

# BOARD OF SELECTMEN

**ROBERT J. BRULE, FIRST SELECTMAN**

**2023 ANNUAL REPORT**

**RICH MUCKLE, SELECTMAN**

**GREG ATTANASIO, SELECTMAN**

**SHANNON WITHEY, EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT**

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**(FROM R TO L) SELECTMAN GREG ATTANASIO,  
FIRST SELECTMAN ROBERT BRULE AND  
SELECTMAN RICHARD MUCKLE**

It continues to be an honor to serve the Town of Waterford as the First Selectman. To me, commitment is truly the most important piece of serving our community. I continue to value trust, communication, transparency, a sense of belonging and always putting the Waterford community first in my decision-making. I am proud to work alongside Selectman Rich Muckle and Selectman Greg Attanasio and present the 2023 Board of Selectmen Annual Report.

In 2023, the BOS presented an operating budget with an increase of just 1.32%, consistent with previous budget increases of 1.25%, 1.65% and 2.07%, respectfully. The 5-year Capital Plan presented in 2023 highlighted a “Snap Shot” which identified use from the General Fund Balance for capital projects with a focus on road paving, water utility, building maintenance and parks, which was well received from elected officials on both sides of the aisle. Waterford completed its state-mandated revaluation and saw a significant number of property values continue to climb. The Grand List increased for the 8<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, a 30% increase. Waterford continues to work closely with the Board of Finance and RTM to complete existing capital projects and initiate necessary town-wide capital infrastructure projects. The First Selectman will continue to provide the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and the RTM quarterly updates to ensure consistent communication continues.

Over the past year, First Selectman Brule served as Vice Chairman of the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) and a member of the Executive Committee for SCCOG and the Southeast Area Transit District (SEAT). In 2023, First Selectman Brule was selected and honored as a “First 100 Plus - Class of 2023” recipient by the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, for

demonstrated leadership and commitment to improving the lives of domestic violence survivors in Connecticut.

## Community Engagement

The First Selectman's Office remains committed to community engagement and accessibility to town parks and outdoor space. The First Selectman's "Waterford Cares" initiative started four years ago and continues with great participation by the community - to provide holiday meals to veterans and families in need. It also includes creating and supporting community events in town, for example, Veterans ceremonies, holiday tree lightings, hosting a Diaper Bank drive, hosting food drives, Waterford Day Parade, trunk or treat, Town Coin presentations, Town Proclamation ceremonies, Honoring Scouts, and the American flag display from Memorial Day to Veterans Day. The Town continues to commit to its veterans by hosting Memorial Day and Veterans Day Ceremonies through the First Selectman's Office, as well as participating in Wreaths Across America every December. These events honoring



and remembering our Waterford Veterans remains a priority. The Waterford Veterans Coffeehouse continues to gain membership and attendance. The Coffeehouse is held at Filomenas Restaurant in town and remains the largest attended Veterans Coffeehouse in Eastern CT. The First Selectman's Office continues to sponsor the Waterford Veterans Day Ceremony, Memorial Day Ceremony and 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony, as well as, Wreaths Across America at Jordan Cemetery.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Waterford Day Parade continued this summer and was a huge success for residents of all ages! The Town of Waterford continues its strong relationship with the American Red Cross and has continued to host monthly blood drives at Town Hall. The town continued to partner with Ledge Light Health District, to provide residents vaccine clinic options and Covid-19 Test Kit distribution opportunities. In 2023, the Waterford Country School celebrated 100 years of service. Congratulations! The Waterford Country School employs 150 staff and sits on 320 acres of rural land. Every day, the WCS use of therapeutic animal interaction, nature based enrichment activities, hands on learning, and compassionate staff to change the growth trajectory for children and young adults. The Town of Waterford

remains a proud supporter of the Waterford Country School. The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center recently produced the musical “Shucked” which was a Tony Award winner in 2023! Amazing accomplishment! The First Selectman remains a proud Ex-Officio member of the Board of Trustees at The O’Neill. The town’s efforts continue to focus on the campus’ capital needs, while ensuring the day-to-day maintenance of the buildings and grounds remain the O’Neill’s responsibility. The Town worked directly with the Diaper Bank of CT, Waterford resident Jennifer Kohl, and Waterford Human Service Administrator, Dani Gorman to create the First Selectman’s Diaper Bank Drive! The Diaper Bank Drive falls under the First Selectman’s Waterford Cares program, an initiative



focused on addressing the day-to-day needs of all our residents, emotionally, financially, spiritually, and physically. The turn out from the community and town employees was amazing and did not disappoint! Waterford continues to donate and deliver holiday meals to veterans and seniors in town, as well as, families in need.

