

**MINUTES
REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING
STATE OF THE TOWN MEETING
DECEMBER 12, 2016**

CALL TO ORDER

The Regular State of the Town Meeting was called to order at 8:10 p.m. by Donna Rajczewski, Town Clerk, who announced that the RTM had eleven new members as follows:

DISTRICT II

Stacey Tie
Susanne Handler
Iris Mix
Timothy Goertel
William Cusack

DISTRICT III

Elise Feldman
Holly Giordano
Nicholas Vitale
Peter Riordan
Sue-Ellen Mitchell
Carolina McGoey

Mrs. Rajczewski swore in all of the new members with the exception of Carolina McGoey, who was unable to attend this meeting.

Upon Roll Call, the following members were present:

From District I, there were 11 members present, 4 absent.
From District II, there were 15 members present, 0 absent.
From District III, there were 14 members present, 1 absent.
From District IV, there were 14 members present, 2 absent.
From District V, there were 12 members present, 5 absent.
From District VI, there were 10 members present, 5 absent.

The absentees from District I were: Buchesky, Butler, Keane, Kelly.

The absentee from District III was McGoey.

The absentees from District IV were: Montanaro, Morrison.

The absentees from District V were: Adiletta, D. Bayne, Haueisen, Hayes, Hennessy.

The absentees from District VI were: Adelman, T. Hawkins, Lauritzen, Natale, Silsby.

The Moderator, Seth Morton, assumed the Chair.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

**** THE AGENDA WAS ACCEPTED BY UNIVERSAL CONSENT.**

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 14, 2016 ANNUAL MEETING

**** THE MINUTES WERE ACCEPTED BY UNIVERSAL CONSENT.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Moderator discussed "Unwarned Meetings" noting that this refers to discussion taking place on agenda items after a meeting has been adjourned by a quorum of committee members - this is not permitted. In addition, RTM members should always inform people that they are members of the RTM but they are not speaking on behalf of the RTM.

STATE OF THE TOWN REPORTS

CHAIR, PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

John Sini, Chairman, read the Commission report (attached).

CHAIR, BOARD OF EDUCATION

Michael Harman, Chairman, read the report of the Board of Education (attached).

CHAIR, BOARD OF FINANCE

John Zagrodzky, Chairman, read the Board report (attached).

FIRST SELECTMAN

First Selectman Jayme Stevenson read the report of the Board of Selectmen (attached).

**** UPON MOTION MADE AND SECONDED FROM THE FLOOR, IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY VOTED TO ADJOURN AT 9:30 P.M.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Telesco Blois
Telesco Secretarial Services

2016 State of the Town Address

John Sini, Jr., Darien Planning and Zoning, Chairman

December 12, 2016

Good evening Mister Moderator, Members of the RTM, town officials, and my fellow community members here and watching via TV-79.

I am John Sini, the Chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission. I am honored to be here with you this evening in order to deliver this year's State of the Town address on behalf of our Commission.

Before we get started, I would like congratulate the **Darien Varsity Football Team** and Coach Rob Trifone in closing its second perfect season in a row with Saturday's State Championship win. I want you all to know that they have spread lots of '*Blue Wave Pride*' throughout our entire community.

Like all of you here tonight, I am proud to share in the **spirit and tradition of civic volunteerism**, which makes this community so very special. Every time I step into this auditorium, I often reflect upon Norman Rockwell's *Freedom of Speech* painting and wanted to share this image as I kick things off.

I plan to share my **enthusiasm related to what is in store for Darien's future** from a planning, development, and infrastructure perspective. Before I do that, I want to give you an **update on our Commission** and share a few **words of appreciation**.

Our Commission has made a couple internal adjustments over the last several weeks with Commissioner Jim Rand's appointment to fill the position created by Richard DiDonna's resignation. We also elected a new slate of officers. I was elected Chair, Eric Voigt is now our Vice Chair and Steve Olvany is our Secretary. Commissioners Kevin Cunningham and Susan Cameron round-out the rest of our line-up.

One of my **primary objectives serving as Chairman** is to begin a new era of collaboration with other elected town officials for strategic and project planning. My message to the three of you here tonight, is that it is in the best interest of our community to include our Commission in your initial planning discussions. We have the expertise and land use regulation tools to help you reach your project goals.

Our Commission has a rigorous meeting schedule each year – conducting up to 35 public meetings, along with site visits and related research. Since I joined the Commission in November 2013, we have reviewed over 210 applications.

I deeply appreciate the energy and dedication my fellow commissioners' put into serving our community. Our meetings often run late into the evening, but the team continuously pushes forward with an attitude of respect and teamwork. Susan Cameron deserves a special recognition for the 15-years she has volunteered for Darien's land use boards, with the last three as our chair.

Of course, we wouldn't be able to accomplish anything without the Planning and Zoning Department staff under the direction of Jeremy Ginsberg. We should all be grateful for the department's steadfast work on behalf of our community.

Not to be forgotten is the several additional volunteers that serve on Darien's other land use boards, including the Environmental Protection Commission, the Zoning Board of Appeals, the Architectural Review Board, as well as our Town Historian. Without their efforts, our Commission's work would be significantly encumbered.

Last but not least, I am especially grateful to my wife Michelle, and our three boys: Luke, Connor, and Jake. Without their support and understanding, I would not have the ability to dedicate so much of my time to serve our community.

It is important to take a moment to reflect on **how privileged our town is** on several fronts. Darien is filled with smart, dedicated, and selfless residents that volunteer an extraordinary amount of their time, effort and money to great local causes.

Our local government has a successful track record of executing partnerships with private organizations. A perfect example of this is our nationally-renown Darien Library.

Darien's charitable organizations, such as *The Darien Foundation, the Nature Center, The Tree Conservancy, The Athletic Foundation, the YMCA, and the Land Trust* (just to name a few) have an immeasurable positive impact to our surroundings and quality of our lives within our community. I'm committed to working closely with private organizations that have a mission of improving our infrastructure, generously making Darien better place every day.

