

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

ROBERT J. BRULE, FIRST SELECTMAN

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

RICH MUCKLE, SELECTMAN

GREG ATTANASIO, SELECTMAN

SHANNON WITHEY, EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

It continues to be an honor to serve the Town of Waterford as the First Selectman. Commitment is truly the most important piece of serving our community, and I remain steadfast in valuing trust, communication, transparency, a sense of belonging, and always prioritizing the Waterford community in my decision-making. I am immensely proud of our town and the dedicated employees, volunteers elected officials I work with every day. My energy and passion for this role drive me to provide the public with a thoughtful Annual Summary. It is a privilege to work alongside Selectman Rich Muckle and Selectman Greg Attanasio as I present the 2024 Board of Selectmen Annual Report..



**FIRST SELECTMAN ROB BRULE WITH
SELECTMAN RICH MUCKLE AND SELECTMAN
GREG ATTANASIO**

In 2024, the Board of Selectman (BOS) presented an FY25 operating budget with an increase of 3.85% highlighted by a \$710,520 increase for the Retirement Commission and \$488,048 for Public Safety: \$285,042 Police Department, \$102,199 Emergency Management, and \$100,807 Fire Services. Previous general operating budget increases of 1.32%, 1.25%, 1.65% and 2.07%, have been respectfully submitted and approved. The 5-year “Snap Shot” Capital Plan, which is the responsibility of the First Selectmen, continues to identify projects that fall into the following four categories: Road Paving, Infrastructure/Utilities, Building Maintenance, and Board of Education. The “Snap Shot” tool remains an effective tool to transparently address the responsible use of the General Fund Balance for capital projects. The primary focus for the “Snap Shot” in 2024 was road paving, building maintenance, park improvements and Board of Education needs.

In 2024, after completing or closing 18 approved and funded capital projects, the Town of Waterford saw nearly \$5.8M in projects completed. The First Selectman's office supports the funding for the Town's Fleet Plan at \$1M annually as well as the town's retirement fund at \$1M. Working closely with the Board of Finance and RTM, I strive to complete existing capital projects and initiate necessary town-wide capital infrastructure projects while continuing to provide the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and the RTM quarterly updates to ensure transparency.

Over the past year, I have served as Chairman of the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SECOG) in addition to maintaining membership in the Executive Committee for SECOG and the Southeast Area Transit District (SEAT). On a more personal note, I was proudly selected into the 2024 Waterford Athletic Hall of Fame as the Waterford High School girls soccer team coach for twenty years.

Community Engagement



FIRST SELECTMAN BRULE WITH STUDENTS WHO VOLUNTEERED FOR THE FIRST SELECTMAN'S 2024 STAR WARS FOOD DRIVE AT TOWN HALL

The First Selectman's Office remains committed to community engagement and a "neighbors helping neighbors" approach. The "Waterford Cares" initiative which I started 5 years ago includes the following: hosting First Selectman Food Drives for the Waterford Community Food Bank; providing donated holiday meals to veterans, seniors and families in need; supporting the holiday tree lightings at Jordan Green and Quaker Hill Green; sponsoring the Waterford Day Parade; supporting Halloween Trunk or Treat and Socks for Seniors events; distributing Town Proclamations and Town Coins to honor scouts, milestones and residents; hosting the Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies; participating in Wreaths-Across-America every December; supporting survivors of domestic violence and Safe Futures as well as the Terri Brodeur Breast Cancer Foundation; and sponsoring the Waterford Veterans Coffeehouse. To note, the Waterford Veterans Coffeehouse has become the largest attended Veterans Coffeehouse in eastern Connecticut. The Town of Waterford

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**FIRST SELECTMAN BRULE CELEBRATING
HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH AT THE
WATERFORD LIBRARY**

maintains a strong relationship with the American Red Cross and continued to host monthly blood drives at Town Hall through 2024 as well as supporting the Thames River Garden Club's annual plant sale. In the Fall of 2024, I participated in the town's first Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration and was proud to present Town Proclamation to the "Women Between Cultures - Promoting Health and Wellness by Building Community" performers at the event. This event boasted amazing energy, great dancing and incredible people getting together to celebrate and

share their culture. Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated from September 15 to October 15 each year to recognize the contributions of Hispanic and Latinx Americans to the United States. As First Selectman, I am excited to announce I will be sponsoring the Waterford Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration in 2025. The 4th Annual Waterford Day Parade included over 90 entries, the largest number of participants in 5 years. "Unity in our Community" and seniors celebrating their 100th birthdays remain the themes every year for our town's parade. Police Chaplain Joseph Parise was recognized as the 2024 Grand Marshal.

