forms and past tax returns.

Water Pollution Control Facility (WPCF) Maintenance

The treatment facility's second digester is scheduled to be emptied and serviced soon. We do not anticipate any adverse odor emissions from the process; any odors will be similar to normal treatment plant operations. This service is scheduled to prevent operational failures through regular maintenance.

Board of Assessment Appeals Process

This is a reminder that the deadline to appeal your assessment is by end-of-business on Tuesday, February 20. Applications are available on the website from the Tax Assessor. You can access the application [here](#).

Solar Energy with a Home Battery

You can learn more about the benefits of having a battery back-up system to power your home with clean solar energy by attending a free webinar conducted by the Connecticut

Green Bank on Thursday, Feb. 22 from 6:30-7:30 p.m. The webinar is part of the Sustainable Fairfield Task Force's "PowerSmart" program, designed to educate homeowners. You can [register for the virtual presentation here](#). Right click on the image under "Upcoming Events" toward the bottom of the Welcome page.

"Comics Bring the Heat" for Fairfield Families

"Comics Bring the Heat" features seven stand-up comics raising funds for Fairfield Social Services to help families, seniors and veterans with heating costs. Don't miss this fun evening and help cover energy costs for up to 20 Fairfield families, ensuring they can stay warm in their own homes. [Tickets are available here](#).



presents

Sponsored by:



COMICS BRING THE HEAT

A stand-up comedy fundraiser for Fairfield Social Services to help local families, seniors and veterans with heating costs.

Friday, February 23 | 7:30pm

Doors open at 7:00

Scandinavian Club

1351 South Pine Creek Road | Fairfield, CT

Plentiful free parking

\$25

TICKETS:

ComicsBringTheHeat.eventbrite.com

PG-16

Some mild adult content

BYOB

(Beverages, food, etc.)



HEADLINER:

Andy Pitz



CONNECTICUT'S FUNNIEST COMICS!



Gina O'Connell
(MC/host)



Laurie Yellow Sweater



Eileen Fitzpatrick Fickes



Mat Orefice



Trish Gernert



Joe Aulogia



Avery Quinn

One Book, One Town

Have you started reading the 2024 selection for One Book One Town, Warrior Girl Unearthed, by Angeline Bouley, yet? Copies are available to borrow in print or digitally from Fairfield's libraries, or to purchase at the Fairfield University Bookstore on Post Road. The

middle grade selection is *We Still Belong*, by Christine Daya. For younger readers, the selection is *Berry Song*, by Michaela Goade. Angeline Boulley will appear in person on Tuesday, March 5 at 7 p.m. at Fairfield University's Quick Center for the Arts. Let's all read together!



Christine Brown, Chief of Staff in the First Selectman's Office, is reading One Book One Town *Warrior Girl Unearthed* by Angeline Boulley.

Make the Connection



Q&A with Conservation Director Tim Bishop

Q: What's your background that led you to your role as the Town's Conservation Director?

A: Since I grew up out in the woods and swamps catching frogs and salamanders, I'd say that I knew early in my childhood that I would have a career in the environmental field. I went into my first day of undergrad, declared in environmental conservation and that direction never strayed through to grad school. A majority of my career has been in the private sector, as an environmental consultant focusing and mixing natural resources projects with contaminant hydrogeology investigation and remediation. After 18 years, I was

burning out in consulting, felt unfulfilled and sought to pursue my passions in natural resources when the position here at the Town became available.

Q: What do you think are the biggest conservation challenges facing Fairfield right now?

A: As a coastal Town, there's no doubt that coastal resiliency and climate change pose significant threats to our way of life and natural resources. It is no secret that weather extremes have had direct adverse effects on us all, at home, at work and at play. Think about in the last decade how our area has experienced weather extremes. When was the last time you took your kids ice skating on a pond, how it always rains and floods (hardly drizzles or showers) and when was the last time you took a long drive and had little to no bugs on your windshield? We're experiencing change and everything in our world is connected, all of which have consequences on our natural environment. Both inland and tidal wetlands help to endure coastal storms, water detention, improve water quality and wildlife habitat— and maintaining their overall health is one of the greatest challenges I see right now.

Q: How much open space does the Town of Fairfield have? How is that maintained?

A. This Department currently manages approximately 1,200-acres of Town open space designated by roughly 44 individual spaces. By open space, I'm referring to conservation open space under our jurisdiction and not parks or golf courses, which are sometimes considered in open space inventories. Our open spaces are maintained by Department staff, including four full-time staff who are dedicated to keeping trails open, cutting trees, replacing signage & fences, planting trees and removing invasive species.

Q: How do the Conservation Commission, Inland Wetlands Agency, Land Acquisition Commission and the Shellfish Commission work with your department?

