



Free Open Day At New Pond Farm



Curious about all that New Pond Farm has to offer? Join them on Saturday, February 28th at 11 a.m. for a relaxed and welcoming day and experience the beauty, history, and vibrant life of the farm and education center. Wander through a stunning landscape rich with diverse habitats and wildlife, discover their deep roots in place and learning, and meet the warm, passionate people who bring it all to life. Inside their Learning Center, enjoy hands-on activities including exploring their Native American Museum with its artifacts and reproductions, meeting their program animals, sampling delicious farm-fresh dairy products and more. Outdoors, take time to explore the property, visit the barnyard animals, and connect with members of the staff and Board who are eager to share their stories and answer your questions. The event is free and no registration is required, although they ask you not bring your dog. If you have any concerns about the weather, please check www.newpondfarm.org after 9 a.m.

Courtesy photo

Patricia's Presents

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164 Greenwood Avenue, Bethel, CT
info@patriciaspresents.com
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Blizzard Warning
Storm To Bring Up To 20" Of Snow



The National Weather Service upgraded the forecast to a Blizzard Warning for our region, with snow accumulations of up to 20 inches now expected.

The NWS statement reads: BLIZZARD WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 1 PM THIS AFTERNOON TO 6 PM EST MONDAY

Blizzard conditions expected. Total snow accumulations between 16 and 20 inches. Winds gusting as high as 55 mph. Portions of southern Connecticut and southeast New York. From 1 PM this afternoon to 6 PM EST Monday.

Visibilities may drop below 1/4 mile due to falling and blowing snow. Whiteout conditions are expected and will make travel treacherous and potentially life-threatening. The strong winds

and weight of snow on tree limbs may down power lines and could cause sporadic power outages. Travel could be very difficult to impossible. Areas of blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions could impact the Monday morning and evening commutes. Strong winds could cause tree damage.

Heaviest snow and strongest winds are expected tonight into Monday. Travel should be restricted to emergencies only. If you must travel, have a winter survival kit with you. If you get stranded, stay with your vehicle. Check local Department of Transportation information services for the latest road conditions. A Blizzard Warning means severe winter weather conditions are expected or occurring. Falling and blowing snow with strong winds are likely. This will lead to whiteout conditions, making travel extremely dangerous. Do not travel. If you must travel, have a winter survival kit with you. If you get stranded, stay in your vehicle.

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At The Mark Twain Library
New Books And Videos



There are two new movies, one new audiobook, one new music CD, seventeen new children's books, and twelve other new books. The new movies this week are "Roofman" and "Tron: Ares."

They Have A Winner



There is a winner of this gift basket filled with more goodies to keep you warm should do the trick. They thank all who participated in the Winter Raffle.

Courtesy photo

Hollandia Nurseries
Over 40 Years And Still Growing
Where Customer Service Never Expires - Really Owned and Operated Since 1964

Don't forget your feathered friends!
Complete Line of Birding Supplies

WINTER HOURS FEB
Hollandia Gift & Garden
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Local Athletic Director Pay

Community	Athletic Director Salary	High School Students	High School Athletes	AD \$ Per Student	AD \$ Per Athlete	\$ Above Median Income	\$ Above Median Income %
Bethel	\$142,236	1,057	338	135	421	105,628	389%
Brookfield	\$146,679	812	260	181	564	83,268	231%
Danbury	\$159,500	3,359	1,075	47	148	128,039	507%
Joel Barlow	\$157,228	681	218	231	721	96,185	258%
Newtown	\$144,852	1,185	379	122	382	99,544	320%
Ridgefield	\$186,835	1,375	440	136	425	111,201	247%

Bethel Proposed 2026-27	\$175,000	1,083	347	162	505	138,392	478%
Change	\$32,764	26	8	27	84	32,764	89%
Change as %	23%	2%	2%	20%	20%	31%	23%

Sources: CT EdSight, U.S. Census, CT Dept of Education, CIAC, School Budget and Budget Proposal Draft

Community	Population	Students	Avg HH Income	HHs
Bethel	20,156	3,249	88,344	7,538
Brookfield	17,528	2,542	176,204	6,644
Danbury	86,500	12,126	83,422	33,071
Newtown	27,500	3,951	161,000	9,500
Easton/Redding	17,124	2,506	242,709	6,101
Ridgefield	25,000	5,000	244,216	9,000

With the annual budget process heating up, a number of voters have taken to social media questioning the pay levels of various positions in town government and our schools. In the next few issues, The Community Gazette will be publishing a look at various positions and comparing pay to neighboring communities rather than relying on six and 20 year old comparisons with communities in artificially defined District Reference Groups (DRG).

Bethel, for example, with the lowest household income of any of the compared towns, is proposing Athletic Director salary 111% of District 9's and 10% higher than the average for the combined five neighboring communities. All while having household income 34% below the average for its neighboring communities and 44% below Redding/Easton's. Bethel also has the lowest Household income of any of the DRG D communities we compared, although not the lowest in the entire DRG.

MARILYN CARAVETTA
REALTOR®
C: 203.512.1822
O: 203-438-9000
CT Broker License #REB.0100515
Marilyn.Caravetta@cbrealty.com
ColdwellBankerHomes.com
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Ridgefield, CT 06877

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Things To Do

Read To Sydney!

