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State of the Town Report
Bill Brennan, First Selectman

(Slide 1)

Good evening. I am pleased to have this opportunity to report once again to the citizens of Wilton on the state of our town!

One of my goals as your First Selectman has been to communicate regularly to the citizens of Wilton. Last year, The first State of the Town Report was presented to the community over Channel 79, the government cable channel. Many citizens viewed this report and the feedback was excellent. Therefore, it is my continuing intention to present an annual State of Town Report as long as I serve in this office.

Before starting, I wish to thank the citizens of Wilton for re-electing me to the position of First Selectman. I am most grateful for all the support, encouragement and many suggestions that I received during my re-election campaign.

Now let's talk about Wilton! Anyone living in our town over the past year will agree that "lots of things have been going on!" In brief, Wilton has been humming with activity! In this report, I will highlight community progress and review a number of subjects that I believe are of interest to all Wilton residents.

(Slide 2) First, I'll briefly review the Town's FINANCES. Next, I'll report on DEVELOPMENT activities. I'll then review GOVERNANCE AND SERVICES, and conclude with comments on several CHALLENGES we face and key GOALS for 2008.

FINANCES

Let's begin with the Town's Finances, (Slide 3) which I am pleased to report remain strong. We have maintained our Aaa bond rating status, which is crucial to achieving the lowest borrowing rates when funding the Town's capital projects. Fortunately, over the past year, we have continued to maintain a high general fund balance, which impressed the rating agency. In its rating statements Moody's acknowledges "Wilton's strong financial position...strong management team, a large and affluent tax base and low debt levels." Given the recent volatility of the nation's financial markets, preserving this strong financial position is essential in order for our town to be prepared to manage any contingencies that might develop in the future.

(Slide 4) Taking a look at the Town's revenues and expenditures for Fiscal Year 2007, the operating results were once again very strong. As the chart shows, total revenues exceeded budget by \$2.4mm and on the expenditure side, we finished the year below budget by \$2.5mm. The net effect is a positive variance of \$4.9mm and another year of very favorable operating results!

(Slide 5) Contributing to strong revenue performance were increases in property tax collection, education grants and interest income. (Slide 6) On the expenditure side, both the Town and Board of Education had favorable operating variances versus budgets and as noted, approximately \$756m of the budgeted charter authority or contingency funds was unspent at year end.

These performance results indicate that we have made significant progress in our goal to manage the Town as cost effectively as possible. But constant vigilance will be required to maintain that progress and meet the financial challenges that face us. One area that continues to require close watch and study is the Town's unfunded pension liability, which has increased to \$10mm. An in-depth analysis of our pension fund investment income and future liabilities has recently been undertaken to provide us a better understanding of this complex subject and to assist us in establishing policies designed to decrease this unfunded liability. In the FY 08' budget, the BOF voted to set aside funds from the Town's general fund to reduce this liability. It is expected that additional fund contributions will be required again in FY 09' and in the future.

DEVELOPMENT

(Slide 7) As I said earlier, the Town has been "humming with activity". The most visible and challenging development activity has obviously been the Route 7 widening project, but just as important have been a series of projects along Route 7 and within Wilton Center. All of these projects will serve to expand and enhance both the services available to our citizens and our town's tax base. Let's look at some of these projects.

(Slide 8) While "humming" may not be the accurate word to describe the Route 7 Widening Project, most residents have acknowledged that visible progress is being made, as sections of road become paved and traffic is switched over to the new roadway. Overall, the project is on schedule, aided by better than expected fall weather conditions, which have allowed the contractor to keep construction activity progressing.

Completion of the Route 33 bridge work over the railroad station area and the bridge over the Norwalk River just south of School Road are key goals for next year. In the spring, we will schedule another community information meeting with DOT representatives to outline 2008 construction plans. Past sessions have been well attended and we believe this is an excellent way to communicate construction plans and to respond to citizen questions.

Before we review economic development activity, let me highlight another State DOT project that required action. I am pleased to report that we successfully negotiated the construction of new restroom facilities at Wilton's Cannondale Railroad station. Construction activity is currently in progress, which when completed will upgrade this station's facilities for commuters and other riders.

Economic Development has also been very strong over the past year. Substantial development activity is underway in both the Town Center and along the commercial Route 7 corridor.