The First Selectman and Emergency Management Director, Steve Sinagra, attended the 2024 Connecticut Emergency Management Symposium at Camp Nett in Niantic. Each spring, the CT Division of Emergency Management & Homeland Security, the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection, and the Connecticut Department of Public Health attract hundreds of local public safety officials and other local leaders responsible for responding to mass emergencies.



**FIRST SELECTMAN BRULE WITH
DESPP COMMISSIONER RONNELL
HIGGINS AT THE 2024 EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT SYMPOSIUM**

As Waterford's First Selectman, I opened the EOC (Emergency Operations Center) with Police Chief, Marc Balestracci, for the Secretary of State's Emergency Contingency Model Plan for Elections drill and discussed the scenarios of each module. In addition, the Town committed 8 months of preparation to ensure a safe election process. As First Selectman, I signed two (2)

additional Inter-local Agreements on behalf of the Waterford Police Department for the Southeastern Connecticut Special Response Team. The Town of Montville and the City of Groton have now joined Waterford, the Town of East Lyme and the Town of Ledyard to form this impressive regional team. The Shoreline Traffic Accident Reconstruction Team (START) also saw growth. This regional agreement is an excellent example of Waterford working together with East Lyme and new partner Montville Police Department. As throughout 2024, I will continue in 2025 to work closely with the Boating Division of the CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) to split the cost of rehabilitating the large state-owned Mago Point Boat Launch Public Parking lot, which will offer Waterford residents after hour parking and encourage continued business development in that area.



FIRST SELECTMAN BRULE AND SUPERINTENDENT TOM GIARD PARTICIPATING IN THE 2024 FEMA MILLSTONE POWER STATION HOSTILE ACTION DRILL

The Town of Waterford hosted a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for a Hostile Action Drill at Dominion Millstone Power Station at the Emergency Operations Center. The day-long exercise included the Waterford Police Department and Police Chief, Waterford Emergency Management Director, Waterford Fire Department and Director of Fire Services, Town Department Heads and Superintendent, State Police, FBI, DEEP, Public Health

Director, the Coast Guard and Dominion Security and Facility supervisors. The federally run FEMA drill simulated the progressive scenarios we have been trained to address. Each situational progression far more severe. Waterford police officers, firefighters, fire police, public works maintainers and ambulance service staff all participated at Forward Command (at Millstone) and throughout town. The debriefing session after the drill by FEMA evaluators was very positive. Working alongside Waterford leaders, employees and professionals in our EOC to ensure resident's safety remains my greatest responsibility. Thank you to Dominion, FEMA, the FBI, the State Police and all our mutual aid partners that participated in the drill.

The Town hosted the Ambassador of Finland, Mikko Hautala, U.S. Congressman Joe Courtney and U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary Paul Murray for the Department

of Spent Fuel and Waste Disposition, to Waterford. Congressman Courtney and I were proud to tour Dominion's Millstone Power Station and conduct a meeting at Waterford Town Hall. The discussion focused on Finland's proactive experience with storage of spent nuclear waste and the federal government's emerging plans for nuclear waste storage and consent-based siting. I want to thank Secretary Murray, Ambassador Hautala and Congressman Courtney as well as Dominion for their willingness to share their experience and expertise on this challenging but crucially important issue of long-term nuclear waste storage. Few communities across America are more significantly affected by this as yet unresolved issue than Waterford, and I will continue to support the federal government's concept of consent-based siting of spent waste storage and visit national and international proposals to store nuclear waste.



**FIRST SELECTMAN BRULE WITH FINLAND
AMBASSADOR HAUTALA AND U.S.
CONGRESSMAN JOE COURTNEY**

Capital Projects



**THE ARNOLD E. HOLM JR. MEMORIAL PARK
GRAND OPENING**

The newly renovated Arnold E. Holm Jr. Memorial Park officially opened this summer! The park renovations included ADA accessible pathways, lighting, a boardwalk, bridges, aerating pumps, basking logs for turtles, benches, a memorial plaza, stonewall, streetscape trees and additional lighting on Rope Ferry Road. I would like to thank the Recreation and Parks Commission and the Civic Triangle Ad Hoc Committee for their two-year commitment in overseeing the project. Most of the funding came from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), however, the dredging (\$945,000), the final phase for ADA access (\$273,428) and streetscape trees along Rope Ferry Road were supplemented from capital monies. The First Selectman's "Snap Shot" is a 5-year capital plan reflecting the responsible and transparent use of the General Fund Balance for capital projects. The "Snap Shot" helps ensure operating budgets stay intact and impact on the tax rate remains stable. Road paving

projects will continue to include the Utility Commission replacing 30-year old plastic water connectors with copper prior to road paving, eliminating the possibility of leaks forming under the newly paved roads. The Town's \$2M request for funding school security improvements remains the largest capital project for school and community safety the Town has ever requested. The largest part of this project, the video security cameras inside and around our schools, started at the beginning of the 2024 summer.