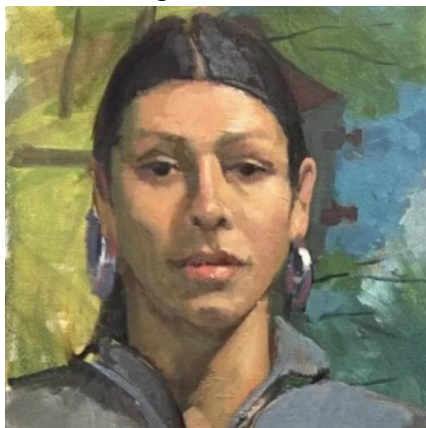


Children 5+ are invited to take turns to read to Sydney, a trained therapy dog. Reading to Sydney provides a judgment free space for many children to increase their reading skills, self confidence, and encourages a love for reading! Sydney's handler, Hayley, also happens to be a pediatric occupational therapist and loves to volunteer her time with Sydney at the library. So bring a favorite book, take a peek at Sydney's book, or pick one out at the library before the event. March 4th and 18th, 2026 at 4 p.m. at the Danbury Library.

Tax Help

The C.H. Booth Library is pleased to announce FREE income tax assistance, provided through a partnership between the AARP Foundation and the IRS. This service will be available on Thursdays until April 9, 2026. Don't miss this opportunity to receive expert help with your taxes.

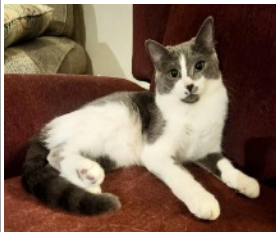
Painting Demonstration



On Wednesday March 25, 2026 at 1:30pm, Frank Bruckman will be demonstrating a portrait in oil. This event will be at The Newtown Senior Center, 8 Simpson Street in Newtown, CT. All are welcome and admission is free.

Pets

Meet Chessy



Meet Chessy, a sweet and gentle one-month-old gray and white kitten from the "Parent Trap" litter. She was found last summer living in a dilapidated garage in Watertown with her mom, Elizabeth James, and siblings Nick Parker, Hallie, and Annie. She is the last left of her litter and has been waiting over a year to find her forever home. Chessy is reserved at first, once she gets to know you, she's incredibly sweet and enjoys gentle pets. She's not one to seek attention right away, but once she feels comfortable, she'll quietly approach and show her affection. When it's treat time, Chessy will come running and politely take them right from your hand—her way of showing her trust and appreciation. She is very social with other cats and will happily walk over to purr and greet any kitty who comes by. She adores the fosters cats so in Chessy must go to a home with a confident, friendly feline. She was very shy in the beginning but has made wonderful progress and is ready to find a patient and experienced home where she can continue to grow into a loving, confident kitten.

To learn more or to adopt a rescue, contact Happily Furever After Rescue at info@happilyfureverafter.org or (631) 935-3578 or visit their website at www.happilyfureverafter.org

Doing Good

Feed A Veteran

Patrons of For Pete's Sake Delicatessen, located at 73 Stony Hill Road in Bethel, can donate breakfast or lunch to local veterans all year long. As a result, veterans of American armed forces can enjoy breakfast or lunch at no charge as part of the program. Veterans should bring proof of service as they may ask for it. The program runs all year long.

MeadowTails™

By Sam Twane



Why did the mushroom go to the party?
Because he was a fungi.

Municipal Calendars

Bethel

Public Library
Monday, February 23, 2026 at 5:00 PM
Inland Wetlands Commission
Monday, February 23, 2026 at 7:00 PM
Planning & Zoning
Tuesday, February 24, 2026 at 7:00 PM
Public Site & Building Commission
Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 7:00 PM
Parks and Recreation Commission
Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 7:00 PM
Bethel Film Committee
Thursday, February 26, 2026 at 9:00 AM

Brookfield

Career Building Workshop - Room 135
February 23, 2026, 6:00 PM - 7:30 PM
Arts Commission - Room 209
February 23, 2026, 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Inland Wetlands Commission - Room 133
February 23, 2026, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM
Brookfield Soccer - Room 133
February 24, 2026, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM
Brookfield HS Athletic Hall of Fame - Room 135
February 25, 2026, 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Parks and Recreation Commission - Room 135
February 25, 2026, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Danbury

Mon, Feb 23
RESCHEDULED - Registrar of Voters - Tabulator Testing - RESCHEDULED
Tue, Feb 24
Zoning Commission Meeting
CANCELLED
Wed, Feb 25
Board of Awards Weekly Meeting
Wed, Feb 25
Registrar of Voters - Tabulator Testing
Wed, Feb 25
Public Hearing: Resolution - Series 2026 Bonds (Danbury Proton)
Wed, Feb 25
Environmental Impact Commission
Thu, Feb 26
CDBG Application Workshop

Newtown

Commission on Aging
February 23, 2026 - 4:00pm
Board of Fire Commissioners
February 23, 2026 - 7:00pm
Board of Finance Public Hearing
February 23, 2026 - 7:00pm
Fairfield Hills Authority
February 23, 2026 - 7:00pm
Board of Finance Special Meeting
February 23, 2026 - 7:30pm
LC Traffic Workgroup Special Meeting
February 24, 2026 - 5:00pm
LC Education Committee
February 24, 2026 - 7:00pm
Public Building & Site Commission
February 24, 2026 - 7:00pm

Redding

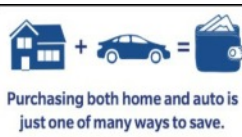
Democratic Town Committee
February 23 at 6:00 pm
OPEB Trust Board
February 23 at 7:30 pm
Board of Finance
February 24 at 5:30 pm
Region 9 Finance & Operations
February 24 at 7:00 pm
Planning Commission
February 25 at 8:00 am - 5:00 pm
PD Training
February 25 at 7:00 pm
Zoning Commission
February 26 at 11:30 am - 1:30 pm
Town Hall Conference Room In Use (ZS)
February 28 at 10:00 am