One of latest examples of the boundless generosity offered within this town is the pending application to designate the six-acre **Mather Homestead** property as a *Protected Town Landmark*. The site has been listed on the *National Registry of Historic Places* since 1964 and the surrounding meadows have already been secured as open space. The plan is to preserve the site in its historic condition in perpetuity and use it as a historical resource. Several of the key individuals responsible for this tremendous effort are direct descendants of Moses Mather, whose image appears in the murals above us, and Stephen Mather, founder and first Director of the National Park Service.

Darien is also extremely fortunate as a result of the ongoing interest for **commercial and residential redevelopment**. This redevelopment continues to set Darien apart from several of its surrounding communities and allows our town to reach a new level of vibrancy in both our residential neighborhoods and business districts.

One example of this new-found vibrancy is in the downtown's **Grove and Day Street area**. The arrival of the *Darien Butcher, Fjord Fish Market, Le Boudoir, and Blue*

Mercury complimented the existing activities within Grove Street Plaza. This business development would not have occurred without collaboration with the Board of Selectman on refining the Grove Street lot parking policy.

Another one of my goals is to work closely with the Police Commission to enhance our business districts' pedestrian safety and on-street parking to make downtown an even better destination.

As you all know, we have three major development proposals that the Commission is in various stages of addressing. I envision they will likely deliver our community value creation, economic vitality, housing diversity, and enhanced community gathering places.

First, an update on the *Baywater* Proposal at the corner of Corbin Drive and Boston Post Road:

This past fall, after several public hearings and deliberation sessions, the applicant withdrew the first application for the necessary regulation amendments that were primarily related to building height and parking. However, a follow-up application has been filed and the public hearing has been scheduled for January 10, 2017.

After the Commission makes its regulation change finding, the next steps would be a review by the Architectural Review Board and a site plan/special permit application to the Commission.

I can assure you, our Commission is very well aware of the community support for redevelopment in this area. We look forward to working closely with the applicant in order to strike the right balance of maintaining the proper scale and

character for our suburban downtown while allowing for this area's redevelopment.

Second, early next year we expect to review plans for the reconstruction of both the **Palmer and Federal Realty** properties in Noroton Heights Business District. The Commission already modified zoning regulations of the area's business district earlier this year to enable its redevelopment.

The **Palmer Family's** application is for a site plan and special permit for redevelopment of the area on Heights Road in proximity to Hollow Tree Ridge Road. The new buildings are proposed as mixed-use, including restaurant, retail, and residential uses. The first public hearing for this proposal will be January 24, 2017.

Federal Realty's intention is to create another mixed-use development in the area of Stop & Shop and Walgreens. The Planning and Zoning staff has already met informally with Federal's development team and the Commission expects to see a formal application sometime in the next few months.

Beyond the three more well-known proposals in town, there are a few other projects I also want to mention this evening:

In 2016, the Commission rezoned a 3.7-acre property to the east of the Avalon Apartment complex and adjacent to the Connecticut Turnpike to allow for the construction of a **self-storage facility**. This property has been vacant for several decades because it has unique characteristics that restricted its possibilities for development – foremost, the inability to tie into the sewer system. Work is already underway on this project and its completion is expected by the end of 2017.

Upon its completion, the property will consist of a three-story self-storage facility and a smaller building for the office onsite employee living quarters, and the creation of over a dozen commuter parking spaces, conveniently located across the street from the Noroton Heights Train Station. Facilities like these are typically viewed by traffic experts as a low intensity use.

In late 2015, the Commission made changes to the **Noroton Neighborhood Business Zone** (for those that aren't aware, it is generally the area by the Post Road and Noroton Avenue intersection). The Commission has already approved a new two-story retail and residential building which is now under construction across the street from Papa Joe's. A similar application for the adjacent property is expected to be brought before the Commission in early 2017.

Even though I am a huge *Burger Shakes & Fries* fan, I'd be remiss not to mention the fact that **Shake Shack** on the Post Road is expected to open just after the New Year thanks to approvals from both our Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The Commission is also in the midst of its review of the **Department of Public Works Garage** expansion project and recently approved the **Paramedic Station at 701 Post Road**. Two weeks ago, we closed the public hearing for the **Darien High School Stadium Lights** proposal and expect to deliver a decision by the end of January. Finally, we are working with other town agencies on **key environmental issues**, such as costal resource management.

Unfortunately, our commission can't affect **Connecticut's misguided Income Tax and Estate Tax policies**, which are far from being competitive with other states. These taxes are unnaturally influencing age-demographics in towns like Darien by propelling older and typically wealthier residents to move to lower-tax regions of our country.

Our **younger population** poses unique challenges related to school population growth,

school facilities, fields and gym space, playgrounds, field lights, and the desire to have a town aquatics center. Board of Education Chair, Michael Harmon plans to discuss this topic in greater detail this evening. However, as long as Darien maintains its reputation of a great place to live work, and play, these challenges will be unavoidable.

Redevelopment, or “*suburban renewal*,” as Commissioner Olvany likes to call it, has had a tremendously positive impact on Darien’s fiscal well being by helping to increase the size of Darien’s grand list. As this chart shows, the grand list has appreciated from close to \$3 billion in 1995 to almost \$8.5 billion today. This kind of value creation is extremely important in maintaining Darien’s fiscal vitality, something that our Board of Finance Chairman Jon Zagrodsky, is going to cover.

Over the past few years, our Commission guided and approved a number of zoning changes and projects that better appeal to the housing demands of **empty-nesters and seniors** in the hopes that they too will find Darien an attractive place to stay:

The *Active Senior Overlay Zone* was recently established at the corner of on the former site of the Knobel Brothers hardware store at the corner of Locust Hill and Settler’s Trail. Six attractive, age-restricted town houses have been constructed. As part of the project, the developer also improved the street’s sight line and provided two offsite, affordable housing units.

Kensett’s Phase 1 is complete with the construction of 62 town house units. Kensett’s Phase 2 construction is now well underway, creating an additional 14 units. This Commission set stricter guidelines in order to target more senior households. This part of the project also resulted in three offsite, affordable units.