In 2023, the First Selectman’s Office participated in a town-wide, regional school crisis drill, which included all town departments and first responders. Also participating were school administrators, teachers, students, parents and community members in Quaker Hill. The First Selectman signed two Inter-local Agreements on behalf of the Waterford Police Department. The first was an agreement with the Town of Ledyard, creating the Southeastern Connecticut Special Response Team. The second was an agreement with the Town of East Lyme, creating the Shoreline Traffic Accident Reconstruction Team (START). This regional agreement is another example of Waterford working together with our neighbor East Lyme. The two towns currently partner on animal control services, a shared regional police boat and equally contributed funds to a new pump-out boat on the Niantic River for Save the River-Save the Hills. First Selectman Brule joined Mayor Keith Hedrick and Mayor Michael Passero in 2023 to support the annual Wyland National Mayor’s Challenge for Water Conservation (Mayor’s Challenge). With no cost to



cities, towns or taxpayers, the Mayor’s Challenge offers a unique and compelling way to motivate residents to conserve water.



In addition, the town remains committed to the success of the Waterford Fire Department as a “combination department. The First Selectman participated in active firefighter training to see first-hand how firefighters safely enter a burning building to prepare for the day when they are called upon. Waterford firefighters are placed in a position that requires them to handle extraordinary amounts of responsibilities when they become a part of this career. First, they will be placing themselves in harm’s way and taking risks to ensure the safety of others. While firefighters undergo extensive training as recruits, they need to develop or already have specific skills to perform their duties safely and effectively. The First Selectman’s day of training included a debriefing session with a team of 12 firefighters by Captain Martin. It then included entering a smoke-filled building on a 90-degree summer day to rescue a victim on the second floor, seeing nothing because of the smoke machine, wearing all the gear, carrying an ax, wearing an oxygen mask and feeling my way to the victim with my partner.



## Capital Projects



As noted previously, in 2023, the 5-year capital plan reflected a “Snap-Shot” for the responsible and transparent use of the general fund balance for capital projects. Thank you to the Board of Selectman and Board of Finance Chairman, Glenn Patterson, for your input and support in 2023. The 5-year capital plan will again reflect use of the general fund balance as to ensure operating budgets and impact on the tax rate remains stable. Road paving projects will continue to have the Utility Commission replace all 30-year old plastic water connectors over to copper prior to road paving, eliminating the possibility of leaks forming under the newly paved roads. The First Selectman’s Office continues to communicate with the Superintendent of Schools and put forward an \$800,000 capital project to replace the AC Chillers at Clark Lane Middle School. The First Selectman initiated a town-wide school and community



security upgrade capital project with input from leaders within the police, fire, emergency management, IT, finance and planning departments and the Superintendent. The \$2M request for funding this school security project is the largest capital project for school and community safety the town has ever requested and been approved by the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and the Representative Town Meeting. The Waterford Duck Pond dredging project was approved in 2023

and saw the \$900,000 dredging project completed in the fall, while the ADA pathways are still under construction. Trees around the pond were removed due to Ash bore disease or root systems negatively impacting the project and will be replaced with new healthy trees that will be here for another 50 years! The Town of Waterford completed the new concrete sidewalk within the Historic Jordan Village from B-Lane to Avery Lane with the help from a State of Connecticut grant, thereby, extending the connection to the Jordan Historic Village Green. In 2023, the \$1M approved road paving and reclamation project of Old Norwich Road in Quaker Hill became the largest road-paving project the Town of Waterford approved in decades.



#### Other Notable Capital Projects Completed in 2023:

- The Public Safety Building (Emergency Management, Dispatchers and Fire Services) HVAC rooftop unit and roof replaced.
- The Town Hall front door was replaced.
- The \$2.75M Cross Road (state-funded grant) Paving Project was closed.
- The Southwest School underground septic tanks were removed.
- The oil tanks at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center were removed.
- The underground oil tank at the Police Department was removed.
- The AC Units at Emergency Radio Sites were replaced. The \$400,000 Underground fuel tanks at the Public Safety Building and the Library were removed.
- The Utility Commission initiated the replacement of 30-year old plastic water connectors with copper connectors prior to paving new roads.
- Town paved Tiffany Avenue, Oil Mill Road, East Brook Drive, Shore Road, Cedar Street, Savi Avenue, Cherry Street and Niantic River Road.