Ridgefield

February 22, 2026 Sunday
8:30am - 10:00am IWB Sitewalk
9:00am - 10:30am PZC Sitewalk
February 23, 2026 Monday
2:30pm - 3:30pm Commission on Aging Meeting
7:00pm - 10:00pm Board of Selectpersons Budget Meetings
7:00pm - 9:00pm LGBTQ+ Game Night
7:00pm - 8:00pm Board of Education Meeting
February 24, 2026 Tuesday
7:00pm - 10:00pm Board of Selectpersons Budget Meeting
7:00pm - 10:00pm Planning and Zoning Commission
7:00pm - 8:30pm LGBTQ+ Friends Support Group



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Dining

Catering, Takeout & Dine-In For Every Occasion

Angel's Deli

Fast and friendly service, wide selection of breakfast and lunch deli items at reasonable prices. 470 Federal Rd B, Brookfield (203) 546-7232

www.angelsdeli.com

Backdoor Chicken and Burgers

A wonderful new restaurant in Brookfield featuring delicious sandwiches, breakfast, entrees and some of the best coffee anywhere. They have the most friendly and helpful staff and reasonable prices. And if you like BBQ, try the pulled pork, but only if your plan on coming back again and again because it is truly wonderful!

537 Federal Rd, Brookfield (203) 546-7403

www.backdoor-chicken.com

Bagel Crossing

Fast and friendly service with a great selection of bagels, toppings and breakfast sandwiches with lunch salads and sandwiches, too. But be warned, the cinnamon rolls are beyond addictive. 6 Library Place, Bethel (203) 790-6656

www.bagel-crossing.com

Bagel Delight

This is truly a delight as they have one of the absolute best selections of NY style, delicious bagels anywhere outside of "the city", with one of the most kind and friendly owners anywhere. Breakfast and lunch selections are all delicious and the prices are reasonable. Dine-in or take out. 30 Church Hill Rd #1, Newtown (203) 426-6838

www.bagel-delight.com

Delicious and reasonably priced, still using George's original recipes, with some of the most friendly, helpful service anywhere, and shhh, the best kept secret in town is that they also offer delivery.

206 Greenwood Ave, Bethel (203) 748-1427

www.bethelpizzahouse.com

Blue Colony Diner

Fast and friendly service in a comfortable diner with a great selection of delicious, reasonably priced food. They offer dine-in, take-out and catering. 66 Church Hill Rd, Newtown (203) 426-0745

www.bluecolonydiner.com

Capri

Possibly the best calzone pizza we have ever tasted. Pizza, entrees, generous and delicious salads. Take out, dine-in or delivery.

182 Old Hawleyville Rd, Bethel (203) 743-6800

www.capripizzaofbethel.com

Caraluzzi's

Local grocery stores that offer excellent take out and catering. - Bethel:

98 Greenwood Ave, Bethel (203) 748-3547

www.caraluzzis.com/

- Danbury:

102 Mill Plain Rd, Danbury (203) 743-8003

www.caraluzzis.com/caraluzzis-danbury-market-2

- Newtown:

5 Queen St, Newtown (203) 270-7500

www.caraluzzis.com/caraluzzis-newtown-ct

- Wilton/Georgetown:

920 Danbury Rd, Wilton (203) 544-7021

www.caraluzzis.com/

Dogtown

Hot dogs, burgers and more by a fast and friendly team at force a double-take affordable prices. Where else can you get a delicious lunch for 2 for well under \$15? And seriously, where else would you go especially for awesome hot dogs? Lots of other items on the menu, and one of the most generous arrays of hot dog toppings anywhere.

4 Library Pl, Bethel (203) 616-5054

www.dogtownct.com

Elmer's Diner

We love Elmer's. While all the food is delicious, they have one of the best rotating assortments of delicious and affordable specials anywhere. And the service is fast and friendly, too.

22 Padanaram Rd, Danbury (203) 731-2559

www.elmersdiner.com

Famous Pizza

Famous pizza is truly and deservedly famous for their pizza, but also for their salads (try the house dressing!) and delicious entrees. They offer dine in, take out and delivery. Try the thin crust, it is amazing!

7 P T Barnum Square, Bethel (203) 797-1550

www.famouspizzabethel.com

Farmboys Smokin' BBQ

If you love BBQ, try Farmboys. The BBQ is delicious and smoked on the premises, but the secret to taking this to the next level is their amazing homemade BBQ sauces. You can thank me

later.

30 South St, Danbury (203) 616-5942

www.farmboyssmokinbbq.com

Food Emporium

Brookfield's newest market brings SOHO style, fresh produce, and one of the best prepared foods and deli selections anywhere. They offer take out and catering. Did we mention the mouth watering desserts in the bakery department?

731 Federal Rd, Brookfield (203) 746-9487

foodemporium.keyfood.com/sto

re.storc/2717

For Pete's Sake

Fast, friendly service, dine-in or take out and they offer catering, too, and a wide selection of delicious sandwiches and entrees.

73 Stony Hill Rd, Bethel (203) 792-2444

www.forpetessakedeli.com

Gino's Pizza Parlor

Fast and friendly service, some of the most generous salads anywhere and delicious italian cuisine at affordable prices. And they have some of the most diverse and delicious choices of pizza toppings.