In early 2016, the Commission approved the enlargement of **Atria** on Ledge Road. That work has commenced, and will be completed next year.

Maplewood, at the corner of Boston Post Road and Brookside Road, has an application pending to enlarge their existing three-story building, with a net increase of 31 new assisted living/memory care units and a much improved driveway to enhance traffic safety in the area.

The transformation of the **Parkland Office Park** adjacent to Selleck's Woods will soon begin as one of its office buildings will be fashioned into new combination assisted living/memory care facility containing a total of 105 units. Construction is expected to start in early 2017.

The Commission continues to guide the development of **affordable housing** at appropriate locations in town. The recent increase in affordable housing supply has primarily been related to working in partnership with private developers. This has allowed Darien to continue to make great strides in providing deed-restricted affordable housing within its borders, yet with limited impact to taxpayers.

This past October, the Town secured enough points for a **second moratorium** that will be in place until October 2020. It is important to highlight that Darien is only one of three communities in the State to achieve two moratoria. Our success on this front was achieved by a concerted, non-partisan team effort within our local government and Town Hall staff.

Also related to Darien's affordable housing efforts:

Several years ago the town implemented an *Inclusionary Zoning* regulation that requires new, larger multi-unit developments to establish a significant number of affordable units. Our Commission recently modified this regulation's income requirements to match those required by State Statute ensuring we received proper credit for new affordable units.

With the **Corbin, Palmer, and Federal Realty** projects on the horizon, we expect to see numerous new affordable units by means of their *Inclusionary Zoning* requirements.

Knobel Hill's two offsite, deed-restricted affordable units were created on Leroy Avenue and **Kensett's** three offsite affordable units on Hoyt Street.

Pemberton 16, at the corner of Leroy Avenue and West Avenue is nearing completion. The State Superior Court Judge, who overturned the Commission's denial of the project eight years ago, approved the senior restricted 8-30(g) building you see today. You may find that the height, bulk, density, site lines, and landscaping don't quite fit in as well as you may expect if our Commission and staff had the opportunity to review the site plan.

The Redevelopment plan for **Old Town Hall Homes** on Post Road was enabled by the implementation of the *Municipal Use Zone*, which provided *The Darien Housing Authority* with more flexibility for the project. The new building will provide 55 senior affordable units, adding 25 units to the Town's affordable housing stock.

The Commission has recently received a favorable court decision for proposed 8-30(g) development on Hoyt Street in the proximity of Holmes School, limiting the number of units at that site.

Our Commission has unanimously supported **recent land purchase proposals** including: *Hecker Avenue, 4 Short Lane, the property adjacent to Holmes School*, and most recently, the *16-acres of the Ox Ridge Hunt Club*. First Selectman Jayme Stevenson plans to talk more about this, but I personally believe the town's offer to purchase this piece of property is a brilliant move.

Thanks to input and assistance from many of you in the audience, the updated **Town Plan of Conservation & Development** was completed in June 2016. This comprehensive plan will guide the Commission and our community related to conservation, development, and infrastructure issues over the next ten years.

The Commission has already begun **implementation efforts** by reviewing regulations in three areas: Signage; Building coverage and bulk; and our Business Zones. We will certainly need your assistance in turning the objectives laid out by our Town Plan into reality.

I'm always open to discussing questions or concerns you may have with issues related to the Commission. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

I would like to wrap-up my comments with a quote from the great **Yogi Berra**: He said, *"If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else."* Well, I want to assure you all that *your Planning and Zoning team knows where Darien is headed, and it's looks to be an even better place than its already is!*

Thank you again for your time. I wish you all, Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas, and a wonderful, healthy, and prosperous 2017!

2016 State of the Town - Board of Education Report

Town Hall Auditorium,
December 12, 2016

Good Evening,

Mister Moderator, Members of the RTM, fellow elected officials and community members of the Town of Darien. On behalf of my colleagues on the Darien Board of Education (BoE), I welcome the opportunity to update our community on the accomplishments that have been taking place in the past year in the Darien Public Schools.

We are now into the second year of our new Administration; under the guidance of Superintendent Dr. Brenner, the District has transitioned from ensuring compliance to focusing on how to build and improve the educational service delivery in the Darien Public Schools.

It is easy to cite awards and championships, whether test results, college admissions percentages, music competitions, arts fairs, or athletic team successes. The real work is taking place in the classroom and our Administration including Ms. Marjorie Cion, Director of Human Resources, Dr. Susie Da Silva, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Ms. Shirley Klein, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services, and Michael Feeney, Director of Finance, have been busy making sure the District is providing our students with the educational services they deserve.

Let me highlight some of changes taking place in our schools:

- At the elementary schools, SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Interventions) is in full roll out
- Hindley is home to the new DLC program for students with autism spectrum disorders
- At the Middle School, we now have the first year of our full year 6th grade world language
- DHS has implemented the team taught and lab classes
- The District finalized concurrent contract negotiations with the Darien Teachers Associations and the Darien Administrators Association

- And a copy center has been installed at Central Office, with Tokeneke as the first school to implement.

This year, three of our seven buildings welcomed new Principals, beginning with Principal Shelley Somers, who replaced long-time Principal Dr. Debbie Boccanfusa at Middlesex Middle School. Principal DJ Collela replaced another long-time principal, Ms. Rita Ferri, at Hindley Elementary. Royle Elementary welcomed their new principal, Principal Dean Ketchum, who relieved Mr. John Grasso, interim principal for the past two years.

Last year, the Board laid out several goals for the new Administration including Community Relationships, Special Education, General Education, Common Core, Technology and Facilities. The Administration has worked diligently on these goals, and as I attempted to highlight, made significant progress there. However, for our discussion tonight, I would like to focus on the last two items, **Technology** and **Facilities**, as these will be relevant to the 2017-2018 Budget discussions moving forward.