## Fleet Management Plan

The Public Works Department and the Police Department fleet plans remain a priority. As supply chain issues have occurred, the Town remains in good position to purchase the fleet necessary to keep our town safe and operating efficiently. The Town continues to remove vehicles and equipment from the fleet in an effort to reduce the size of the fleet. The new Municipal Complex's 70,000 square foot garage continues to keep our trucks and other fleet equipment inside and protected from the elements. The First Selectman will continue to focus on Fleet Management, focusing on how many vehicles the Town has in its fleet, maintenance of vehicles to extend life and budgeting for large vehicle replacement when the time is needed. FY25 will see the Town committing funds for three large pieces of apparatus within Public Works, including a Sweeper for \$348,209, a 5-ton Dump Truck for \$276,695 and a Side Load Refuse Truck for \$391,997.

## Planning & Economic Development



The Town of Waterford is proud to recognize Waterford resident and business owner, Cindy Hersom, President/Owner of Dicin Electric. In 2023, Dicin Electric was honored by President Biden at the White House for being selected U.S. Small Business Administration Sub-Contractor of the Year, for the entire country! Congratulations Cindy, Chris and the entire

Dicin Electric family for 50 years of dedicated service in town. The Planning Department continues to be very busy with new business and the number of permit requests. Over the past year, there continues to be commitment towards responsible economic development and our continued efforts to "fill empty storefronts" and attract new businesses to Waterford. In 2023, the Town welcomed M&T Bank to town in the old Webster Bank location and saw the closed Hendels Americana Furniture Barn space filled with Americana Fabrics, one of the largest online fabric stores in New England. Posh Wash Carwash renovated and opened the carwash across from Job Lot. Long-time Waterford business Hillyers Tackle Shop was purchased and is under new ownership and the town saw Play it Again Sports renovated and open the space between Planet Fitness and Big Lots. Many in town are excited to see Chipotle purchase the land near Aldi's and the start of construction, while the old Hess Gas Station



nearby was demolished to make room for a gas station and market at the same location. The former Sunset Rib Restaurant in Mago Point was remodeled and opened for business under the new name Fat Tuna. Graniteville Dentistry completed its construction and has moved into the vacant space in Utopia Centre. The first phase of the Waterford Woods Luxury Apartments Complex on Willets Avenue was completed. This needed apartment housing development for young professionals in the area is a \$100M project, and is on schedule to start Phase 2 in the spring of 2024. Waterford Woods includes a state of the art clubhouse and pool, rain gardens, 3-mile walking trail, pickleball courts, dog parks, community vegetable and herb gardens and garage units for additional storage for residents.



The First Selectman, on behalf of the Economic Development Commission, attended the International Council of Shopping Centers National Convention in New York City. During the convention he met with developers from around the country to discuss possibilities of development at the Crystal Mall property and the Airport property.



The Town of Waterford proudly welcomed United States Assistant Secretary of Energy, Dr. Kathryn Huff and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Spent Fuel and Waste Disposition, Dr. Kim Petry, for a visit to Waterford and a tour of the Millstone Power Station. Discussions focused on the future of nuclear energy by the Biden Administration and my official testimony to the U.S House of Representatives supporting Congressman Courtney's Consent-Based Siting of Interim Storage Legislation. This important legislation supports the First Selectman's commitment to the removal of dry cask storage from the Millstone Power Station.

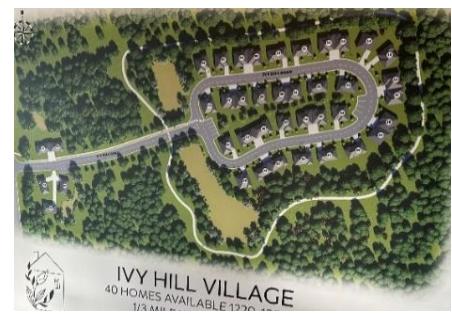
The Town of Waterford is currently completing the town's Plan of Conservation and Development. "Plan Waterford" is our Town's guide for the future. It shows where we have been and lays out the vision for where we are going. Thank you to the staff and Planning & Zoning Commission for the effort put forward as we complete the final phases, including the online survey.

## Budget Management

The town continues to look for new economic development that will have long-term effects and will enhance our Net Taxable Grand List. For example, the town Board of Selectmen and RTM voted unanimously to support Dominion Energy's interest in building data centers on its' property. In 2023, the First Selectman's Office has had positive communication with all three owners of the Crystal Mall property. The 40-home Ivy Hill Village residential project off Great Neck Road began construction in 2023. This cul-de-sac built by Adams Builders will feature energy efficient, smaller homes with an HOA that will take care of the lawn, trash and recycling and provide owners a nature walking trail. This newest residential cul-de-sac will allow homeowners to downsize in energy efficient "smaller homes" in the Great Neck area of town and grow the grand list. In 2023, the Town of Waterford enjoyed a mill rate decrease. Over the past year, there has



been a continued commitment to work closely with the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and the Representative Town Meeting to ensure Departmental Budgets, Capital Spending and Fleet Management Plans are thoughtful, deliberate and transparent. There has been a commitment to identify areas where Department Heads can find savings.



