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# News from the First Selectman's Office, January 30th, 2024

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Hello, Wilton.

I hope those of you who read my article on the revaluation process have had time to digest all of the information. Shock waves continue to be felt throughout the community and also in my own home. One house in Wilton was listed for \$1.4 million and sold for \$200,000 over the listing price this August, with many buyers bidding over each other. This scenario has been repeated many times and is driving up home values all over town. Budgets this year will be strained, with so many maintenance and repair items that have been deferred for far too long, on top of our essential services, such as snow plowing, police and fire, playing field maintenance, and education, just to name a few. There is quite a lot to take in, but my intent was to help everyone understand the issues at play so that when we come together in May to vote on our taxes, we are making an informed decision. Here is a link to the memorandum, for your convenience [Revaluation Op-Ed](#).

## **Confronting Acts of Hate in Our Community**

This Sunday, from 2-4pm, at the YMCA (404 Danbury Road), Wilton will be hosting a distinguished panel of visitors, who will gather to discuss ways to combat hate, bias and bigotry in

our community. As Wilton becomes more diverse, some may feel uneasy at times. Students, in particular, have reported feeling more vulnerable in school, and at after school activities, as insensitive, and, at times, aggressive, speech and behavior have been aimed at them. People may not realize they're perpetrating hate speech, or understand how their actions can be hurtful. In response, Temple B'nai Chaim, the Riverbrook Regional YMCA and the Wilton Library created an event where leaders in the community, the State, and the public, will share ideas on how to prevent discrimination from taking root, how to respond to incidents if they do happen and how to support victims. Pre-registration is required and can be found at this [link](#). Information and communication can only make our town stronger.



## Winter Carnival

The beloved, annual Winter Carnival is happening this weekend, hosted by the Wilton Chamber of Commerce. Activities will take place at the Wilton Town Green, from 12-4pm, on Sunday, February 4th. There will be horse drawn wagon rides, scavenger hunt prizes for finding all of the ice sculptures throughout town, a magic show, characters and carnival performers, face painting, and more. At the corner of Schenk's Island, the Rotary Club is providing a bonfire with s'mores. For the adults, there will be food and beverage trucks, and all of our local shopping! Thank you to Fairfield County Bank for sponsoring this day of winter fun. Other supporters include Kimco Realty, the Riverbrook Regional YMCA, The Village Market, the Wilton Library Association, and Gregory and Adams. What a great day for the kids. Click here for details: [Winter Carnival 2024 - Wilton Chamber of Commerce](#)

## Infrastructure Issues

Below, are a few maintenance and project completion announcements:

- In 2024, the State Department of Transportation plans to resurface part of Route 53, from Cedar Road to Route 106 (Chestnut Hill Road), up to the Weston town line.

- Aquarian Water Company will be doing water main work along Route 106 to the New Canaan town line.
- Verizon says that it should complete construction of the cell tower on School Road by mid-2024.
- Eversource and their arborist will be scheduling maintenance tree work in Wilton beginning in April.

### **Police Assistance Compact**

It was approved that the Wilton Police Department will continue its membership in the expanded Fairfield County Police Assistance Compact, a support network of police agencies across Fairfield County, that offers member departments backup personnel and materials when needed (even dogs!). The network has been extremely successful in strengthening public safety responses, reducing stress among police officers, and reducing costs to towns through shared resources. More towns have joined the program and some improvements to the original plan have been implemented, like the “Blue Plan”, which mitigates the danger of too many officers and emergency personnel responding to a single event, thereby creating confusion and delay. An improved standardized dispatch system was also developed, that increases efficiency when requesting back-up from neighboring departments is needed.

### **The Wilton Library**

Wilton Library proposed their budget at the last town meeting and shared good news during their presentation. I'd like to share that the library has earned a 100% rating as a non-profit agency from the independent assessment organization, Charity Navigator, for their excellence in community service and operations. They have seen an explosion in usership since the pandemic, and have responded by greatly expanding their program offerings and events.

Wilton has been fortunate to have one of its world famous and illustrious residents, Dave Brubeck, and his family reside in town. The library has been the recipient of this legendary jazz pianist and composer's entire musical archive. They have announced that The Brubeck Collection website is ready to launch soon, making access to this collection available worldwide. We can expect to see an uptick in global visitors to the Wilton Library, as fans, scholars, music professionals, and tourists come to experience the collection firsthand. This will, of course, bring more traffic into our restaurants and shops in downtown Wilton.