Our students already use technology in the classroom and when they take their annual Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC). Last year, the Administration proposed an initiative to integrate **Technology** into the curriculum and teaching that takes place in the classrooms. The Vision was for Darien to become a 1:1 school district, grades 5-12 over the next 3 years. Starting this week, our Sixth Graders are receiving their Chromebooks to use in the classroom and at home. Next week, Seventh Graders will receive their devices and most of our Fifth Graders should have them before Christmas Break. Much work has been done to arrive at this point, including Professional Development for our teachers, pilot programs, student digital citizenship training and updated digital use policy. The District is now at the point of transition to a technology program developing 21st century skills in our students.

This roll-out is part of a 3-year long budget initiative to bring Technology to all the classrooms, comparable to the introduction of Smart Boards in the classrooms. Next year, the 1:1 roll-out will continue with the introduction of a tablet device at Darien High School while continuing the Chromebook deployment to the current Fourth

Graders when they transition to fifth grade. The Superintendent's Proposed Budget will reflect the continued investment in our students' technology initiative.

Facilities will be another major consideration moving forward. For the past several years, the Board has focused on Facilities and in particular the need to address projected enrollment and classroom capacity. However, it has become apparent that this needs to be a broader focus, and I would like to speak tonight about **Infrastructure**, as there are in reality two separate issues. The continued stress of creating and converting classroom space in our buildings, led the Administration to seek to develop a Master Plan for the District's facilities. This study was conducted by KD&G over the summer, and included both a Building Conditions Study (BCS) as well as a Facility Utilization Plan (Masterplan). The challenge has always been how to plan in the face of uncertainty regarding enrollment projections. The proposed large-scale redevelopment projects that have been identified in town have the potential to significantly impact the student population, so it becomes even more important to plan how the District can address those potential impacts. However, the KD&G study also identified a range of maintenance requirements in the BCS study, which the Administration with Mike Lynch, Director of Facilities, is incorporating into a planning schedule for the Board of Education's Capital Plan. The Board of Education has not finalized the current project list, we hope to have that discussion tomorrow at our regular Board Meeting, but KD&G has identified significant maintenance that the District will need to plan for over the next few years.

The official October 1, 2016 enrollment, excluding the ELP Pre-Kindergarten program, was 4,722 students K-12, which represents a decrease of 45 students over last year's projection of 4,767 students. The current projection for 2017-2018 has a slight decrease of six students over current enrollment. However, total enrollment does not tell the whole story. At the elementary schools, classroom capacity remains an issue, with the number of sections at our elementary schools at the current level of 118. At the same time, our temporary portables are coming at the end of their service life, having been refurbished at least once. Darien High School will be facing a capacity issue when the current seventh grade class enters in fall of 2018. Previous locker room conversions have provided added classroom capacity, but cafeteria and storage needs have not been increased. The Board's Capital Plan

will mostly likely include a recommendation for a cafeteria expansion, with the goal of combining it with changeover of the stadium turf this summer.

The Masterplan is still being discussed at the Board's Facilities sub-committee meeting and has not been presented to the full Board yet, but it is evident from the KD&G study that in particular, Ox Ridge Elementary School is in need of significant maintenance upgrades. These costs might warrant a reconstruction project option instead, which could allow the Early Learning Program (ELP) to be housed in a single facility. Such a facility would relieve enrollment pressures at two of the Elementary Schools, which currently house the ELP. These discussions are still in the preliminary stage and the Board has not opined on the matter, but I feel obliged to make this body aware that there is a potential for some major infrastructure projects, regardless of the outcome of any of the proposed developments in town. The goal of the Board and the Administration is to develop a Masterplan that will incorporate the needs of our students and educators to provide the excellence in education we come to expect. It will also need to incorporate flexibility in capacity as well as preserve the structure of our neighborhood elementary schools, the team-based middle school and our successful high school. 46%, or almost half of our current DHS Seniors were enrolled at one of our 5 neighborhood elementary schools when they started Kindergarten, and I believe that shows the trust and belief in our schools that our parents and students have.

The Board of Education thanks the RTM and our community for supporting our school budget every year. This year's Superintendent's Budget will build on the experience gained last year, continuing the zero-based budgeting philosophy and the single budget session schedule. Our Superintendent will present the budget book structure and proposed budget on January 5th, kicking off the Budget Season. The Board expects to review the full budget book on Saturday, January 7th starting at 8:30am (snow-date Jan 21) including a discussion of all Responsibility Centers (RCs) and Question and Answer sessions. The Darien Board of Education invites all RTM members, elected officials, and community members to join us at 35 Leroy to hear first-hand our school district leaders explain their financial requests for the 2017-2018 school year. The Board of Education hopes the community shares our commitment to support what we value.

On behalf of the Board of Education, we would like to thank and acknowledge a number of people:

The Board extends a special thanks to all our parents, volunteers, and donors who contribute so much to our children and to our schools. Over the past year, the support of our community, the RTM and Town officials have helped the District continue to move in a positive direction. The Board would like to thank the staff at our schools and our Central office. We entrust our children to them every day and we need to acknowledge the outstanding job they do in educating the young people of Darien.

We would like to acknowledge the various volunteer organizations that support and enhance our students' success and wellbeing, whether in the classrooms or after school programs. The Board thanks you for your generosity and hopes to continue the successful partnership with the Administration.

Personally, I want to thank my fellow Board members: Vice Chair, Mrs. Betsy Hagerty-Ross, Secretary, Mrs. Sarah Schneider-Zuro, Mr. Michael Burke, Mr. David Dineen, Mrs. Christa McNamara, Mrs. Katie Stein, and to introduce our two new members Mrs. Jill McCammon and Mrs. Tara Ochman. It is a privilege to work with this exceptional group of volunteers, who contribute countless hours to the welfare of our schools. This Board continues to have the well-being and education of Darien's children at the heart of every decision it makes.

To the parents of all Darien Public School children: The Board of Education and the administrative team continue to make strides to move the district forward. One of the core goals of our Board of Education and our Administrative team is excellence in our educational system for the children of Darien. Our schools exist for our children and the Board expects everyone involved to have our children's best interests at the forefront of their minds.

