

Town of Fairfield News

12/30/2021 - 2021 In Review | Happy New Year



Happy New Year Fairfielders!

At the end of 2020 I sent out a year in review [newsletter](#) reflecting on what a difficult year it was for our Town but also highlighting the good work of our Town employees in their service to our residents. While we all had hoped 2021 would be less challenging, we still have a lot to be grateful for, living in a community filled with so many generous and kind people.

Fairfield in 2021

Social Services

- Thanks to generous donors, the **Town's COVID Relief Fund** granted more than \$150,000 in donations to assist 52 Fairfield residents and families impacted by COVID.
- Thanks to the generosity of Fairfield Rotary, Unquowa School, Holy Family Church, Town Departments, Near and Far Aid, and our compassionate residents, Fairfield Social Services collected more than \$25,000 in gift cards and donations to distribute to Fairfield families in need during the holidays.
- The **Bigelow Center for Senior Activities** under the new leadership of Director, Brenda Steele, held hybrid classes, lectures, educational programs and the congregate lunch program. Bigelow Center membership has grown to more than 5,500 registered members.

- **Social Services**, in partnership with Operation Hope, delivered more than 500 bags of shelf-ready groceries through its Mobile Food Pantry to Fairfield homebound seniors, residents with disabilities and those impacted by COVID. Senior Transportation services also resumed trips for Fairfield residents for grocery shopping and medical appointments.
- I want to thank Director of Human Services, Julie DeMarco, who has been an excellent leader guiding the Senior Center and Town social services throughout COVID.



Health & Safety

- The **Health Department** has had another challenging year under the tireless leadership of Sands Cleary. Since vaccinations became available last December the Health Department has conducted 65 clinics performing over 28,500 vaccinations. This includes administering 1st, 2nd and booster vaccinations for 179 homebound individuals. In addition the department worked with Griffin Health and Hartford Healthcare to host an additional 25 clinics in Fairfield that vaccinated over 2,000 citizens. All Health departmental staff as well as Medical Reserve Corps and CERT volunteers continued through 2021 to work together to support the vaccination clinics.
- The department's **contact tracing** team reached out to 4,290 cases over the year and thousands of their contacts providing valuable guidance and responding to numerous questions from residents. The Health Department, Human Services Department and the CERT volunteer team set up and staffed the COVID Call Center for several months assisting residents with making vaccination appointments and answering questions. The department's environmental staff continued the enforcement of the State's COVID sector rules responding numerous complaints.
- This past year was also an extraordinary year for the **Health Department's School Nurses**, under the leadership of Jill Mitchell. Aside from their normal responsibilities of providing nursing care to students

across town, they also contact-traced, advised and counseled the families of over 920 school-related COVID-19 positive cases, and with over 4,000 students and staff who had to quarantine in 2021. The nurses have been a critical resource for the school community during the pandemic. Their efforts in patient education, staff training and their own professional development go beyond the current pandemic and aim to improve the health outcomes of the Fairfield school community.



- Under the leadership of our new Police Chief Robert Kalamaras who was sworn in last December, the **Fairfield Police Department**, took on many challenges facing law enforcement in modern policing, that requires so much more of the men and women who protect our town every single day. Our Police Department has provided the best service with resiliency and professionalism. The Department implemented a new Citizen Police Academy program focused on community engagement and conversation. The Department put in protocols to comply with specifications in the Police Accountability bill, created a new Diversity and LGBTQ Advisory group and completed construction on a new, regional emergency communications center. Furthermore, recognizing the necessity to evolve as a police agency with regard to transparency and accountability as well as the need to improve training surrounding empathy and use of force, the Department secured federal funding for a 10-year, comprehensive equipment and software solution from Axon Enterprises. The Fairfield Police Department additionally welcomed 11 new Police Officers, including four female officers. As of today, the Department responded to 48,561 calls for service. The agency continues to work toward State and National accreditation and looks forward to the many successes its future holds.
- It is with pride we are finally able to announce the **Fairfield County Regional Dispatch Center** is nearly complete. I want to thank Deputy Chief John Bucherati for guiding this project through supply chain issues,

and working with the State's communications vendors to complete their installation. It consolidates Fairfield and Westport's emergency communication into one multi-town 911 dispatch and is the first of its kind in the state. Once operational, residents from both communities will see increased service levels such as a reduction in call processing times, increased effectiveness during large-scale incidents effecting one or both communities and improved management of both internal and field resources.



