

Bringing Resources Back to Wethersfield

Within the last two years, State Representative Russ Morin and I worked together to secure state funding for various projects that many of you along with town officials told us were important to Wethersfield's quality of life. I am glad to report that all four of the projects for which we obtained \$500,000 in funding are either completed or near completion. The new playscape at Emerson-Williams Elementary School, the soccer field renovation at Mill Woods Park, and the new tennis courts at Samuel B. Webb Elementary School (lower left) are providing improved recreational opportunities for the young and not so young in those neighborhoods. Also, the realignment of the intersection of Main, Church and Marsh streets (lower right) is nearing completion. While it will take some getting used to, I think we all agree it will be a safer intersection to cross for motorists but most importantly, for the many walkers and bicyclists enjoying this beautiful and historic part of Wethersfield.



New Life for a Long-Vacant Building

Exciting things are happening on the economic development front in Wethersfield. It seems as though almost monthly a new business is opening its doors on the Silas Deane Highway. In the last few months it was announced that the long-vacant Weight Watchers building will finally be taken down and a new furniture distribution facility will be constructed on the site. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to assist Wethersfield's dynamic mayor, Paul Montinieri, by helping to facilitate a role by the state's economic development agency, DECD, to provide important financial assistance for this project.



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Structural Changes to Budgeting & Building Connecticut's Economy

Connecticut's economy, while improving, is still not producing tax revenue as we normally see after a recession. This has led to more budget cuts and revenue enhancements than we anticipated this far removed from the Great Recession of 2009. More people are working, but many are employed in jobs that pay far less than what workers had been paid previously.

Addressing what may be the "new normal" for Connecticut, I have focused much of my time this past session and going forward into the next session on two strategies. First, in this year's budget package we passed a provision that reforms our budget reserve requirements. Too often we fail to set aside surplus revenue to be available when the economy slows and tax revenues decline. Inevitably the governor and the legislature resort to cuts in important programs, tax increases, or both to bring the budget back into balance. Although it won't take effect until 2019, we were successful in passing legislation requiring the governor and the legislature to set aside a much greater amount of surplus revenue to minimize the impact of an economic downturn and to avoid or lessen the need for further tax increases or cuts to critical services.



Not all entrepreneurs are in high-tech. The Brothers Crisp are a small group of young entrepreneurs in Parkville that make artisan footwear that they sell internationally.

The second area of focus is on growing our economy. Connecticut has many of the ingredients necessary to build a dynamic economy around innovation and entrepreneurship that has produced hundreds of new technology-based companies and thousands of jobs in the Boston area and a number of areas of the country which have embraced this phenomenon. When you think Apple, Google, or Uber, think innovation and entrepreneurship. But Connecticut has not put the support system together necessary to keep our college graduates to pursue their ideas here. Many leave for Boston, New York or Silicon Valley in California to be around other would-be entrepreneurs.

There is a saying that small business is the job creator of our economy. Actually, it's young companies that produce the greatest jobs. Right now we are not producing enough new companies to benefit from that job growth. Working with my legislative leadership and the Malloy administration, it is my intention to put forward legislation that will put into place the support needed to build a dynamic economy focused on innovation and entrepreneurship. Check with my website to learn more about this subject and our progress.

Landmark Property Tax Reform Becomes Law

This legislative session we passed the most significant reform of the State's property tax system in decades. For the first time ever, municipalities now have a dedicated portion of the sales tax—½ of a percent. Until this year, the state had never granted its municipalities significant revenue other than from the property tax.

The new revenue will be distributed in three forms:

1. **Reducing the unfairness of the car tax which is based on a town's mill rate.** The new law caps the mill rate on automobiles across the state at 32 in July of 2016, and lowers it further to 29.36 in 2017. (Currently, Hartford's rate is 74 mills, Wethersfield's is 38 mills.) Starting next July, the residents of both Hartford and Wethersfield who own a car or cars will see their car tax reduced.
2. **Increasing reimbursement for towns with a greater percentage of state-owned or college and hospital tax-exempt property.** Currently, state-owned property and colleges and hospitals do not pay property taxes to the towns in which they are located. The state reimburses those towns a small percentage of the actual taxes those entities would pay if the property were taxable. The new law has created three tiers of reimbursement rather than one. The more tax-exempt property a municipality has, the higher the level of reimbursement.
3. **Creating a new revenue stream for cities and towns.** In a town with limited commercial property such as Wethersfield, or a city with overwhelming service needs such as Hartford, the property tax is punishing for many residents. This section of the law provides revenue from the sales tax to offset the need for a property tax increase and to slow the growth of local government beyond a certain level. No town will be prohibited from spending more than allowed, but this new funding will be reduced proportional to the amount the town overspends.