A: The Conservation Department essentially acts as the agent for these Commissions and while the Inland Wetlands Agency is the only Regulatory board of the four, all of them are comprised of dedicated residents volunteering their time to execute their respective environmental purviews. I really enjoy working with everyone on all of these Commissions and I believe that we have formed great partnerships between the groups and this Department. I also like to point out that they do not always get enough recognition for their personal sacrifices serving the Town and their accomplishments fly under the radar for protecting and enhancing the natural resources for the benefit of the public good.

Q: What are the unique concerns Fairfield has as a coastal community along Long Island Sound?

A: Some state experts have published projections of models which show increased migration of the shoreline landward by 2050. This is a real concern for the entire Town, whether you live south of Post Road or not. Loss or degradation of tidal marshes and increased coastal and inland storm frequency and severity also have significant impacts Town-wide on residents and our natural resources.

Q: What is your long-term vision for the Town's conservation efforts?

A: I strive to remain engaged, strongly persistent and as proactive as possible to enhance this Department's efforts, with the support of the Administration, Commissions and other Town Departments/bodies to put forth the maintenance and protection our residents and natural environment deserve. I'm committed to acquiring more land for open spaces, reviving existing open spaces, reconnecting with the public, streamlining permitting

processes, restoring habitats and maintaining strong enforcement of applicable Regulations.

Q: What are the educational resources your department offers?

A: With respect to educational resources within the Department, our website and staff are exceptional. With the Town's website being a few months old, the Department has been adding informational resources, links and forms to our [Department homepage](#) so that it is easy to find and answers many of the public's questions. That includes the [News and Updates section](#), where content is added almost weekly. I always encourage a call or visit to our 1st floor counter, as it is much easier to answer questions in advance, than pursue a violation or enforcement action.

Q: This newsletter includes a photo of a juvenile bald eagle taken in the Pine Creek Marsh (Eyes on Fairfield, bottom of newsletter). Do we have eagles nesting in Fairfield?

A: Our national bird, symbolizing pride and strength, has been seen often in Southport and a nesting pair has been documented. I have seen juveniles and mature birds in Southport Harbor many times myself and they are an amazing sight. The population rebound of the large raptors including eagles, ospreys and hawks we have in this area is really great to see and it's a relief to know that part of the food chain is restoring itself for the ecological health of our region.

Q: What other species of special concern live in Fairfield? How do you protect their habitats, nesting areas, and food sources?

A: In general, songbirds, insects (specifically pollinators) and amphibians are groups of species that are of concern in Town due to development stresses, degradation of habitat and environmental quality in the region. Specifically, amphibians have a difficult time during migrations between habitats for breeding, nesting and finding food. I completed a project last year and began mapping [vernal pools](#), which are wetland habitats critical to the survival of a handful of species. This mapping project, (one of the only municipalities in the State) is one tool that the Department will use for protecting these species from vanishing in our area. Individual homeowners can do their part in protecting natural resources and habitats as well, and if everyone did one small thing, it would make an enormous difference Town-wide.

Q: What do you want people to know about conservation efforts and successes in Fairfield?

A: I can't stress enough the importance of approaching the Department for an informal in-person or phone discussion about your next project. The short list would include last year's revisions to the inland wetland regulations and fees to provide more protection overall and that align with surrounding Towns, a statewide pioneer and leader of a Shellfish Commission here in Fairfield, land acquisitions at a current rate averaging 1 new parcel every 3 months and 1,200 amazing acres of conservation open space undergoing significant improvements to benefit the environment and our residents.

[You can find maps and a guide to Town Open Space here.](#)

[How to Contact Your State Legislators](#)

I encourage you to reach out to your legislators with questions or comments on their legislative work. Click on the name below to contact them at their website.

State Senator [Tony Hwang](#)

State Representative [Cristin McCarthy Vahey](#)

State Representative [Jennifer Leeper](#)

State Representative [Sarah Keitt](#)

Board of Selectmen Meetings

Our next regular Board of Selectmen meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 21 at 4 p.m. Meetings are held in Independence Hall and open to public, and you can attend either in person or on Webex. You can also read minutes of previous meetings [here](#).

Eyes on Fairfield

Help us celebrate the unique beauty of life in Fairfield by sharing your photos with your community. We've received so many beautiful photos of our Town—keep them coming! Submit your photos at 300 dpi to firstselectman@fairfieldct.org. We live in such a special Town. Share with us the sites and sights you love.



Photo credit: Dorothea E. Brennan
Juvenile bald eagle in South Pine Creek Salt Marsh
Want to know more about the Pine Creek Marsh? [Read about it here.](#)

WHY YOU'RE RECEIVING THIS EMAIL:

As a resident, business owner, student, or individual interested in news about the Town of Fairfield, your name appears on an email list that belongs to the Town database. You might have requested to be on this list or added your name to another Town communication in the past.

This email arrives in your inbox every other Friday and is official news from Fairfield's First Selectman and the Town of Fairfield. If this email was forwarded to you and you want to receive official emails from your First Selectman, [click here](#). You can also unsubscribe from any newsletter you don't want to receive. Go to the bottom of the email and click unsubscribe.