- The **Fairfield Fire Department** deployed the High-Water vehicle to rescue multiple people trapped in cars stalled in flood waters during September's Storm Ida, and responded to numerous water and electrical emergencies during that event. They assisted many residents who experienced severe flooding at their homes. Department staff in partnership with United Illuminating overhauled the utility's emergency communication systems to speed up recovery from major utility disruptions caused by weather events. The changes they implemented with utility companies allow for more accurate and timely restoration of electric service as well as coordination with local resources to improve town-wide recovery efforts. The Fire Department continued their Fire Prevention initiatives which includes the Senior Citizen Smoke Detector Program where they replaced batteries or installed new smoke detectors for our most vulnerable residents. The members of our Fire Department responded to 8,945 calls throughout the year as of today. I was

particularly proud to swear in the first female Fire Fighter in our department in over 25 years. I want to pay special recognition to Denis McCarthy for his professionalism and dedication not only as Fairfield's Fire Chief but also as Director of the Emergency Management Team, guiding our operations throughout severe weather events and the pandemic.



Recreation

- As part of our efforts to improve efficiencies in Town government, we moved the Superintendent of DPW to the **Parks & Recreation Department** to improve accountability and streamline maintenance. Under the direction of Anthony Calabrese, the town launched a Parks and Recreation Master Plan, opened the new H. Smith Richardson Clubhouse with expanded golf programs for youth and adults, began the process of replacing outdated and unsafe playgrounds that will continue next year. We also remediated and renovated with new improvements to Gould Manor Park. We also reopened both Penfield and Jacky Durrell Pavilions after being closed in 2020 to public and private events. The Department planned 36 summer concerts, hosted 232 events at the pavilion and over 35 free events around town for adults and children. The department also registered and hosted summer camp programs and recreation soccer & basketball for over 6,500 participants. Our Park & Recreation Department is critical component for making Fairfield a fun place to live. I'm very

proud of that our Park & Recreation Director, Anthony Calabrese, was recognized and awarded the Connecticut Recreation & Parks Association (CRPA) Outstanding Professional Award!



- **Fairfield Public Libraries** reopened both the Main Branch and Fairfield Woods after modifying their operations due to COVID with 80,000 visits circulating 400,000 books. The library staff provided innovative programming in person, virtually and a hybrid setting, with 20,000 live participants and an additional 16,000 views of the previously recorded programs. We recently welcomed Scott Jarzombek as Fairfield's new Library Director.
- The **Conservation Department** welcomed its new Director, Timothy Bishop in August, who has hit the ground running, and is working to create efficiencies for the department. They are nearing completion of the automatic gate installation at Lake Mohegan-Cascades and is working to acquire several parcels totaling over 5 acres to be add to our existing open space inventory. Most recently, Tim revised inland wetland permit applications



which are available online. Tim has also begun the process of proposing changes to the Town's fees and regulations. The department had another record year for Shellfish permits and the Shellfish Commission was successful in constructing and operating a down-weller system for raising oysters. The Department worked with town Boy Scouts to complete two Eagle Scout projects at Lake Mohegan and with the Girl Scouts at Pine Creek



Business Support & Economic Development

- Due to the efforts of our **Community & Economic Director Mark Barnhart together with the Chamber of Commerce**, Fairfield was able to lessen the impact on small businesses during the pandemic. The department provided mini-grants of up to \$5,000 to help defray the purchase of personal protective equipment, physical modifications and other operating costs to help sustain the business enterprise. The program was funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development under the CARES Act. To date, the Town has assisted 82 Fairfield small businesses with grants totaling \$325,285.
- As part of its on-going “**Fairfield Buy Local**” campaign, the Town’s Office of Community & Economic Development worked with Beverly Balaz of the Fairfield Chamber of Commerce to market and promote the first-of-its kind Fairfield community e-gift card program that has been very successful. This program allows consumers to purchase a digital e-gift card that is available to be used at 77 Fairfield businesses, keeping spending local. Consumers have purchased more than \$75,000 in gift cards since the program officially launched last fall.
- We were pleased to welcome Aldi’s and Floor & Décor that opened in the former Kohl’s this past summer, which were among the more than 40 new businesses that opened in Fairfield this past year.



- The **Affordable Housing Committee** began work this past year on updating the Town's Affordable Housing Plan in advance of the June 2022 state statutory deadline. Since the last Plan was adopted in 2014, the Town has added more than 150 new affordable housing units and closed the gap to within 45 points of the 433 points needed to qualify for a temporary moratorium under Connecticut General Statute, 8-30g. The Town successfully acquired parcels for new affordable housing this year and my administration is working on new and creative ways to build our own affordable housing and reach the moratorium on the 8-30 statute as quickly as possible.
- The **Finance Department** which handles all the financial transactions for our Town, also successfully applied for reimbursement for expenses from FEMA as a result of Storm Isaias, which the Town received almost \$700,000. Even during the second year of the pandemic, the credit rating agencies reaffirmed the Town's AAA bond rating, which allowed us to borrow \$28 million of notes and bonds for critical town and school projects at historically low rates - less than 2%.