Finally, on behalf of the Darien Board of Education, we wish you and your families a joyous Holiday season, and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Michael A. Harman
Chairman, Darien Board of Education

STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS
DARIEN BOARD OF FINANCE

JON ZAGRODZKY, CHAIRMAN
MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2016

Good evening. My name is Jon Zagrodzky, and I'm chairman of the Board of Finance. This is my second time to address you, and I appreciate the opportunity to offer some perspectives.

First, I'll begin with some budget comments. If you look at the total operating budget on the Town side of the ledger, recent numbers have been pretty favorable. Total spending was actually down 0.5% last year, and it's projected to be up just 1.6% this year. A lot of this was driven, however, by a two-year drop in pension contributions due to the reset of pension return rates and other assumptions, along with favorable investment results. Next year, we won't benefit again from such declines.

Debt service reflects a similar trend. Last year it dropped 5.5% due to re-financings and other factors, but will increase 6.4% this year and is expected to grow 7.6% next year with the debt service from debt we'll be adding this spring – which we'll structure as expertly as possible to mitigate debt service variation. The re-financing opportunities we've saved so much from in the past, by the way, are largely gone now, which is unfortunate.

All this means that we're likely to see higher Town expenditures and debt service going forward. These adverse trends are reflected in the forecasted 4.4% growth you see for next year, which like all these future numbers is a forecast and not a budget.

Some good news is that I hear the Selectmen plan to ask all departments to limit next year's increases to 2%, which will help matters. We should reflect briefly on this 2% goal in the context of the services we receive. Our terrific parks and public facilities, our fine Police Department, our world-class library – the list goes on. The Selectmen oversee delivery of really excellent Town services, and have

done so with very limited budget flexibility for years. They should be commended for that!

I'll also do a shout-out regarding the collaborative budget process last year. The Selectmen were gracious enough to include us in their department reviews, and Jack Davis and F&B participated early and often. I hope we can continue this efficient collaboration next year!

As for the Board of Education, we saw a 2.8% increase last year, quite modest given that a significant component is driven by contracted personnel costs. The forecast you see, however, which is based on trends and not submitted budgets, shows steady annual increases of 3%, growing to 4% in a couple of years.

I'm of two minds on education spending. On the one hand, I understand the drivers, many of which are difficult to address in a single budget year. In this sense, I appreciate the many thoughtful, multi-year initiatives that Dr. Brenner has undertaken with support from the Board. His holistic and strategic approach to special education, union negotiations, facilities and other elements will, I'm convinced, help us financially over the long-term. We just need to be patient.

On the other hand, though, you'll note in the forecast that in two years, education spending, excluding capital projects and school debt service, will exceed \$100 million for the first time and will rise to nearly \$115 million in five years. It is shocking, to me at least, that education in a town of this size could cost this much money. There are complex and sensitive factors involved, which is why I'm glad I'm not on the Board of Education, but I would encourage everyone who demands more program spending to periodically reflect on these numbers.

Again, though, there is good news. For next year, at least, Dr. Brenner has indicated that he expects to keep the overall Education increase next year to 2%, which would be terrific. Long-term, though, union contracts, health costs and other factors will ensure higher future increases.

Next, a few comments about revenue, as John Sini promised I would make. You'll recall that we had some last-minute uncertainty in setting the mill rate in April this year when the State was toying with the idea of reducing Town grants. Based on their preliminary rumblings, we faced the loss of over \$1 million in state funding. As a precaution, we deferred some investments like the Town generator and adjusted the mill rate upwards. Fortunately, most of those cuts were not

made, so this year's budget should end up better than the forecast you see in the five-year plan.

But the prospect for such cuts remains, especially given the hopelessness of State finances. As my fellow Board colleague Senator Jamie McLaughlin has said, the State is running a structural deficit of a magnitude never before imagined in large part due to unfunded pension liabilities, which have worsened dramatically over the last two years.

We currently receive north of \$4 million in annual State grants, mostly to support education. It's not impossible that a town like Darien could lose all these grants as the State wrestles with its problems. What's worse, there are regionalization plans being discussed that could significantly increase what we pay for certain services, which Jayme will address in her remarks. All told, I believe we are at risk for millions of dollars in additional net cost, the bulk of which will fall on residential taxpayers. One of the things we'll need to wrestle with in the coming budget discussions, by the way, is whether to budget conservatively and assume that we won't receive some or any of these grants.

This is why we should be supportive of opportunities to increase the value of our Grand List. John just talked about the many projects before his Board that would do this, and while I don't have a clear total at the moment, they are likely to boost our Grand List significantly. John duly recognized the role of public support for at least one of these projects, and he has laid out a smooth and reasonable process for getting these projects reviewed and approved. I would urge P&Z to adhere to this plan in its coming deliberations.

Let me turn now to town debt and prospective capital projects. As of June 30, total debt was about \$71 million, down from nearly \$100 million a few years ago. Given our expected bonding this year for the Town garage and the Ox Ridge Hunt Club land acquisition, total debt will still be around \$71 million by June 30 next year.

There are some storm clouds on the horizon, however. As has been mentioned, the Board of Education is working to finalize plans that will include some major construction. It appears that in most scenarios, we will see debt levels significantly exceed \$100 million at some point.

It is true that back in 2010, the Board of Finance adopted a guideline suggesting that total debt should not exceed \$100 million. I continue to believe this is prudent, but I also recognize that buildings don't last forever. We just happen to be at a moment when these investments need to be made.

As the Board of Education finalizes its proposals, I'd like to emphasize a few things. First, we need to see a complete and comprehensive capital plan. As Michael says, however, the plan isn't ready. I've urged them to take their time, though, because it will be hard to gauge whether the District's proposed capital spending next year makes sense unless we can do so in the context of a clear, long-term strategy. We certainly don't want to spend money fixing a building when a year later there's a change and the building gets torn down. But let's not take too much time with these plans, as it is increasingly clear that low interest rates may be a thing of the past.