As the Senate chairman of the Finance Committee, I am proud to have worked with Senate President Martin Looney and my Hartford and Wethersfield legislative colleagues to pass this groundbreaking legislation.



Update on UConn Study of Stopping Illegal Streetbikes



While the problem is particularly acute in Hartford and other major cities, every town is now experiencing the dangerous actions of groups of illegal streetbikes marauding down the streets of our neighborhoods. Riders of these illegal streetbikes and quads are well aware of the restrictions local police forces have on police chases of

these bikes. This realization is extremely frustrating for law enforcement as well as residents who experience this lawless activity. Working with the Southwest/Behind the Rocks Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) organization, I requested that the University of Connecticut assist us in researching ways to limit, if not end, this scourge. The students and faculty assigned to this project have come back with a number of recommendations, a handful of which hold some promise. The NRZ, representatives of the Hartford Police Department, UConn, and I will be working over the next few months to identify one or two approaches which have the greatest potential to serve to deter this growing public safety problem. You can find the full list of recommendations on my legislative website at www.SenatorFonfara.cga.ct.gov.

Expansion of CRDA to Include Hartford's Neighborhoods

When Governor Malloy first took office five years ago, he created a new agency, the Capitol Region Development Authority (CRDA), to focus on the redevelopment of Hartford's Downtown. Since then, millions have been put to work to support the creation of hundreds of new housing units and to lead initiatives such as bringing UConn downtown and the upgrade of the aging XL Center. This session I worked with the Malloy administration and the



dynamic executive director of CRDA, Michael Friemuth, to expand the footprint of CRDA to include all of Hartford's neighborhoods with \$40 million in new funding for housing and public infrastructure projects, including streetscape improvements. \$10 million of these funds will be dedicated to the newly designated Promise Zone in the city's Northend. I look forward to working with Mr. Friemuth, the Hartford legislative delegation, Hartford's Mayor-elect Luke Bronin, and the City Council to maximize the impact of these funds in our neighborhoods.

Capewell Building Finally Getting Some Love

As many of you know, the Capewell Horse Shoe Nail Factory in Hartford's east side has sat vacant for over 20 years. Somehow it has survived the storms of time. Despite years of effort by the City, private developers, and support from the Hartford legislative delegation, the



loop could not be closed to make the renovation happen. Now with the experience and commitment of the Corporation for Independent Living, the creativity and determination of CRDA's Michael Friemuth, the persistence of neighborhood activists such as Lynn Ferrari, I am happy to say not only has Capewell been saved, but it now will be another success story in the amazing revitalization of the Sheldon/Charter Oak neighborhood. This project is living proof of what can be accomplished when caring people work together to overcome enormous odds.

Other Issues of Importance

Brainard Airport Study

The Program Review & Investigations Committee, which I co-chair, has begun a study of the economic benefits of Brainard Airport compared to other potential economic development uses. I welcome your perspective on this issue.

Cut Your Heating Costs

The Boiler Replacement Program we passed into law two years ago is helping families lower their heating costs. Please visit www.ctenergyloan.com or call 855-803-3090 to learn how you can replace your old, inefficient boiler with a loan for less than three percent interest, no credit check and with the loan repaid on your existing utility bill.

Grand List Growth

Every Hartford business owner knows too well the effects of Hartford's 74 mill property tax rate. As chair of the Finance Committee, I won passage of a bill, Grand List Growth, that will enable municipalities with high mill rates to encourage new commercial development by taking the average of the surrounding towns' mill rates and applying that lower rate to any new or expanded commercial development or vacant commercial property. Growing Hartford's grand list is critical to giving the small businesses along neighborhood corridors such as Park Street and Franklin, Maple, Farmington and Albany avenues a fighting chance.

Learn more about these issues at my website at www.SenatorFonfara.cga.ct.gov.