
FIRST SELECTMAN'S REPORT

TO: Board of Selectmen
FROM: Eric Wellman – First Selectman
DATE: February 11, 2019

Reflections on a Difficult Week

Over the past week, our town has been at the center of a conversation about race and diversity and I have heard from so many residents and former residents during this time. I appreciate everyone who has reached out to me to share a perspective. No doubt the intensity of the conversation reflects the divisions that are playing out in our country.

Personally, I have no interest in rehashing the specific incident that has gripped our town over the past week. However, I am highly interested in figuring out how we can make Simsbury a welcoming place for everyone who lives, works, and goes to school here.

Conversations about race don't often happen organically. If there is anything positive that comes out of this otherwise difficult week, it is the fact that our community is talking. And we need to keep talking.

One of the privileges of holding elected office is the opportunity to get to know a community intimately. During my time in office, some of our residents have shared with me a perspective on our town that a white man, such as myself, may not be otherwise privy to. I am grateful for the candor of these conversations, but saddened by the implications.

I am pleased that Deacon Art Miller will be providing programming to some of our students. Community for Care will be organizing a wider conversation. Also, members of our Board of Education met with the NAACP and had a productive conversation.

Diversity training and forums are just the beginning. Creating a place where every person feels safe and welcome is the responsibility of all of us.

Simsbury is unique – an outlier – when it comes to our high level of civic engagement. It is my hope that we can use this as a springboard. Let's seize the opportunity to come even closer as a community through conversation, listening, and mutual understanding.

New Park Construction

In June, the town is scheduled to begin work on a new park next to the Flower Bridge. It will include new landscaping, paver walkways, and a new pavilion. This project will also improve access to the river for the launching of kayaks. While this park will enhance an already amazing attraction, the town will unfortunately need to close the Flower Bridge for much of the 2019 season. It will remain open until June to allow for the annual Duck Race and Burgers on the Bridge Fundraisers.

If you have questions about the new park or the bridge closure, I encourage you to [review a presentation](#), which was recently delivered to the Board of Selectmen. The temporary closure of the bridge is not something we take lightly, but I'm very excited that we'll be able to unveil the new park in time for Simsbury's 350th celebration.

Planning Update

- One week ago, the Zoning Commission approved a distillery for the Hixon Building (the Depot Building behind Bank of America). The operator is relocating from another location in Simsbury and expects to be open to the public this spring.
- Demolition permits have been filed for the removal of buildings on the “Big Y” property. There are no plans for re-development at this time, however staff will be contacting the property owner to discuss the status.
- Development and Management Plans have been filed for the Deepwater Wind solar project with the Connecticut Siting Council. Staff is evaluating the submission and will provide the Board with a detailed update at a future meeting.
- 690 Hopmeadow Street (Ensign Mansion) is proceeding along. 5 apartments are being built in the historic building and the restaurant, Metro Bis moved into the annex on the south side of the property earlier this month.
- 200 Hopmeadow Street (former Hartford property): The plan for the property consists of apartments, an assisted living facility, and some commercial development. Work has begun on one of two commercial buildings for the development. The assisted living portion of the development is scheduled to be open in late July/early August.

Key Dates for Budget Season

- Monday February 25th – Town Manager’s budget presentation to the Board of Selectmen
- Saturday March 2nd – Board of Selectmen’s budget workshop (BOS reviews each section of the budget in detail with department heads – public is welcome to attend)
- Tuesday March 19th – Board of Selectmen presents its proposed budget to the Board of Finance
- Tuesday April 2nd – Public budget hearing at the library
- Tuesday May 14th – Budget referendum at Henry James Middle School

Police Retirement

I’d like to offer congratulations and well wishes to Sgt. John Durkin who is retiring from the Simsbury Police Department after 34 years. Sgt. Durkin served as a dispatcher, officer, detective, and 20 years as a sergeant. He is also a Simsbury resident. There will be a party in his honor Sunday February 17th from 3 – 5pm at Trinity Church in Tariffville. Members of the Board of Selectmen are welcome to attend as is any member of the public.