Two new buildings that have been approved for construction in Wilton Center will add new office and retail space, plus one apartment. Two more restaurants will soon emerge in the village and (Slide 9) municipal lamp-posts have been installed along River Road and in the village improving the lighting at night and enhancing pedestrian safety. New curbing and sidewalk improvements are also being made to improve the center, most of which will be done next spring. The Conservation Commission and the Garden Club are also working on a Tree

Plan and additional flower plantings in the village area. In the spring, hopefully with some economic assistance from Wilton's business community, we plan to install flowers on the lampposts in the village area to improve the shopping environment.

(Slide 10) Along Route 7, the Westy's Storage Center construction project was completed and their storage facilities opened to the public. (Slide 11) During the year the Wilton Diner property on Route 7 was sold and the building removed. Currently, a new building is under construction for a new bank branch. (Slide 12) At 40 and 60 Danbury Road, Davis-Marcus Partners broke ground on a new corporate office complex. When these two new buildings are completed, Davis-Marcus Partners will have over 800,000 square feet of class A office space in Wilton. This investment is a noteworthy endorsement of the commercial desirability of our community and this firm's confidence in the future of Wilton.

Most important, this development activity is consistent with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development. These projects will also contribute significantly to the health of the local economy by providing employment and service opportunities, as well as increased tax revenues.

GOVERNANCE AND SERVICES

(Slide 13) In the effort to continually improve Town Governance and Services, we addressed a number of areas vital to Wilton residents. First we identified the need to have a consistent process for major bonded capital projects. In the past, each project followed different procedures for initial review, design development and approval. To improve the system, we formed a small sub-committee of experienced board and town officials to develop a capital process for all major bonded capital projects.

This written process outlines the sequence of events and approvals required to take a major construction project from concept to completion. Existing projects have been integrated into the new system with the assistance of the Council on Public Facilities. I believe the development of a formal process, guidelines if you will, to more effectively manage the Town and Board of Education's capital projects, will prove over the long term to have been a major accomplishment.

Turing to current Major Capital Projects, I am pleased to report that the stadium and fields' project has been completed. During the year, the visitor and home stands were opened for public use, a complete new track surface was installed, team rooms were completed in time for the first varsity home football game and a new concession stand and lavatory facilities were finished well ahead of the contracted construction schedule. Extensive new fencing, improved stadium lighting, as well as an emergency light system, were also installed at the stadium complex. And lastly, the Parks and Recreation Department is finalizing a comprehensive maintenance plan document outlining specific tasks and responsibilities to keep our facilities in good condition.

At the May Town Meeting, funds were approved for the initial design and engineering of renovations to the high school and the expansion of Miller-Driscoll pre-k special education facilities. Activity is taking place on these projects including the retaining of Turner Construction to provide pre-construction and project management planning expertise during the critical design and budgeting phases.

At Ambler Farm this summer, major renovations were made to the yellow house and a caretaker/educator and his family moved in as a tenant to assist in the preservation and development of Ambler Farm. A steering committee has been formed to start the process of renovating the historic white farmhouse. As you may recall, funds were appropriated at the Town Meeting to support the first renovation phase of this two year project.

The Comstock Community Center project, which includes a new senior center, is also underway. A steering committee has been formed with members who have architectural, construction and other related skills.

This committee's role will be to develop a statement of requirements, plus preliminary design and cost estimates for eventual approval at the town meeting. A member of the newly formed Energy Commission is also on each of these committees to assure that energy reduction concepts and technology are incorporated into design considerations from the start.

Emergency Planning and Preparation continues to be a major focus for the Town, encompassing all public safety departments, health and school officials, as well as volunteer emergency workers, EMT's and CERT team members.

(Slide 14) Two new fire engines were delivered this year and put into service. Our fire protection fleet is now well equipped with the best and most modern apparatus available. A new Deputy Fire Chief was hired this year to strengthen operations management and staff development.

The Town's emergency operations plan was also updated, revised, reviewed and approved by Connecticut's Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. This update was an important goal and we were pleased to receive a complimentary letter from Governor Jodi Rell recognizing our emergency planning accomplishments.

In September, a very successful emergency services day was organized at the Town Hall Complex. Emergency service units demonstrated equipment, rescue operations, SWAT team procedures and recommended home emergency preparation supplies. Connecticut's State Police also thrilled the crowds by demonstrating their rescue helicopter. It was a great day and fun for all.