Second, I know the District is thinking carefully about capacity. Predicting enrollment is really hard, and it has to be frustrating see the slight declines in overall numbers that Michael mentioned, while having to deal with localized capacity problems for particular grades or schools. Whatever the final enrollment numbers are for the capital plan, I would urge the Board to build in as much flexibility as possible, as there are many factors that could drive future enrollment up: affordable housing, State-mandated pre-K, more students remaining in district, etc. Doing so will enable us to minimize future expenditures if we have to add classroom capacity unexpectedly.

Third, it's important to stress functionality over aesthetics. New or renovated buildings should get the job done; taxpayers shouldn't be asked to support something more. The entry-way at Tokeneke, a beautiful thing but a waste of space, ended up proudly on the company brochure of the architect who designed it. The time for these luxuries has passed.

I've been a little critical here, so I want to emphasize that I believe Dr. Brenner and the Board of Education are all mindful of these points and taking them into account. I know they are working hard to balance capacity and other needs with sensitivity about cost and ostentatiousness. I just wanted to go on the record one more time about these points.

This is probably a good point to reiterate our thanks to the many organizations in town that have generously donated to fund important projects related to the schools and their sports programs, such as the Darien Athletic Foundation, which has committed upwards of several million dollars. We have some great fields that otherwise would have cost taxpayers a lot without the DAF's help – so thank you again.

Before I move on, on last point about capital spending. I know there was some controversy earlier this year about the Board of Finance capital contingency reserve. As a reminder, this is an appropriated reserve, which means that the Board of Finance can spend it without further RTM appropriation. The controversy came about when we used this reserve to fund the street light acquisition without consulting with the RTM. I regret this – it wasn't our intention. Going forward, I will try make sure the RTM leadership is kept apprised of our plans to use this reserve. I know you're re-thinking whether to keep it. Bear in mind that it was established so that the Board of Finance could move quickly on modest, non-controversial capital projects when speed is of the essence. I would hate to see the Town lose such flexibility because of this incident.

Finally, I wanted to review progress on the focus areas I mentioned last December. The first and biggest area was capital projects. As I stated, no town should manage them better than Darien. So how are we doing?

Jayne Stevenson has taken the lead on this by establishing a building committee for the Public Works Garage, for which I am grateful. We have some great members on the committee, including Martha Banks, and I'd like to thank Jim Bosek and Joe Pagliarulo for serving as co-chairs. I'd also like to thank Ed Gentile and Michael Lynch for working with the committee. We've already had several productive discussions, which I think will help ensure that this project is well-managed without creating another layer of bureaucracy.

In addition to the committee, Kip Koons has initiated an effort to create a Construction Process Manual. Rusty Shriner, who played a key role in the Middlesex work a while back, is helping us with a draft. The purpose of this manual is to capture the learnings from previous building efforts – we want to

make sure our best thinking is part of every project, and that mistakes of the past are never repeated. So, thanks to everyone involved in creating this manual.

We have some significant capital projects coming up, and I believe these recent efforts will help us manage them, as I say, better than anyone else. But let's make sure we don't drop the ball.

I also said last year that when it comes to staffing levels and retiree liabilities, no one should manage them better than Darien. Well, we saw net growth of 7 employees this year versus last, 5 for the Town and 2 for Education. I'm not overly concerned about the Town staff growth – one was a new hire to help Jeremy in Planning & Zoning with his huge workload, one was for a new Recreation Department Program Supervisor, based on an expected revenue increase from additional programming, and two were consolidation of multiple part-time roles. Still, as I've described, adding even one employee is hugely expensive in the long run. As we did last year, we will scrutinize any such plans carefully as part of this year's budget process. But the good news is that we saw no benefit changes that would adversely impact long-term pension or health liabilities.

Lastly, I stated that no one should be leading the way on shared services better than Darien. We're making progress here, and I'd like to thank Frank Huck for his tireless efforts. Frank leads the Consolidated Services Working Group, which has been working with school administration to identify shared service opportunities. Last year, the group hired Milliman, one of the leading experts in healthcare financing and delivery, to see if consolidating Town, Library and District health insurance could save us money. The answer, delivered last week, is yes, possibly a few hundred thousand dollars. I'm hopeful that this is the first step in the savings we could see with consolidated services, but I recognize that getting to agreement takes effort. I would urge this group to keep going – real progress will only come with persistent effort over time.

I'll close with a couple of thoughts.

Last year, I spent a few minutes on state's terrible financial condition. I think I described it as having reached "alarming proportions." And yet, a year later, here we are. Lots of bad news, lots of smoke, but no real fire. The fact is, for all

the trouble, they continue to muddle along. My new term to describe the unhappy state of affairs is “sustained unsustainability.” Terrible news year after year, but no disaster. I suspect I’ll report next year that all this unsustainability has been sustained for yet another year.

My experience with circumstances like this is that everything is fine – until it isn’t. There’s often a dramatic inflection point after which everything is different. We’ll see this eventually, but I have no idea what form it will take, and therefore nothing to recommend as to what we might do as a town to prepare financially.

In the meantime, we can expect the slow bleed I alluded to earlier.

Regionalization, loss of grants, higher State-imposed costs – all of these have the real prospect of creating budget pressure and uncertainty for the Town. Here I do have one recommendation: we should do all we can to keep our own costs under control. Now is not the time to engage in extra spending.

And lastly....

I’ve been in this job for a year now, and on the Board of Finance for eight years. And I’ve learned a few things. The first is that the details of government matter – you have to spend time understanding them, and it does take time, I can assure you. Second is that relationships matter. Having a strong and trust-based network of other elected officials and town personnel is essential – I could not do my job without it. Third is that local control matters. I have been amazed at how much time and effort is expended by volunteers – many of whom are in this room – to maintain Darien as a great place to live. Sure, local control is important as a financial matter, but I’ve learned that there’s another reason: only local control engenders local ownership, local enthusiasm and local dedication. And the results are clear for all to see.