Veterans Appreciation Breakfast

Metacomet VFW Post 1926 invites all veterans, current military, and their families to a veterans appreciation breakfast on Saturday February 23rd from 8 – 11am at the Main Fire House, 871 Hopmeadow Street. The event is being provided free of charged by the Simsbury VFW as a thank you for your service. The VFW asked me to share that members of the Board of Selectmen are welcome to attend.

Help with Taxes

AARP Tax-Aide Volunteers are providing free individual income tax filing assistance on Thursdays now through April 11th and Tuesdays March 5th – 26th at the Simsbury Public Library. Appointments are available from 10am – 3pm. Please book an appointment ahead of time by calling the Simsbury Senior Center at (860) 658-3273. Walk-ins will not be accepted.

The program is open to anyone who needs assistance, regardless of age, income, or town residence. The volunteers will be located in the Library’s Program Room #2.

24th Annual Simsbury River Run

The Simsbury-Granby Rotary Club will be hosting the annual River Run on Sunday April 28th at the Simsbury Meadows. The River Run is a community event that features a 5K, 10K and Kids' 1-mile run in addition to family activities and live music.

Martin Luther King Junior Celebration

If you were unable to attend the town's annual Martin Luther King Jr. celebration, you can find a link to the video [here](#). The program will also be shown throughout the month of February on SCTV. UConn professor Joelle Murchison gave an excellent keynote address titled "Living the Dream in Times of Trouble."

Bi-Annual Town of Simsbury Shred Event

Saturday April 6th is the Town's bi-annual shred event. It's free for residents of Simsbury who are invited to bring up to 3 grocery size bags per household. It will take place 9am – 1pm in front of Town Hall (933 Hopmeadow Street).

New Economic Development Commission

The Board of Selectmen formed the new EDC in late 2018. The commission will be focused on 4 areas in particular that were identified by the Board of Selectmen. They include identifying business incentive programs that make sense for our town, developing a roadmap of economic development priorities, refreshing branding materials, and developing a business visitation program. You can read more about the priorities [here](#).

Cell Phone Service

The need to improve cell service in town came up as one of the Board of Selectmen's priorities. Verizon is in the process of installing 5 small towers to improve its local service, including one near Maple Tree Café, with the goal of improving service in our central business district. Our contact at Verizon says they are waiting on an additional part and that tower should be operational in a matter of weeks. Similar small cell towers have been installed already across from Simsbury High School and off Winslow Place. I frequently hear from residents who are concerned about the quality of cell coverage. In 2019, I will continue to work on this issue, engaging with other cellular carriers as well.

Simsbury's 350th Celebration

I am excited about the planning that's going into Simsbury's 350th anniversary celebration, which will be comprised of numerous events throughout next year. I want to acknowledge the dozens of volunteers and organizations involved, and all of the people giving their time to plan this anniversary celebration. The 350th Committee gave a presentation to the Board of Selectmen at our January 14th meeting. You can see a tentative schedule of the signature events [here](#) (page 14). They include an antique show, a river day, a country fair, and many, many more! I also wanted to point you to a recent show on SCTV that gives a look into the planning going into next year's celebration. You can find that [here](#).

Board of Selectman Priorities

At our last meeting in November, the Board of Selectmen unanimously adopted its priorities for the coming year. The priorities include infrastructure improvements such as connecting Tariffville to Simsbury with a bike path, and improved cell phone service, especially in our downtown. Other goals center around financial management, improving transparency and identifying opportunities for the Town to work more closely with the Board of Education on shared services. Other goals speak to quality of life, including improving transportation options for seniors. You can find the full list of goals [here](#).