102 Church Hill Rd, Sandy Hook (203) 304-1304

www.ginosparlorct.com

Hunan Noodle Bar

Delicious food, wonderful selection, fast and friendly service. 461 Main St., Ridgefield (203) 431-4238

www.ridgefieldhunan.com

Jacqueline's

This is my go to place for breakfast and lunch or just

excellent coffee. They offer dine-in, take-out and catering and some of the best wait staff anywhere. I have a friend who sneaks out and drives 40 minutes round trip every so often just to get their bacon, egg and cheese on an english muffin. Thankfully I live much closer!

138 Greenwood Ave, Bethel (203) 792-5541

www.catatjacquelines.com

Kowloons Chinese Restaurant

Fast, friendly service, reasonably priced and a wide selection of delicious choices. The BBQ spare ribs are the closest to New York ribs we have found, and the shrimp with lobster sauce is another personal favorite.

110 Greenwood Ave, Bethel (203) 205-2325

www.kowloonchinesect.com

Newtown General Store

A dizzying array of delicious choices for breakfast and lunch. They feature dine-in, take out and catering.

43 Main St., Newtown (203) 426-9901

www.newtowngeneralstore.com

Pop's Diner

Enjoy a classic diner experience with a wide selection of fast and friendly service.

199 Ethan Allen Hwy, Ridgefield (203) 445-4272

www.popsclassicediner.com

Portofino's Wine Bar and Restaurant

A cozy cub like atmosphere on one side, an elegant dining room on the other, with food by one of the absolute best chefs in Connecticut. They offer dine-in, take out and catering. And the bar

is tended by one of the best anywhere. A truly perfect choice for an evening out or take out. 213 Greenwood Ave., Bethel (203) 797-8131

portofinorestaurantandwinebar.com

Prime Burgers

Some of the best burgers anywhere. Lots of other delicious choices, but seriously, my mouth waters just thinking about their burgers.

449 Main St, Ridgefield (203) 431-3000

www.primeburgerct.com

Queen B's

Delicious baked goods, sandwiches, entrees and an awesome coffee bar. Fast and friendly service and did we mention how delicious the baked goods and coffee is? Dine-in, take-out or delivery.

417 Main St, Ridgefield (203) 894-5994

www.queenbcoffeecompany.com

Red Colony Diner

Fast and friendly service in a comfortable diner with a great selection of delicious, reasonably priced food. They offer dine-in, take-out and catering.

121 Federal Rd, Brookfield (203) 546-8280

www.redcolonydiner.com

Rocco's Cafe & Delicatessen

Same great food, new owners and an updated, more welcoming dine-in experience. So here is a true story: After surgery at Danbury hospital, I decided to say thank you to the amazing nursing staff for the wonderful care I received by catering lunch

and dinner for the 2 primary shifts on the 5th floor. Rocco's provided a delicious array of sandwiches and fixin's at a reasonable price, but best of all, when I went in for a follow-up, a year later, the nursing staff were still talking about the great lunch.

208 Greenwood Ave, Bethel (203) 297-6262

www.roccosdeli.com

Shoprite Brookfield

They offer some of the best prepared food, wide selection at affordable prices. The bakery selection is amazing, and they offer catering, too.

143 Federal Rd, Brookfield (203) 775-7078

www.shoprite.com

Spice Indian Cuisine & Bar

Looking for a delicious and authentic Indian dining experience in a comfortable atmosphere with reasonable prices? Then this is your place!

25 Grassy Plain St., Bethel (203) 300-5784

www.spiceindiancuisinect.com

Stony Hill Diner

Fast and friendly service offering dine-in, take-out, delivery and catering. I love good prime rib (who doesn't?) and I recently had a top notch prime rib meal at a shockingly reasonable price.

14 Stony Hill Rd, Bethel (203) 791-2280

www.stonyhilldiner.com

Sycamore Drive-In

Offers dine in, take out and drive-in service (and the black and white shake is legendary!)

282 Greenwood Ave., Bethel (203) 748-2716

www.sycamoredrivein.com

Three Brothers Diner

Fast, friendly service, delicious food and an amazing dessert selection.

242 White St, Danbury (203) 748-6008

www.3brothersdiner.com

Uncle Leo's and Rosny's Gourmet

Three great locations with excellent food, quick and friendly service and reasonable prices. They offer dine in, take out and catering.

114 Greenwood Ave, Bethel (203) 885-2362

19 Main St, Georgetown/Redding (203) 587-1050

17 Danbury Rd, Wilton (203) 644-8085

www.facebook.com/uncleleos

Varano Bakery

Their baked goods, especially the desserts, should only be reserved for those truly on your nice (ok, or maybe naughty) list. We suspect Santa stops there several times his Christmas cookies because they are truly that good.

198 Greenwood Ave, Bethel (203) 744-6640

www.varanobakery.com

Whitlock's

Enter and find a welcoming pub and a friendly dining room with delicious food, friendly service and reasonable prices. They feature dine-in, takeout and catering.

273 Greenwood Ave., Bethel (203) 791-2707

www.whitlocks-bethel.com

Did we miss your favorite?