That’s all I have to say. Thank you for indulging me. Happy Holidays. JZ

2016 State of the Town Address
Jayme J. Stevenson, First Selectman
December 12, 2016

Good evening friends, colleagues, fellow Board members and folks watching from home. Shout out to our incomparable Channel 79 staff for keeping government accessible to everyone through technology. Seth, congratulations and best wishes to you as our new Moderator and thank you Sarah Seelye for the outstanding job you did for the RTM and the town.

I appreciate this annual opportunity to reflect on our notable accomplishments and vision for the coming year. This is my 6th State of the Town address and with each passing year, I gain valuable perspective. In my opinion, 2016 has been one of the more productive and forward-thinking years for Darien government and also the most challenging when considering the uncertainty of regional and state government policy.

Fundamental to the work we do each day is the principle that governments exist to provide a safe, healthy environment for us to live, work, raise our families and educate our children. As stewards of your tax dollars, we must set priorities, save for the unexpected challenge or opportunity and be transparent and accountable to you for each dollar we spend. The Board of Selectmen has recommended that all departments submit FY 2017/18 budget requests with a not-to-exceed 2% increase. Last year, this same methodology resulted in the one of the lowest Board of Selectmen's budgets in recent memory. Of course, each year is different, but we are committed to putting the taxpayers first in our budget planning.

An important theme over my 6 years as your First Selectman is the focus on providing government services in a more efficient, effective and customer-friendly way. In 2016, we updated the town's website, installed self-service computers in the building department, digitized land use documents, committed to implement OpenGov software that will aid our budget process and make our financials accessible to the public and....drum roll...we now can renew commuter parking permits and query the waitlist online!

We can and will do more. We need to better utilize technology in certain departments and should fully commit to LEAN Government management principles in our daily work. LEAN is a "continuous improvement" process and mindset, originally applied to Toyota's auto manufacturing process, that seeks to cut waste streamline systems and improve customer and employee engagement. I want to Thank Kate Buch and Jenn Charnesky for their leadership in looking at service delivery in new ways.

In 2016, we resolved several long-standing public safety, health and environmental concerns and have begun planning for some much needed and welcomed community amenities.

With the support of the RTM and the community, here are just a few of our accomplishments:

- Received our second 8-30g moratorium
- Hired full time, in-town paramedics and were able to utilize a town-owned building to save on operating costs
- Enacted a Peddler's Ordinance and socially-conscience Blight Ordinance

- Completed, with the generous support of the Friends of Gorham's Pond, the Upper Pond Dam and Habitat restoration project
- Abbey/Intervale drainage project is well underway
- Completed a community health needs assessment the results of which will be rolled out in early 2017 in a series of public forums
- Began a bacteria source testing program in the Goodwives River
- Set aside funding to plan for the dredging of two of our sedimentation basins
- Energy and Recycling Advisory Committee completed a public facilities energy audit
- Converting our streetlights to LED which will result in significant utility cost savings
- An extensive natural gas expansion project is underway
- We received a grant to build a new Swap Shop
- Application has been made for lights at the Darien High School – Congratulations Blue Wave Football and Coach Trifone on your Class LL Championship...hopefully next season you will play at home under the lights!
- Planning is well underway for a much needed renovation of our multi-department town garage
- Funding has been approved for a 2017 Master Parks Plan that will, among other things, help us identify where we might locate a community swimming pool and possibly a temporary ice rink
- Received a grant and partnered with the Darien Land Trust to purchase 1.24 acres of land adjacent to Town Hall that preserves open space and creates the opportunity to build a pocket park
- Year-long negotiations will culminate in early 2017 when the RTM will deliberate on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to purchase the 16.3 acres of open space you see behind me from the Ox Ridge Hunt Club

2016 also saw a number of retirements within our Police Department resulting in a transformation of our command staff through promotions and the hiring of 6 new patrol officers. K9 Zulu retired paving the way for Grizzly and Argo to join the department. I want to thank Officers Aranzullo, Silva and Hinkley who volunteered to undertake the 24/7 care and training of our four-legged officers. You can follow K9 Grizzly's training on Instagram. Both Grizzly and Argo will be trained in narcotics detection in response to the significant increase in opioid and drug abuse. As the #1 public health crisis of our time, I will spend another few moments on this topic.

In response to the worsening opioid crisis and lack of in-patient treatment programs, Darien Police Department and the Town of Darien have partnered with *Saved from Addiction* to provide referrals to this new FDA approved life-saving treatment option. Opioid and drug abuse is taking the lives of 2 Connecticut residents every day. Overdose deaths have increased from 357 in 2012 to a projected 888 by year end. Sadly, Darien has not been spared. Through collaborations with the Darien Police, local and state health departments and community service providers, we are working hard to make positive change. Last Wednesday, and kudos to Senator Chris Murphy for his advocacy, the US Senate passed a comprehensive 21st Century Cures Bill dedicating \$1 billion dollars to increase opioid prevention, treatment and drug monitoring programs. I'm hopeful that with Senator Murphy's support, Connecticut will see some of this much-needed funding.

Darien police are among the most highly trained in the nation. However, incidents of police brutality and brutality against police across the nation have necessitated the need to implement the use of body

cameras. Cameras alone are not the answer to resolving tensions between civilians and police but they can be an important tool in documenting civilian/officer interactions and collecting evidence.

Along with our new state-of-the-art police boat, we will be looking at other public safety tools in the coming year. CopSync, a real-time public safety alert service, is one such tool that we are currently researching.

Unknown to many is that the Darien Police Commission serves as our Local Traffic Authority, tasked with maintaining pedestrian and vehicular safety on our roads. You've heard a great deal tonight about redevelopment opportunities coming to Darien. Close collaboration is needed between our Local Traffic Authority, the Planning and Zoning Commission and Connecticut DOT to insure that the pedestrian experience is a priority as we improve our downtown and Noroton Heights commercial areas. A recent Road Safety Audit, organized by WestCOG, and the work of our Pedestrian Infrastructure Advisory Committee will provide meaningful input to our planning process for sidewalks, crosswalks and traffic signals. For our bicycle enthusiasts, a Darien/Norwalk Health Department initiative to develop bike routes connecting coastal communities in the southwest and to connect the Darien Train Station and Norwalk Community College is underway.