Town Infrastructure & Operations

- The **Charter Revision Commission** was established to review our Town's governing document and consider changes to the way our town government operates. I look forward to their recommendations next year. You can follow along their meetings [here](#).
- My administration worked to compile a long list of important projects in our Town proposed to utilize the American Rescue Plan federal funding, that was presented and approved by Town boards. I was particularly grateful to finally appropriate funding toward the long overdue plan to address flooding along the Rooster River. The full list of projects the Town will be using the ARPA funding for, can be found [here](#).
- The **IT Director, Dave Kelley**, single handedly continued to managed the virtual meetings throughout this past year so that boards and

commissions could conduct town business safely. The IT Department and I are working on a plan to outfit meeting spaces with sophisticated technology to enable hybrid Town board and commission meetings, that will allow elected and appointed members and the public to attend in person and virtually at the same time. Due to supply chain issues and purchasing requirements this process is taking longer than we would like. The IT Department is working to install an interim solution until the full solution becomes available.

- **The Department of Public Works** under the direction of John Marsilio, hired in November of 2020, and Assistant DPW Director John Cottell, that joined the Town in 2021, assembled the first comprehensive capital plan for DPW, Conservation, WPCA & Parks, acquired a paving management program to prioritize and plan for the future maintenance of Town roads, disposed of 200 obsolete pieces of equipment, and reorganized the department for greater efficiency. The Solid Waste & Recycling division installed a credit card payment system which has been well received.
- The **Town Clerk's** office launched the Town of Fairfield's Fraud Alert to notify property owners of new transactions regarding their property. The Town Clerk is providing a new free tool to help property owners protect one of their most valuable assets. With Fraud Alert you can sign up to receive alerts whenever a document such as a mortgage or a release of lien is recorded under your name.
- The **Building Department** with the help of our IT Director, implemented Fairfield's first online permitting portal, trained other departments to use the new system and have begun the process of going paperless. Permits can now be issued electronically, which will benefit businesses and residents alike.
- The Town's **DPW Tree Division** completed the most successful planting year to date with over 400 trees installed throughout the Town. Thank you to the Fairfield Forestry Committee, Fairfield Beach Residents Association, and all residents who have participated in the Tree Planting Program.
- Under the direction of our Tree Warden, Jeff Minder, Town crews pruned over 3,500 trees and removed approximately 250. They also answered



and completed over 1,500 resident requests. The Utility Protection Zone program completed 35 miles of road pruning and removing hazardous trees to ensure more utility resiliency and reliability. Our DPW crews worked around the clock after Isaias to clear trees throughout Town, which was a monumental task.

- The **DPW Highway** team paved 7.5 miles of town roads and chip sealed 10.7 miles. They ground and top soiled over 200 stumps and answered and completed over 1,050 resident requests for service.
- The **DPW Building Maintenance** team completed over 1,200 work orders on town facilities, modernized office spaces, reroofed three buildings, painted two buildings, upgraded the transfer station's electric and plumbing, and installed above ground fuel tanks at Smith Richardson Golf Course.
- **Human Resources** implemented an online job application tracking system to create a more efficient and user-friendly process, updated job descriptions for over 20 full-time positions, reached a tentative agreement with the Dispatcher's Union to effectuate the consolidation of Westport and Fairfield ECC communication center, provided extensive COVID support to departments and employees regarding the pandemic response, and has commenced contract negotiations with six of the seven Town unions. Together with the First Selectwoman's office, over 15 trainings were offered and/or required for Town employees to help advance skill sets and help modernize our workforce.
- The **Engineering Department** is intricately involved in numerous projects big and small throughout our entire Town, which include flooding, traffic, pedestrian & bicycle safety, public utilities, bridges, commercial & residential construction and remediation. I'm continually impressed by longtime manager Bill Hurley's ability to keep track of all the ongoing projects in partnership with so many departments and organizations. He is an invaluable member of Fairfield's team. The department applied for, assisted with and/or secured over 35 grants relating to bridges, flood improvement projects, traffic safety and pedestrian improvements. The Department also provided a project manager for the WPCA Hardening project which is almost complete.



I have sincerely appreciated the support and feedback from our residents over the last year. I want to wish you and your families a Happy & Healthy New Year!



Brenda L. Kupchick

To go read the 2020 in review, [click here](#).

[Archives](#)