THE ARNOLD E. HOLM JR. MEMORIAL PARK
SEEN HERE AT NIGHT

Other Notable Capital Projects Completed in 2024:

- Town paved Kingfisher Way, Brill Avenue, Kestral Way, Lark Street, Mackenzie Avenue, Quail Street, Robin Street and Thrush Street.
- The Community Center HVAC System upgrade was completed.
- The Cohanzie Firehouse Underground Septic Tank was removed.
- 8 Goshen Road home abutting Great Neck School was purchased.
- Oswegatchie Firehouse architectural drawings were completed.
- Oswegatchie Firehouse project manager was funded.
- Clark Lane Chillers replaced for the AC system.
- Fargo Water Tank antennas replaced during the rehab project.
- Town Hall Basketball Court funding approved.

Fleet Management Plan



THE PUBLIC WORKS FLEET PARKED INSIDE THE
MUNICIPAL COMPLEX GARAGE READY FOR
INCLEMENT WEATHER

In 2024, the Town received three large pieces of apparatus for 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. 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. The Waterford Fire Department included its vehicles within the Fleetio fleet management system to ensure all town-owned vehicles, both small and large, are within the new fleet software program.

Planning & Economic Development

Over the past year, the Town of Waterford remained committed towards responsible economic development and our efforts to “fill empty storefronts” by attracting new businesses. In 2024, residents were excited to see Chipotle Mexican Grill open next to M&T Bank on Boston Post Road. Fish Market, who sells fresh shellfish and seafood with a focus on “knowing the source”, moved to Waterford from Niantic and opened next to Ivy's on Boston Post Road. Aesthetics Ink Day Spa opened in that same plaza on Boston Post Road. Phase Two of the Waterford Woods Luxury Apartment Complex on Willetts Avenue was completed in 2024 and includes a clubhouse, pool, pickleball court, walking trail, vegetable and herb gardens and additional storage units on the property. Phase Three, the final phase of Waterford Woods, started in the summer of 2024 and is expected to be completed by summer of 2025. This \$120M project has brought much needed workforce family housing to the region and will have a positive tax impact



**FIRST SELECTMAN BRULE WITH
AESTHETICS INK OWNER GIA
REAGAN**



CHIPOLTE MEXICAN GRILL OPENED IN 2024

on the town. 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



THE CRYSTAL MALL HAS SIX SEPARATE PARCELS ON THE PROPERTY OWNED BY THREE DIFFERENT COMPANIES

Commission for the effort put forward as we complete the final phases, including the online survey. Finally, the Planning & Zoning Commission and I worked closely all year with a consultant developing a draft Planned Development District (PDD) for the Crystal Mall property to encourage mixed-use development, provide flexibility for the owners and a much needed tax revenue for Waterford residents. The town continues to look for new economic development that will have long-term effects and will enhance our Net Taxable Grand List.

The First Selectman's Office communicates with the three owners of the Crystal Mall property often. Discussions include several conceptual multi-use options that would include demolition and partial demolition of the structure. The Town and the Connecticut Department of Economic Development continue to discuss conceptual ideas for the project with the current Mall owners. The town's Board of Selectmen and RTM voted unanimously back in February 2023 to support Dominion Energy's interest in building data centers on its property, however, the CT Siting Council denied Dominion's initial permit application. There has been no application re-submitted to the Siting Council in 2024. Data centers on Dominion property would provide \$8M annually for 30 years to the town if completed. The 40-home Ivy Hill Village residential project adjacent



IVY HILL VILLAGE PROVIDES SMALLER HOMES OFFERING MODERN LIVING IN A BEAUTIFUL TOWN

to Great Neck Road completed construction of 12 of the 40 energy efficient, smaller homes with an HOA that will take care of the lawn, trash and recycling. Those homeowners also have a nature walking trail off the new road.

The Town continues to share a positive working relationship with Dominion Energy and successfully negotiated a tax appeal in 2024.