The Noroton Heights Access Study is soon to begin and we've just been awarded a Municipal Resilience Grant from the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation for the planning of a storm water management solution for the Heights Road area. Valuable action items will result from these studies and may require further town investment. I applaud the efforts of Public Works Director Ed Gentile in finding grant funding to limit taxpayer burden for these important infrastructure improvements.

Research has begun on the use of a new value-capture financing tool called Tax Increment Financing or TIF. TIF allows a portion of commercial taxes from a development project to be reinvested in needed infrastructure improvements spurred by the project. A timely example would be a new train station building in Noroton Heights and sidewalks, crosswalks and traffic signal upgrades around the Noroton Heights Development area. These could all be funded with TIF financing. I encourage the Board of Finance to look closely at implementing this tool.

We've learned a great deal from our research with developers about changes to how residents want to live. Real estate values support the notion that people prefer to live where they can walk to amenities like parks, shops, restaurants and transportation services. Our recently updated Town Plan of Conservation and Development recognizes this social shift and lays the policy ground work for the Darien of tomorrow while preserving our small town character. Bricks, mortar and tree-lined streets can enhance or detract from our small New England town "feel" but I would offer that it's our people and our focus on family and community that's most critical to this perception.

Commercial redevelopment, if thoughtfully planned and executed, can and will help grow our grand list to help offset financial pressures we face from further reductions in state aid, new mandates and our own desires to maintain and improve our public schools and facilities. I recommend that Darien joins our peer towns in formalizing an Economic Development Committee or Task Force that can provide proactive analysis for future development. I want to thank Susan Cameron for her leadership of the Planning and Zoning Commission and welcome John Sini into this role at a critical time in our town's development history.

By now, we are all familiar with the dismal State of the State. The non-partisan Office of Fiscal Analysis projects the state will face \$4.3 billion in budget deficits over the next four years due to surging debt costs and shrinking revenues. Appropriations Committee leadership imagines the need for a 20% reduction in municipal aid, school funding and support for social services.

What this will likely mean for Darien is a further reduction in ECS funding. This year we received \$775,000 of a promised \$1.3 million. The previous fiscal year, we received \$1.6 million. We should anticipate an elimination of School Construction Reimbursements, Municipal Revenue Sharing and STEAP Grant Funds. Cuts in state social service programs like Husky, Snap and energy assistance will have a direct impact on the need for more local funding to support families in need.

I've recommended to Chairman Zagrodzky that the Board of Finance should plan a path to fiscal self-sustainability which will mean the need to satisfy our spending plans entirely with local dollars. With the perfect storm brewing in Hartford, I'm exceedingly grateful for our conservative fiscal policies that have allowed Darien to outperform the state on all fiscal metrics. I would be remiss in not stating the obvious...elections matter.

Additional state mandates will likely add to our fiscal burden. There is a concerted effort underway to "integrate" local health departments. This is the mandated version of the 2007 voluntary effort to regionalize health districts. Early information indicates that towns would be required to pay 1.5% of operating budgets into the regional health district. For Darien, we currently spend \$296,000 to run our local department. Under the new mandate, we would be required to pay approximately \$2 million into the district. Funds would be redirected to cities whose property tax base is inadequate to cover their own health service costs.

Other regional initiatives will include a push for population proportional voting for COGs, heavily weighing votes for the urban centers' agenda. WestCOG has taken a defensive posture against this proposal acknowledging that this will undermine the fundamental COG structure by having small towns withdraw from the COGs. I have been pleased to serve as Vice Chair of WestCOG and Chairman of our Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization since 2015 and have been recently named to the Board of the Connecticut Council of Municipalities (CCM) giving Darien a stronger voice in all regional matters.

WestCOG, CCM and COST (Council of Small Towns) will be coordinating our legislative agendas to insure a unified voice against costly mandates and any efforts to undermine local control. It's very important that you call and write to Senators Duff and Leone and Representatives Wood and Tong to insure they are looking out for the best interests of Darien this legislative session.

I'd like to end my remarks on a note of sincere gratitude.

Over the past several years, we've hired and promoted exceptional people on our town's management team. These folks, long with the rest of our outstanding staff are the reason we've accomplished so much in 2016. Please take a moment to thank them when you have the opportunity.

I'm very grateful for the wise counsel of Attorney Fox and his staff at Curtis, Brinkerhoff and Barrett; for the hundreds of volunteers who serve on town boards, commissions, the RTM and on special projects like the Fireworks and Memorial Day parade; to our volunteer fire fighters and Post 53 medical responders for the life-saving services they provide at limited taxpayer cost; to the Darien Athletic

Foundation for their extraordinary generosity for the benefit of our kids; to our modest but mighty Senior Center staff for growing our Senior Program into what has become the best in the state and to our local Human Service Department and non-profit network who provide invaluable safety net services to the most vulnerable in our community.

While it would be nearly impossible to name each person who has contributed to our collective success this year, there are a few people who deserve our recognition and thanks. Without the work and support of John Lundeen, Lucia Zachowski and the Friends of Gorham's Pond, the Upper Pond Project would not have been realized. Terry Gaffney and the Energy and Recycling Center Advisory Committee spent countless hours on the town building energy analysis. The McPherson Family's charitable gift of their storied family homestead will help preserve our town's history for generations to come. Deep gratitude to the Monuments and Ceremonies Commission for honoring our town patriots and Veterans. Join us this Saturday, December 17th at noon for the *Wreaths Across America* ceremony in Spring Grove Veterans' Cemetery. And finally and above all...to our dear friend Gene Coyle, whose memory, particularly in this place, reminds me every day how blessed we are to be Americans with the freedom to stand up, speak out and serve our community and country with respect, kindness and humility.

I wish you and yours a peaceful and joyous holiday season!

Respectfully presented,
Jayme Stevenson, First Selectman