If we have, then please email Brad@CommunityGazette.com

Bethel 114 Greenwood Ave 203-885-2362	Redding 19 Main St 203-587-1050	Wilton 17 Danbury Rd 475-277-4313
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537 Federal Road, Brookfield
(203) 546-7403
www.backdoor-chicken.com

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Catering	Live Music	21 Hole Mini Golf	What Our Customers Say
Our catering services are designed to bring the taste of our restaurant to your venue. Whether you're hosting a small family gathering or a large corporate event, our team is dedicated to delivering	Our live music events are designed to bring the community together, providing a space where you can unwind and enjoy quality entertainment. In Brookfield, we're known for our welcoming atmosphere and delicious	Our mini golf course is designed to complement your dining experience, offering a unique way to unwind after a delicious meal. It's a great spot for family gatherings or a casual day out. At Backdoor Chicken & Burgers, we	★★★★★ Quick food service. Sandwiches are great. Very friendly and accommodating staff. – Ray V ★★★★★ Super friendly, and amazing food. Will be back a bunch. – Chris T ★★★★★ Some the best fried chicken I have ever had, the strawberry sauce is phenomenal. – Damon C ★★★★★ This is our second time eating at Backdoor Chicken &

At Home



6 Katrina Circle, Bethel, CT
3 Bedrooms, 4 Baths, 2,295 SF, .79 Acre
\$798,000

Welcome to your dream home in the highly sought after Sleepy Hollow Estates in the Codfish Hill area of Bethel. This sprawling ranch that has been updated with over \$100K in recent enhancements some include a heated saltwater pool, expansive entertaining deck, and beautifully updated landscaping. From the moment you step inside, you'll experience an open, airy floor plan filled with natural light. Enjoy an eat-in custom kitchen with sliders that lead directly to your private resort-style backyard, with large decks and that amazing pool. This home features two elegant fireplaces, central AC, and a beautifully finished lower level offering a large rec room, cedar closet, and office or guest suite. Large rooms, most freshly painted with two full and two half baths. Perfectly positioned on a level .79-acre lot on a quiet street, this home also features a mudroom to the pool and an attached large two-car garage. Located in southern Bethel with easy access to I-84, Metro-North, charming downtown amenities, and Bethel School Park, this property delivers the ideal blend of luxury, location, and lifestyle.

Contact Jim DiLillo at (203) 470-2678 or james.dilillo@randrealty.com



13020 Amberly Ct #306 Bonita Springs, FL
3 beds, 2 baths, 1,222 sqft
\$245,000

Welcome to the Florida lifestyle you've been dreaming of! Perfectly nestled between Naples and Fort Myers in the highly desirable Worthington Country Club, this first-floor 3-bedroom, 2-bath condo offers the ultimate balance of active living and relaxed luxury. Enjoy morning sunrises and light-filled rooms from your east-facing lanai with panoramic golf course views—a peaceful backdrop for your coffee or evening glass of wine. The corner location enhances privacy and natural light, while modern updates like stainless steel appliances, newer washer/dryer, and turnkey furnishings mean you can start enjoying it right away. Step outside and you'll find an abundance of activities: championship golf, tennis, pickle-ball, bocce, a fitness center, restaurant and a resort-style pool and spa—all within a vibrant, social community. When it's time to unwind, you're just minutes from Bonita's award-winning beaches and multiple pools within the neighborhood. The location couldn't be more convenient—walk or bike ride to Publix, restaurants, and the incoming Midtowne at Bonita with shops, dining, and entertainment (sister of Mercato in Naples) You're also close to I-75, RSW Airport, and everything that makes Southwest Florida one of the most sought-after destinations in the country. With a 2023 Rheem A/C, low-maintenance living, and endless opportunities to stay active or simply soak up the sun, this is more than a condo—it's your gateway to the best of Southwest Florida living.

Contact Ann Lefcakis at (239) 297-2926 or ann@kwelevate.com

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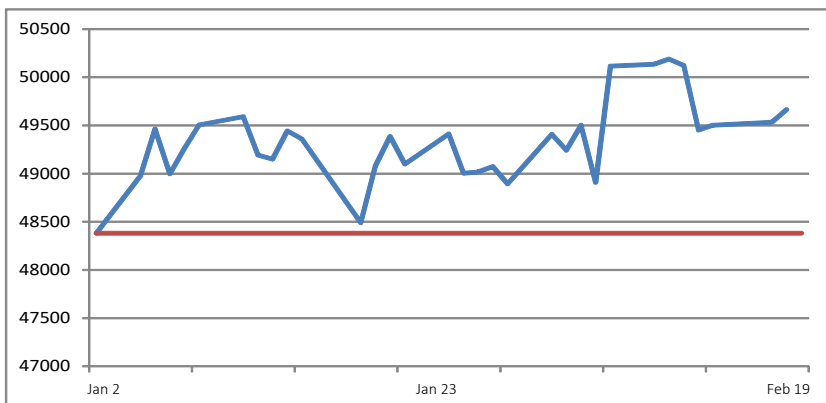
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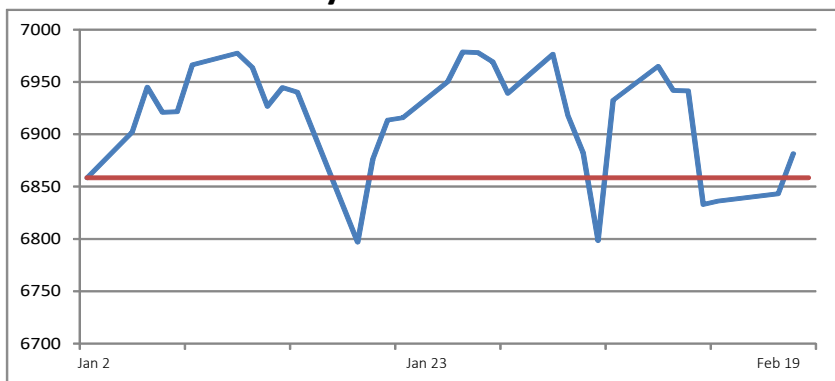
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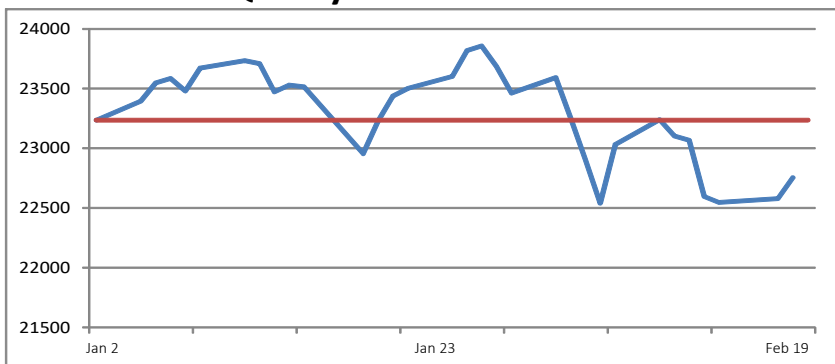
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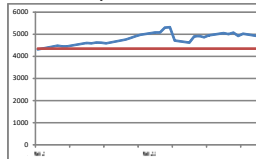
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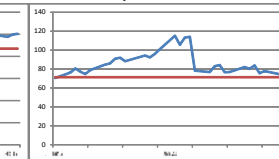
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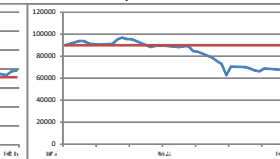
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Issues