### **How Wilton Works**

We continue to highlight the many departments that make Wilton work. The Department of Environmental Affairs is responsible for managing all of the trails, woodlands and open spaces that make Wilton so desirable. In many ways, this department is emblematic of Wilton's values as they safeguard the ecological features of nature preserves, unique habitats like the Red Maple swamps, clean waterways, and wildlife that keep Wilton connected to its agrarian

past. The staff have to wear multiple hats to accomplish this. First and foremost, they are ready to educate the town on its natural resources, which is important to know if you're a recent transplant to Wilton. This is particularly true if you're new to Connecticut. The rules and guidelines might look different here, so please know that the Environmental Affairs staff is eager to assist residents in making ecologically conscious decisions with their property management. They offer on-the-spot, one-to-one guidance on your yard's topography, design plans, permit requirements and landscaping ideas and alternatives at no cost to homeowners. Not many places offer such concierge service! Call their office at (203) 563-0180 and speak to Elizabeth Larkin, the secretary, to make an appointment. Mike Conklin, the Director, or Zen Herter, the Environmental Analyst, will be happy to help.

The department also runs a well-known community event, the Townwide Cleanup Day, where residents trek across Wilton with empty garbage bags and trash grabbers, picking up any litter on our roads and green spaces. There is typically a raffle at the end of the day, and participants are rewarded with gift cards from town businesses. An out of control deer population can be ruinous to our greenways, farms and gardens, and can be dangerous to cars on the road. Deer are also a key species contributing to the spread of Lyme disease. Part of managing the environment means culling these herds, which the department supports by administering the controlled deer hunt. One of the many benefits to the hunt is that a percentage of the meat harvested is shared with organizations that feed the homeless in our area and beyond.

The environment often needs an advocate, and in town meetings, corporate board meetings, state government conferences, Mike Conklin has stood up for Wilton. He and his staff have fought to protect our waterways, our open spaces and our wildlife while carefully making room for Wilton's growth. A lot of building is happening in Wilton, but all of it, commercial and residential, is overseen by the Department of Environmental Affairs. They are there to ensure that the materials used, the building processes, the impact on our natural resources, are ecologically balanced. For this reason, they serve as a constant advisor to the Board of Selectmen and the Town on all environmental issues.

Mike Conklin, Zen Herter and Elizabeth Larkin, thank you for looking out for Wilton's long-term interests. Your work gives people a reason to want to move here, and for the rest of us to want to stay. Please, the Department of Environmental Affairs, take a bow.

## **Town Buildings**

Most have already read the school system's 10-year maintenance and repair report. The town buildings have also undergone a similar analysis and will present these findings soon. Those of you who have not been inside Town Hall recently may not have seen that the condition of our town buildings has reached a tipping point. I am including these pictures,

below, to show just how dangerous the decay and damage have become. I hope, as the bill to repair all of this deferred maintenance becomes part of our town budget, that these images will remind us all why the work cannot wait. We are facing an enormous price tag to bring our buildings up to code. The cost of failing to do so, however, is undeniable.

### Town Hall



### Town Hall Columns



### The Annex

For those of you who are unaware, the Annex building sits behind Town Hall and houses six town departments. Planning and Zoning, the Health Department, the Building Department, the Department of Public Works, the Department of Environmental Affairs, and Animal Control, plus their staffs, in a space that we have long outgrown. Here is a pictorial tour of its condition:





### **Merwin Meadows Playground**

But I'm so glad to be able to leave you with some good news. Steve Pierce, Director of Parks and Recreation, tells us that the Merwin Meadows Playground will be arriving soon to Wilton, and, weather permitting, will be installed by March 31, 2024. Here is a rendering of what the new playground will look like:



As Steve says, we are excited about this new amenity for the town to enjoy.

### **Closing**

There is a lot happening in Wilton this coming weekend. I hope you'll join your neighbors at

events that promise to be stimulating and a lot of fun. Stay safe, everyone, and enjoy your week.

With all best wishes,

Toni Boucher

The First Selectman

Wilton

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## Wilton Town Hall

238 Danbury Road

Wilton, CT 06897

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