



# *Town of Fairfield*

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## **P R E S S   R E L E A S E** **May 3, 2013**

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### **FIRST SELECTMAN TETREAU GIVES TOWN OF FAIRFIELD BUDGET UPDATE**

First Selectman Mike Tetreau today released the following statements on the Town of Fairfield budget update:

“We have come a long way this budget season. I want to take a moment to review where we are, how we compare to neighboring towns and the important decisions that face the RTM Monday evening.

This has been a long and arduous budget process. We have made great progress and I am proud of the bi-partisan effort. I want to thank my colleagues on the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Finance and Dr. Title along with the Board of Education for their hard work in reducing the budget by over \$10 Million to bring our proposed tax increase to just about 3%. I also want to recognize the key role of our citizens in this process. I have received and read well over 1,000 emails. I have heard your concerns. Thank you for the feedback and guidance.

We have seen reductions to Town Operations and Capital spending reduced by \$4.25 million, reductions to Health Care costs of \$3.6 Million, reductions to the Board of Education operations of \$1.25 million and reductions in Financing including Debt, Pension and Contribution to Surplus of \$1 million.

Based on the ongoing efforts of our Finance Department in reviewing the current year performance and the impact on next year, I am recommending to the RTM leadership two additional adjustments in debt service and fuel costs totaling approx. \$700,000. This would mean a revised tax increase of 2.78 percent.

Given the difficult economic climate we continue to face with so many of our citizens still struggling because of unemployment or reduced incomes, it is incumbent upon our town to work even harder to continue to make appropriate budget cuts, create efficiencies and find savings without hurting essential town and school services.

I want to thank the RTM leadership on both sides of the aisle for improved communication and cooperation to help improve this year's budget process.

There has been a lot of discussion about how our Town compares to other neighboring towns. Let's review some of the facts:

The Bureau of Labor Statistics tells us that the annual compounded CPI for the last ten years is 2.54%. Our current year tax increase is right on a par with this standard.

Our town is more than just a statistic. We have goals and objectives beyond just the numbers. But since numbers do form a basis for comparison, let's see how we compare.

We are looking at a tax increase of 2.78%.

- Darien is projecting 3.86 %.
- Greenwich is at 2.75%.
- New Canaan is projecting 3.71%.
- Shelton is at 0% or no increase.
- Trumbull is coming in at 2.17%.
- Westport is projecting 1.9%.

When we look at how these tax rate levels were achieved, we find:

- Half of these towns are not fully funding their Pension requirements.
- Two thirds are not fully funding their Retiree Medical requirements.
- And 5 out of 6 are using their surplus or savings to fund their budget increase. They are spending at a higher level than they are projecting in current revenues or deficit budgeting.

Fairfield is fully funding long term obligations - our Pension and Retiree Medical annual contributions.

And we are not using our surplus to fund operations. We are living within our means. In fact we are going even further; we are putting funds back into our surplus. In one of the most challenging budget years, we are strengthening our financial position.

The RTM is making a major commitment to keeping our Seniors in town. We are increasing Senior Tax Relief budget by \$1.3 million. Without this enhancement, the overall tax increase including my recommended adjustments would be 2.31%.

There isn't another town in Fairfield County doing as much to maintain a reasonable tax increase, strengthen their financial foundation, meet their long term commitments, maintain top quality services and help seniors stay in their homes. Fairfield really is a great value.

Throughout this economic turmoil and 4 major storms in the last 24 months, our town continues to deliver top quality services and a top performing educational system.

With respect to our school system,  
First, I want to thank Dr. Title for his leadership on helping the Town and BOE reduce our healthcare costs by evaluating new providers.

We have both our high schools recognized as being in the top 20 in Connecticut and in the top two percent nationwide.

For the second year in a row, we have one of our Principals recognized as being the top in the State for their school level.

We have had several of our elementary schools recognized as top performers in our state and the nation.

These are remarkable achievements to go along with maintaining the focus on a reasonable budget increase while being required to meet the needs of a school population that has grown 25% in the past ten years.

With respect to our town services,

I want to use our Department of Public Works as an example of how hard our town employees are working. Mr. Michelangelo and his team went above and beyond in the line of duty to protect our residents during the past year. We saw our DPW workers head out in the worst of Storm Sandy to assist our residents trapped in their cars under fallen trees. During Storm Nemo, we saw the DPW team work nonstop to open roads to get our citizens safely back to normal. We can't forget how much our DPW team has done to help our town save money with improved energy efficient and green power production installations. These efforts have led to year after year savings of millions of tax dollars.

I don't believe there is a better performing DPW team in the entire State!

Overall our town employees have delivered top quality services but there are limits.

Overall, we have fewer employees than we did ten years ago.

We currently have backlogs in Conservation, Building, even DPW is behind on Tree maintenance. We are also behind in our planned capital equipment replacement programs in almost every department.

In summary, I am asking the RTM not to make any further cuts to our Town Departments or Board of Education beyond those recommended here.

- Our proposed tax increase will be just above the ten year CPI trend.

- We are keeping our town employee headcount below the level of ten years ago.
- We are funding our long term obligations.
- We are strengthening our financial foundations.
- We are being more fiscally responsible than our neighboring towns.
- We are delivering top quality services and top value.
- Further cuts to Departments will hurt services and hurt performance.

Fairfield is a town we want to live in. Fairfield services are why we came here and why we have stayed. Let's work together to maintain the quality of life for all our citizens. Let's keep Fairfield a desirable place to live."