Reprinted With Permission From The Hartford Portfolio, Yankee Institute's update on what's happening in Connecticut

An Election-Year Budget That Keeps SEBAC Comfortable

An Election-Year Budget That Keeps SEBAC Comfortable

In an election year, Connecticut's state employee unions appear positioned for another significant round of compensation growth.

While lawmakers debate fiscal guardrails and warn of federal funding uncertainty, the governor's own budget documents show tens — and in some cases hundreds — of millions of dollars being set aside for future wage adjustments, healthcare growth, and pension-related obligations tied to SEBAC contracts.

At the same time, at least one lawmaker is proposing a very different path: a two-year wage freeze for state employees.

The Quiet Cushion: \$169 Million on Hand

Start with the Reserve for Salary Adjustment (RSA) account — a fund administered by the Office of Policy and Management that exists specifically to cover collective bargaining costs, wage settlements, accrual payouts, and other negotiated compensation items.

As of December 31, 2025, that account held:

- \$169.7 million in the General Fund
- \$10.9 million in the Special Transportation Fund

The RSA exists for one purpose: to absorb the cost of negotiated wage and benefit increases. OPM's own reporting notes that additional transfers tied to finalized bargaining agreements are likely before the fiscal year concludes.

Put plainly, the money for future union obligations is already sitting in reserve.

Retirees cashing out accrued time? Covered.

New wage agreements? Covered.

Contractual payouts baked into SEBAC deals? Covered.

And the fund is not shrinking — it's being replenished.

The scale becomes clear in the Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) breakdown of the second year of the biennial budget.

For FY27, the upcoming fiscal year, the budget includes:

- \$186,551,369 in the General Fund
- \$19,864,541 in the Special Transportation Fund

This is not a last-minute addition. The money was built into the FY26–FY27 budget adopted in 2025.

That is nearly \$206 million positioned for raises, payouts, and contract costs for the 35 bargaining units that make up SEBAC.

In other words, the funding for the next round of agreements is already embedded in the budget.

All of this comes as lawmakers caution about fiscal uncertainty and warn against weakening the state's guardrails. The rhetoric is restraint. The numbers suggest business as usual.

Health Care Costs Continue Their Climb

Healthcare spending is rising just as steadily.

According to OFA, the governor's FY27 budget increases spending on state employee health benefits by:

- \$71.26 million for active employees
- \$38.84 million for retired employees

That's more than \$110 million in additional General Fund costs in a single year, on top of:

- \$779 million for active employee health benefits
- \$957 million for retiree health benefits

These are not new programs. They are the ongoing costs of maintaining benefits negotiated under SEBAC contracts.

When lawmakers describe "fixed costs" squeezing the budget, this is what they mean.

The Pension Pay-Down That Wasn't

Now consider pensions.

The State Employees Retirement System (SERS) requires an Actuarially Determined Employer Contribution (ADEC) each year — the amount actuaries calculate is necessary to maintain solvency.

The governor's revised budget includes:

- \$5.37 million in additional General Fund contributions
- \$448,760 in the Special Transportation Fund

Why the increase?

Because the previous budget proposal assumed savings from an additional \$500 million pension pay-down, a deposit that was ultimately bypassed and redirected into a Federal Cuts Response Fund.

Had that \$500 million been applied to pension liabilities, the state would have reduced future required contributions by roughly \$41 million annually.

Instead, because that deposit was not made, actuarial requirements increase.

Spend the money elsewhere today, and taxpayers pay more every year going forward.

That is the tradeoff.

A Different Proposal

Against this backdrop, Rep. Tina Courpas (R-Greenwich) has requested legislation to freeze wage and salary increases for state employees for at least two years.

The case for restraint is straightforward. State employee compensation exceeds \$10.5 billion annually, with wages alone totaling more than \$6 billion. Under Gov. Lamont, state employees have received cumulative wage and step increases of approximately 33%.

Whether such a freeze is politically viable in an election year is another matter.