WATERFORD WOODS LUXURY APARTMENTS COMPLEX WILL ADD TAX REVENUE TO THE TOWN

Budget Management

In 2024, the Town of Waterford enjoyed a stable mill rate (22.3). The Board of Finance voted to use \$1M of fund balance to offset the increase in the FY25 BOE operating budget of \$3,417,198 and town operating budget of \$1,454,111.

The Town continues to prioritize a working budget that supports first responders, critical services and a level of education we expect in town, while minimizing the growth of the taxpayers' burden. The Town, like many of its neighboring communities, has seen a continuation of retirements by eligible employees. We worked hard



FIRST SELECTMAN BRULE WITH TOWN OF WATERFORD DEPARTMENT HEADS

on the recruitment and retention of town employees, most notably, building officials, police officers and firefighters. In 2024, the Town of Waterford saw the retirement of Utility Director Jim Bartelli after 39 years of service and hired Jill Stevens as his replacement. This past year included funding infrastructure and road paving with the General Fund Balance, and worked on staffing levels and fleet management that were priorities for review.

Waterford hosts some of the largest retail shopping stores and plazas in southeastern CT and is home to two nuclear power plants and the beautiful Great Neck Country Club. These provide many benefits to our town as well as tax revenue. We have more growth forecasted for the town and look forward to planning that growth with various builders and developers. Similar to our neighboring communities, the year posed serious challenges in our budgets due to supply chain issues, significant cost increases within capital expenses, the adjustment to post-pandemic realities and the impact Electric Boat has had on the recruitment and retention of Waterford employees by hiring thousands of highly compensated area residents. The Town continues



FIRST SELECTMAN BRULE WITH NEWLY PROMOTED UTILITY DIRECTOR JILL STEVENS



THE FRIENDS OF NEVINS COTTAGE, INC. WAS CREATED IN 2024 TO RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE HISTORIC NEVINS COTTAGE

to find creative ways to reduce costs to taxpayers by supporting the Friends of Nevins Cottage, Inc. established in 2024. The Friends group will restore and maintain this historic building through in-kind and private sector donations. Reducing the cost of historic preservation to the town by over \$250,000.

American Rescue Plan Act



THE 750,000 GALLON FARGO ROAD WATER TANK \$1.3M REHABILITATION PROJECT

All expected American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding from the federal government has been received by the Town of Waterford (\$5,547,889) and was encumbered, per law, by December 31, 2024. The allocation the Town of Waterford received from 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/maintenance and outdoor parks. All appropriations are provided to the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and the RTM in quarterly updates on to ensure transparency.



THE FARGO ROAD TANK PRIOR TO THE ARPA PROJECT STARTING

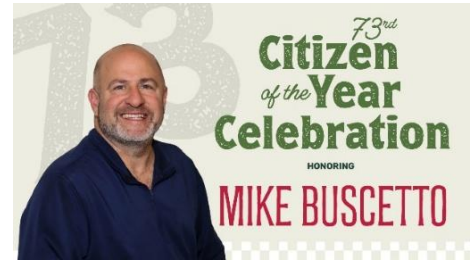
Projects completed with ARPA funds in 2024:

- Fargo Lane Water (Tank) Tower Rehabilitation
- 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
- Town GIS Updates
- Eugene O'Neill Theater Hammond Mansion Roof Replacement

Conclusion

As Waterford's First Selectman, I am proud of the work the Town has accomplished in a bi-partisan and professional manner in 2024 and I remain committed to continuing positive and thoughtful discussions to benefit our community in the year

ahead. Finally, I am delighted to acknowledge the 2024 Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut Citizen of the Year, Waterford resident Mike Buscetto. This is not just an honor for Mike and his family, but for the entire town of Waterford. As the Chairman of the Waterford Youth & Family Services Bureau and member of the Waterford Economic Development Commission, Mike is always at the heart of helping people in our town. I would also like to acknowledge our amazing Quaker Hill Elementary School custodian, William “Billy” Krajewski, who was selected as a Top 10 Finalist for the Cintas National Custodian of the Year award.



As we conclude another year, our community stands stronger and more united than ever. Despite facing some challenges, like all municipalities face, we have achieved significant progress across the town. New initiatives have been successfully launched, existing projects have reached fruition, demonstrating our collective resilience and dedication. The progress made is a testament to the hard work and commitment of our residents, volunteers, elected officials and employees. Their passion and perseverance have driven our community forward, making it a place of pride and belonging. Looking ahead, I remain committed to fostering a thriving, inclusive, and vibrant community. I will continue to build on our successes, learn from our experiences, and support one another in the pursuit of a brighter future for Waterford.

