

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fairfield is at a turning point. This Strategic Plan, Fairfield's first, allowed the Town as a whole to begin thinking about what Fairfield needs and what its future could look like. Our committee hopes this plan will provide a roadmap to achieve the priorities identified throughout this comprehensive planning process. Through this process, priorities were uncovered as the VISION for Fairfield began to take shape, including:

- A streamlined government structure to provide ease of access and produce high citizen satisfaction;
- Private/public partnerships to allow Fairfield to continue to be a leader in education and a national role model for curriculum innovation;
- A focus on life-phase centric housing;
- Culture preserving development that reduces traffic by eliminating the need for it;
- A stable and robust local economy;
- Utilization of current technologies while updating/embracing new technology to communicate with and energize all residents;
- A beach town with both vibrant beach and marine attractions, and sleepy, peaceful seclusion.

Areas to address were also uncovered. Fairfield has a dated form of government. It's very rare to see such highly distributed decision-making processes in towns of its size. Fairfield has an excellent public school system whose traditional form of funding will continue to be under pressure. Fairfield has some of the best real property assets whose value to the community is yet untapped. Connecticut's financial strains are not going away anytime soon. Seniors and Millennials are making similar lifestyle choices, yet they differ from our Town residents' traditional wants.

Despite these challenges, Fairfield was universally lauded as a wonderful Town. The VISION that arose through this planning process will ensure Fairfield has it all. The Strategic Planning Committee urges the town bodies to begin the planning process to implement the recommendations within immediately.

This Strategic Plan was built through extensive community feedback, consultation with numerous subject matter experts, other project analyses, and insights from our consulting partner Houseal Lavigne Associates. The written document contains significant details and implementation steps. The key elements of the plan are to:

1. Modify our Town Governance structure to a Town Council/Town Manager or Town Council/Town Manager/Mayor format to manage increasing complexities and risks. This will provide a more effective and efficient form of government, and will improve cross-department and Commission operations. It would simplify and consolidate control structures to align with this plan, simplify and clarify escalation and risk management, ultimately providing the towns' citizens better access to their government (one-stop shopping), and to improve overall citizen satisfaction.
2. Extend fiscal stewardship by capitalizing on all revenue opportunities, controlling spending, and practice sound budgeting processes, which are based on a set of metric-driven goals designed to achieve the level of taxes commensurate with the value those services deliver.
3. Expand Economic Development to support the Town's financial requirements. Accomplish this by leveraging available land and modernizing land-use regulations. Agree on a set of revenue targets for which departments will be responsible.
4. Continue to invest in Education innovation and set metric-driven goals to further advance and track student achievement beyond per-pupil expenditure. These metrics should recognize the need to reduce the tax burden by taking advantage of public/private partnerships and commercialization of curriculum

where possible. Improve how the Town approaches intra and inter Town collaboration (in Town operations and Education), where programs can be leveraged and spending controlled with shared services.

5. Continue steps to manage and protect the Town's coastal resources, be environmentally conscious, and plan for effective transportation alternatives.

The ultimate outcome defined in the VISION is to increase Fairfield's competitiveness as characterized by the three attributes the Town has defined for itself: Attractiveness, Affordability, and Safety. These attributes will manifest as a result of the projects the Town tackles; in other words, it's the projects we take on and move forward that will define us. Our committee recognizes that all projects come with trade-offs between services, service levels, tax levels, and town character. Trade-offs are unavoidable in any environment; in this financially constrained environment, trade-offs are a practical reality.

Several "BIG" ideas were identified through the process of gathering community input, stakeholder, and subject matter expert interviews covering a wide variety of topics such as economic development, land use regulations, and community design. A short description of each "BIG" idea is provided below, with supplemental details on the following page. Further work is needed to analyze and more fully develop these concepts.