The governor has previously told AFSCME members:

"Every year that I've been here you've gotten a raise, and every year I'm here, you're going to get a raise."

That statement was delivered not in a budget hearing, but at a closed-door union conference.

The Election-Year Question

Consider the full picture:

- \$169+ million currently in the RSA account
- \$186 million budgeted for salary adjustments
- \$110+ million in additional health service costs

Higher pension contributions due to a skipped \$500 million pay-down

This is not belt-tightening. It is a portrait of steady expansion — in an election year.

Fiscal guardrails were designed to prevent overspending and protect long-term stability. But collectively bargained benefits are long-term commitments that compound — especially when pension deposits are deferred and healthcare costs continue to rise.

When budgets tighten, most programs face scrutiny. Proposals are scaled back. Every dollar is debated.

Yet when it comes to SEBAC obligations, the money appears to be waiting in advance,

Taxpayers may reasonably ask whether this budget reflects fiscal discipline — or election-year priorities.

OPM Reserve for Salary Adjustment Account - FY 2026 Through December 31, 2025

Source of Funding:	General Fund	Special Transportation Fund
FY 2026 Available Funds		
Initial Appropriations	\$ 18,165,598	\$ 10,868,037
Prior Year Carryforwards	51,532,755	-
Additional Carryforward (PA 25-168)	100,000,000	-
Total Available	\$ 169,698,353	\$ 10,868,037
Transfers and Expenditures as of 12/31/2025		
Expenditures - Pandemic Premium Pay	-	-
Transfers - Tuition Reimbursement	705,000	-
Transfers - Wages	-	-
Total Available as of 12/31/2025	\$ 168,993,353	\$ 10,868,037

\$186 Million for "Salary Adjustments"

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Opinion - Guest Essay - SB 151

Hello, my name is Dana Benson. I live in Easton, CT, and I am speaking in opposition to Senate Bill 151, which will strip the power to regulate zoning and what gets built in towns away from those towns while mandating that the new standard building lot across CT will be 1/10 of an acre with minimal setbacks and no height restrictions on every lot with public water and sewer. If this passes, you can cut a 1-acre lot into 10 building lots that are 50 feet wide by 100 feet long and build 10 separate townhouses and apartments on a one-acre lot.

Easton borders Bridgeport. We are home to four major reservoirs that supply 90% of Bridgeport's water, and we furnish over 700,000 people in Southern CT with drinking water. We are also home to 20 working farms. Our one and three-acre zoning rules were put in place in the 1940's to protect CT's drinking water. Like other rural towns, we play an important role in CT's ecosystem by supplying food and water to the people.

At this week's hearing, the Chairman of the Housing Committee, from Groton, stated

that this bill was needed to create 8,000 low-cost housing units in Groton because Electric Boat is expanding employment under a Navy contract, and she repeatedly asked those testifying in opposition, "how they were going to create 8,000 low-cost housing units in Groton."

Her emphasis on the Groton problem caused me to do a little research. Currently, 82% of the 27,000 people working in Groton commute in from other towns.

Tony Sheridan, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut, spoke this month about the Electric Boat contract and housing, saying he believes:

"the 8,000 new hires at EB can be quickly absorbed into the local housing market, pointing out that New London alone has added nearly 1,000 new units to its stock in the past few years, and other towns such as Waterford and Stonington have been creating new residences at a fast pace as well."

<http://linksit.xyz/eb-to-hire-18000>

I agree it would be good if Groton and cities like Bridgeport

(represented by Vice Chairman Felipe) could build more housing units so that workers didn't have to commute, but I don't understand why the Housing Committee Chairman and the proponents insist on destroying local control of zoning and the zoning regulations of every other town across the state to achieve this goal.

If Groton and Bridgeport want to build more low-cost housing, why don't their leaders and the local Planning and Zoning Commission implement policies like 1/10-acre building lots and others to create such housing?

Proponents overlook the fact that commuting to work is common. I commuted two to three hours a day for most of my career, as did my father.

Proponents of the bill say it will help the homeless. I am not so sure. How can the homeless buy homes if they lack jobs and money? I think the homeless need more public support, not more housing units they do not have the money to buy or rent. I support a tax increase to improve and expand existing programs for the homeless, including hotel room subsidies, and,

most importantly, mental health treatment.

Proponents say the bill will create starter homes. There is no definition of what constitutes a starter home in the bill. Without defining the price of a starter home, there is nothing to prevent this bill from unleashing a luxury "McMansion" construction boom across the state.

If the goal is to provide moderately priced starter homes, why not pass a bill that offers low-interest loans or grants to income-qualified citizens to rent or buy units at below-market starter home prices?

If I had to summarize this bill in one word, it would be DESTRUCTION:

It will hasten the destruction of historic homes by removing the local authority to protect historic structures after July.

It will hasten the destruction of CT's farms by creating a new incentive to subdivide and develop them, on top of the pressure last year's bill put on farmers to sell by raising their taxes.

It will hasten the destruction of

CT's single-family home neighborhoods by creating an incentive to tear down these homes and build townhouses and apartments in their place.

The bill will hasten the destruction of open space across the state by creating an incentive to subdivide and develop land.

It will destroy the power of town zoning boards to require set-asides of conservation land as a condition of subdividing large parcels, removing a major driver of open space conservation in CT.

Why support a law that speeds up the destruction of single-family neighborhoods, historic buildings, open space, and farms?

Why not let zoning boards in cities like Groton and Bridgeport change their zoning rules and use tax breaks and other incentives to create low-cost housing instead?