The Town continues to prioritize a working budget for our town that supports first responders, critical services and level of education we enjoy in town, while minimizing the growth of the taxpayers' burden. We have continued that philosophy with a minimal increase in the general government operating budget and updating job descriptions through the Human Resource Director, Commissions and the Program Review Board. The Town, like many of its' neighboring communities, has seen a continuation of retirements by eligible employees. There continues to be a focus placed on recruitment and retention of town employees, most notably, building officials, police officers and firefighters. The town successfully



negotiated a 4-year Police Contract, a 4-year 1303 Labor Contract, and a 4-year GGA Labor Contract, ensuring responsible budgeting, retaining our talented workforce and providing department heads with predictable personnel budgets going into the next four annual operating budgets. A trend moving away from the traditional 2-year labor contracts and high labor counsel costs to the town. The town, like many of its neighboring towns, has seen a continuation of retirements by eligible employees. There continues to be a focus placed on recruitment and retention of current employees. Over the past year, the First Selectman's Office worked with the Senior Service Commission, Human Resource Director, town labor counsel, the Youth & Family Services Advisory Council and the GGA union, to eliminate the Senior Service Director position and the Youth & Family Services Director position, and create one position, the Human Services Administrator. The impact has been noticeable and positive. No longer does a family "fall in between the cracks" while a more positive experience occurs between residents and the town. In 2023, the town saw Planning Director retire as well as the Fire Marshal. The town continues to absorb the aforementioned number of retirements of long-time town leaders and employees, yet, provide great opportunities and services for the residents. The Town leadership team remains committed to the growth and stability of the Town of Waterford.

Waterford continues to grow and attract families and businesses to town. We continue to have some of the largest retail shopping stores and plazas in southeastern CT and are home to two nuclear power plants. These provide many benefits to our town. We have more growth forecast for the town and look forward to planning that growth with the various builders and developers. Like so many of our neighboring communities, the year posed serious challenges due to supply chain issues and significant cost increases within capital expenses, adjusting to post-pandemic realities and the impact Electric Boat hiring thousands of highly compensated employees has had and will continue to have on the recruitment and retention of town employees.



FIRST SELECTMAN BRULE AND  
CHIEF OF POLICE, MARC  
BALESTRACCI

## American Rescue Plan Act



All expected ARPA funding from the federal government has been received by the Town of Waterford (\$5,547,889). The allocation the Town of Waterford received from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Plan to spend the funding was submitted to the RTM –

appropriating the funding to emergency service upgrades, small businesses, tourism, mental health needs, water utility upgrades and maintenance and outdoor parks. One adjustment to the Plan thus far, that being, the town-wide broadband was not an acceptable project by ARPA, due to Waterford not operating its own Utility. As a result, these ARPA funds transferred to the Civic Triangle Park Capital Project, due to that Master Plan being already approved by the Civic Triangle Park Ad-Hoc Committee and all town bodies and consistent with the initial ARPA plan submitted to the town for approval.

### Projects completed with ARPA funds in 2023:

- Small Business Grant Program
- Hired Human Services Coordinator for Senior Services Department
- 45 capital projects were completed for an approximate total of \$6.1M



### Projects ongoing in 2024:

- Waterford Park Pond ADA Pathways, Holm Memorial and Boardwalk
- Waterford Park Streetscape – Along Rope Ferry Road
- Waterford Park Playground ADA Pathways to Pond / Restrooms
- Old Norwich Road Pump Station Upgrade
- Fargo Lane Water (Tank) Tower Rehabilitation
- Town GIS Updates
- Eugene O'Neill Theater Hammond Mansion Roof Replacement

## Conclusion

The First Selectman is proud of the work we accomplished in a bi-partisan and professional manner in 2023 and remains committed to continuing positive, transparent and thoughtful discussions in the year ahead. Finally, and sadly, The First Selectman would be remiss if he did not acknowledge the profound loss of former Selectwoman and running mate, Jody Nazarchyk. Jody had an impact on the lives of countless Waterford residents this past year. Jody was an amazing person and community member. Her greatest gift was her love for her neighbor and her advocacy for veterans, seniors and children. Jody is missed terribly by our community, however, her legacy lives on forever in Waterford.