- **Waterfront Development:** The Town's waterfront location is frequently mentioned as an incredible town asset. This real asset could provide more value to the Town if it is leveraged to a more extensive degree with thoughtful commercial development. Such development options could include commercial/retail/restaurant capability.
- **Comprehensive Downtown Community Development:** Create a comprehensive vision and plan for innovative community development in the downtown area. This plan would capitalize on both senior and millennial lifestyle choices, town assets, and economic development partnerships and opportunities. A write-up of the key aspects of this concept has been prepared.

- **'Walk-ability' Zones:** Sprinkle micro-economic centers throughout the Town's vast acreage as a means to grow economic activity, increase services available in underserved areas, and reduce cross-town traffic.

Fairfield's VISION is to create a dynamic and desirable community to provide an exceptional quality of life with a low-cost burden to its residents. The community will boast a transparent and responsible local government, competitive educational system, and effectively delivered essential services.

The Town achieves this through thoughtful community involved planning, leveraging all key assets, prudent and effective partnerships, and responsible business and financial management practices. Fairfield has vibrant, diverse, safe, and easy to navigate neighborhoods, desirable commercial corridors supporting a robust economy, and an engaged citizenry. Its multi-generational citizenry is a key demographic that is planned for and desired that stabilizes and enriches our community.

If Fairfield embraces, actively plans, implements, and provides the supports necessary to the identified focus areas and populations, Fairfield will differentiate itself and become the most desirable community in Fairfield County. Fairfield should plan to continually evolve to meet the new opportunities and challenges it will face over the coming years.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE “BIG” IDEAS:

The following paragraphs provide additional background and information on the “BIG” ideas introduced in the Executive Summary on the prior page. Further work is needed on each of these ideas to fully develop the opportunity, approach, participants, risks, etc.

Develop the Waterfront: The Town’s waterfront location is frequently mentioned as an incredible town asset. This area could provide more value if it was leveraged to a more extensive degree with thoughtful commercial development. The Marina area certainly has the ability to unlock greater value, as does the existing Town-owned land parcels next to it. Commercial development in this area could encompass commercial/retail/restaurant capability, along with aspects of a walking boardwalk running west from the marina area towards Penfield Pavilion. The ability to link the Marina area to Penfield in some manner (pathway, walking path, bicycle path, etc.) would also improve its usefulness. It would be an innovative way to capitalize on this area’s potential for overall Town benefit and improve Fairfield’s reputation on this key waterfront attribute.

Comprehensive Downtown Community Development: Create a compelling vision for innovative community development downtown. To capitalize on both Senior and Millennial lifestyle choices, town assets, and economic development partnerships and opportunities downtown, it should incorporate and leverage the most significant Town controlled land parcels. The plan could be comprehensively developed to provide desirable living components while unlocking this area’s economic value. A key element of this is for the Town to partner and lead in the design of such an initiative, as its development would leverage key aspects of the Town’s infrastructure and its assets at Fairfield Center and/or Metro Center. A key design element needs to intentionally incorporate and take advantage of the similarities in senior and millennial lifestyle choices to create and brand the idea of multi-generational living. Such, Senior and Millennial Integrated Living Environment (SMILE) can be used in Fairfield’s overall branding initiatives. Due to the wide variety of considerations and options for this topic, a write-up of the key aspects of the SMILE concept has been documented.

‘Walk-ability’ Zones: This concept’s basic premise is to sprinkle micro-economic centers throughout the Town’s vast acreage versus having it all concentrated downtown. It was frequently mentioned in community outreach meetings as an idea that could meet the needs of residents in various areas. Projects of this nature that are sensitive to local neighborhood character can increase commercial activity and reduce cross-town traffic while reducing taxes and increase services to areas that have been largely ignored, like Greenfield Hill.

These Big Ideas require further work to best develop these opportunities. The following actions outline next steps.

- Assign resources to develop and outline of the approach, considerations, opportunities, challenges for each topic.
- Identify the steps needed for a structured analysis, and a report back within 45 days of the results of such work.
- Conduct a formal review with the First Selectwoman and BOS of each opportunity.
- Conduct reviews with other relevant Town Boards.
- Determine the implementation steps, partnerships, resources, etc., for each topic.