The Chairman and other proponents argue that the higher taxes paid by buyers of the new 1/10th-of-an-acre units will cover the costs of increased demand for schools and other infrastructure that the increased population will require.

If the increased population attracted by affordable or dense housing offsets the cost of the greater demand for infrastructure through the new taxes they produce, why has Bridgeport, with so much dense housing, experienced a cumulative education budget deficit of \$47 million since 2020 and faces a \$30 million deficit this year?

The truth is that the increased infrastructure costs will be borne by communities through higher property taxes, another unfunded mandate handed down from Hartford.

Proponents claim that allowing local communities to set zoning rules is discriminatory. The truth is that discrimination in housing has been illegal under the Fair Housing Act since 1968, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin in the sale, rental, and financing of housing.

I would ask you to consider the words of Hippocrates, which still guide our doctors today: "FIRST, DO NO HARM."

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Pikachu Card Sale Sets Record

Wrestling star Logan Paul recently sold a 1998 Japanese Pikachu Illustrator trading card for more than \$16.4 million at auction, shattering the previous record for the most expensive trading card ever sold at auction. "The current hobby consensus is that 41 copies of this card were officially awarded and distributed, with this Logan Paul-backed piece the chief among them," Goldin's description read. "The card is accompanied by a custom wooden presentation box bearing Paul's Maverick logo and a plaque that reads 'Pokémon / Pikachu Illustrator / PSA 10 / 1 of 1.'"

"Due to the scarcity, grand value, and pedigree of this Pikachu Illustrator, this is one of the most significant public offerings of a Pokémon card in the history of the hobby and a potentially once-in-a-lifetime sale."

A.J. Scaramucci, the son of financier and former White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci, purchased the card.

CT Has 20th Highest Divorce Rate

While overall U.S. divorce rates are about 1/2 of their 1980 high, according to the National Center for Health Statistics Nevada has the highest rate, with 3.8 divorces per 1,000 married women. Connecticut shares ranking 20 with Delaware, Missouri, Nebraska and North Dakota at 2.6 divorces per 1,000 married women. Statistics were not provided for California, Hawaii, Indiana, Minnesota or New Mexico as not all states report divorce data to the National Vital Statistics System.

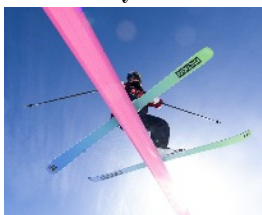
Olympics



The U.S. women's ice hockey team won the gold medal after defeating Canada 2-1 on Thursday, in a game played after their 5-0 win over Sweden.

Courtesy image USA Hockey

CT Native Takes Silver Medal In Olympic Freestyle Finals



Norwalk native Mac Forehand, who lived in Fairfield until relocating to Vermont has won a silver medal in the Freestyle Skiing Men's Freeski Big Air final after the highest score of the qualifying competition on Sunday. Forehand was the last competitor in Tuesday's final at 1:30 p.m. at the Milan Olympics. He combined for 183 points on his two jumps, receiving 93.25 on his first run and 89.75 on his second. Having completed two strong jumps, Forehand opted to do a straight jump with no tricks on his final attempt. The top two scores are used in determining overall scores.

U.S. Ski And Snowboard courtesy photo

CT Boy Scout Rescued From Mt. Washington

New Hampshire officials report that on the afternoon of Sunday, February 15, 2026, rescue personnel responded to Mt. Washington to assist a 15-year-old Boy Scout from Connecticut who was experiencing a medical emergency after hiking to the summit.

At 1:00 PM, New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Conservation Officers were notified of a 15-year-old male who was experiencing a significant allergic reaction near the summit buildings. Officers quickly learned that the patient was hiking with a group of Boy Scouts from Connecticut, and that the group was tending to him and rendering First Aid. It was also learned that the group had been able to alert an employee of Mt. Washington State Park, who located the individual and got him into a warm building.

Conservation Officers coordinated a rescue effort with New Hampshire State Parks and personnel from Gorham EMS. State Parks readied their Snow Cat and ultimately transported a Conservation Officer and EMS personnel up the Mt. Washington

Auto Road to the summit, arriving there at 3:11 PM. The patient was quickly loaded into the Snow Cat and transported back down the mountain, arriving safely at the base at 4:00. Once roadside, the young man was taken by Ambulance to Androscoggin Valley Hospital in Berlin for further evaluation and treatment.

The patient in this case was found to be prepared for his hike, as was his group. New Hampshire State Parks, Gorham EMS, and New Hampshire Fish and Game were also prepared, which made for a very successful rescue effort.

Fatal I-84 Accident Under Investigation



Connecticut State Police report that on February 15th at approximately 8 a.m Troop A responded to a multi-vehicle double fatal collision on Interstate 84 west in the area of Exit 25A. The collision involved a blue 2008 Honda Fit that commenced into

a yaw. While within the left lane, the Honda Fit collided into the right rear of a white 2021 Jeep Grand Cherokee. Following impact, the Honda Fit spun across the center lane and entered the right lane. While within the right lane, the Honda Fit collided into the rear end of a gray 2021 Ford F-150. The operator, (Abdriel Negron) and front passenger (Sheily Briceno) of the Honda Fit sustained fatal injuries. The next-of-kin for both decedents were notified. The accident remains under investigation.

Tensions Build In Middle East



As a second round of U.S.-Iran nuclear talks began in Geneva, leading to a forecast of a guiding principles declaration, the U.S. has deployed a second aircraft carrier battle group to the region while Iran conducted naval drills.

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