Simsbury Trail News

I'd like to offer my thanks and congratulations to all who were involved in our Bicycle Friendly Community application. We got word from League of American Bicyclists that Simsbury will maintain its Silver status for another 4 years! Across Connecticut there are 9 Bike Friendly Communities and only Simsbury and New Haven have achieved silver status. Out of the state's 11 Bike Friendly Businesses, 3 are here in Simsbury. This application fills a three ring binder. I am so appreciative to Bike-Pedestrian Advisory Committee, the volunteers, and town staff who worked cooperatively to make this possible. It's a testament to the work that's been put in to encourage cycling, improve infrastructure, and improve cycling safety in our community.

See Simsbury.bike for a regional listing of upcoming events, rides, and meetings.

Stay Connected

You can sign up for email updates from the town so you always know what's happening in our community. On the homepage of the Town website, click "[subscribe to news,](#)" and you'll be able to specify exactly what kind of news you want to receive.

Opportunities to Serve Your Town

There are more than a dozen boards and commissions that serve our town whose members are appointed by the Board of Selectmen. We're always looking for volunteers willing to serve and I'm pleased to share that the Town has made the process easier and more transparent. You can learn more about all of our boards and commissions, current vacancies, and how to apply [here](#).

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

TO: Board of Selectmen
FROM: Maria E. Capriola – Town Manager
DATE: February 11, 2019

BOARD OF SELECTMEN BUSINESS:

Communications: Today we received correspondence from the Conservation Commission (attached) regarding your agenda item on HB 5254, referred to as the “Municipal Open Space Funding Bill.” Similar to the correspondence you have received from the Simsbury Land Trust, the Conservation Commission is also seeking your support of the bill. Should the Board wish to learn more on the topic please let me know and I can schedule it as a more structured future agenda item.

DEPARTMENTAL NEWS & NOTES:

Public Works: I would like to commend Dough Rendock for going above and beyond during the recent winter storm event. During the storm one of our residents got stuck in her vehicle trying to proceed along Westledge Road. Doug demonstrated great skill in plowing around her car and, as the resident reported, helping her out of a scary situation. I would like to again extend my appreciation for the hard work that all of our public works employees do during winter storm events to make sure Simsbury is safe.

Police: I would like to congratulate our Police Department on their recent recognitions of excellence at the law enforcement torch run kick off for the Special Olympics. Officer Laurel Harrington and PFC Lauren Devin accepted the recognitions of excellence for the department at an event held on February 5th. In 2018 our Police Department raised over \$15,000 for the Connecticut Special Olympics. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all department members who are involved in raising funds for this worthy cause.

SPECIAL EVENTS & PROGRAMS:

Veterans Breakfast: The Metacomet Post 1926 Veterans of Foreign Wars, Simsbury, is inviting all veterans, current military personnel, and their families to a veterans appreciation breakfast on Saturday February 23rd. Members of the Board of Selectmen are also invited to attend. The breakfast will be from 8:00am until 11:00am at the Simsbury Main Fire House located at 871 Hopmeadow Street. The VFW is sponsoring this free event as a “thank you” to veterans and active military personnel for their service. The snow date for the event is March 2, 2019.

HFPG Greater Together Listening Tour: The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (HFPG) Greater Together Listening Tour event originally scheduled for tomorrow evening at the Library has been rescheduled to Thursday, March 14, at 5:30 pm, same location. The event is part of an information gathering program which will be used in the organization's strategic planning process. HFPG has held similar events throughout their service area over the past few months. HFPG President Jay Williams will speak. They wish to hear from community members what makes Simsbury great, some of the challenges facing the community, and how HFPG can work together with the town to make Simsbury an even better place to live. Results of the event will be shared on the HFPG website and we've requested they be sent to me directly as well. A new initiative of HFPG is the Greater Together Community Fund. \$100,000 has been set aside for each community in the HFPG area, \$50,000 to be used in the near future with the remaining \$50,000 held in perpetuity in an endowment for future projects. The towns will appoint a Community Advisory Group which will determine projects on which to allocate the \$50,000.