In October, we had our first influenza/pandemic flu shot drill using Miller Driscoll School as the inoculation site. It was a very successful exercise with over 500 citizens inoculated quickly proving mass inoculation procedures, if ever required in the future, would be possible. The Town plans to continue various emergency drills in the future to sharpen our skills and to be prepared for various potential storm related or other disasters.

Utilizing an Emergency Management and Homeland Security grant, the Town has acquired a reverse 911 message system, that when programmed, will provide an updated capability to send emergency messages to the community as a whole or to geographical segments of the community. To build our shelter resources, we acquired additional cots and blankets to assist displaced citizens during a severe storm or other major emergency.

And finally, the activities of the Social Services Department deserve recognition – Over the past year Wilton's Social Services staff helped 100 families apply for assistance from the State of Connecticut's energy assistance program. In addition, programs to help single mothers and to combat underage drinking were developed. Department personnel also received training from the Red Cross on shelter management and our seniors' emergency contact list was updated. And lastly, holiday giving programs were organized for low income families and homebound seniors. In brief, our Social Services' professionals help to ensure that those Wilton residents in need are not ignored or overlooked.

CHALLENGES AND GOALS

(Slide 15) Over the past two years, we have made a lot of progress, and I believe Wilton is prepared to face new challenges from a position of strength. Next, I'd like to discuss several (Slide 16) challenges that we are addressing and then sum up key goals for 2008.

Here is a list of challenges that are important to all of us:

- Rising energy costs
- Super 7
- Proposed flight pattern changes by the FAA and
- Capital project priorities

The management of rising energy costs is obviously one of our major challenges for next year. The Board of Selectmen recognized this issue and an Energy Commission was established to recommend energy conservation plans, assess new technologies, review new building construction and to provide energy education services to the community.

The Board of Selectmen is working closely with this Commission to determine the most promising strategies. For example, the schools recently relamped their buildings with assistance from CL&P, which will produce overall energy savings of approximately \$88,000 a year. We believe we can take similar actions at Town Hall facilities to achieve lower energy costs. The Energy Commission, working closely with CL&P, will perform the analysis and then make their recommendation to the Board of Selectmen.

Another challenge that requires us to remain vigilant is any effort to resurrect a Super 7 highway through Wilton. This is not just a Wilton concern. Ridgefield, Redding and many other member towns of the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials are vehemently opposed to this outdated, environmentally hazardous and very costly road concept. It received no support in the House Transportation Committee and lacks DOT backing, as well as the land to build it on. More than 40% of the land necessary to construct this road would need to be acquired by the State resulting in the displacement of many families whose homes would have to be taken by eminent domain.

New federal environmental and state aquifer protection laws make it also highly unlikely that the required approvals necessary for federal funding could ever be obtained. I believe a better approach would be for Norwalk and Wilton to work together on a project that is broadly supported – an improved Norwalk to Danbury rail line, which is consistent with the State’s multi-modal transportation strategies.

Working closely with neighboring communities, and our vigilant State Representatives, please be assured that we will continue our multi-town opposition strategy to combat any initiative that would negatively impact the quality of life and the environment of the many families, citizens and businesses in this beautiful and scenic area of Connecticut.

Turning now to another area of concern, 14 towns and cities in southwest Connecticut have formed an alliance to challenge the Federal Aviation Agency’s recently announced “Record of Decision” that would make major changes to the flight patterns of aircraft over this geographical area. The State of Connecticut, supported by Governor Rell, has also filed suit against the FAA. In total, more than 11 suits have been filed by communities in NY, NJ and PA in opposition to this ill-conceived proposal that the FAA admits would only have a minor effect on reducing airport delays. Wilton has worked closely within the Alliance on all phases of strategy development. The basic objective will be to implement a well coordinated legal, lobbying and grass roots activist’s campaign to obtain a stay or cause the FAA to review and revise their current proposal. I will continue to keep the community advised on the Alliance’s activity and outline soon how citizens can help us.

Lastly, capital project priorities. As the Town does not have infinite resources, it is critical that all new capital construction projects be carefully examined. Both the schools and the Town have capital needs and those needs must be balanced to meet legitimate maintenance, community and other requirements. The Town cannot afford to do all projects at once. The challenge to the Board of Selectmen, Board of Education and Board of Finance will be to closely look at the merits of each project and to set specific priorities, which may mean a delay or re-evaluation of the scope of some projects.

(Slide 17) Other 2008 key goals are as noted on the slide:

- Form a Charter Review Commission to address a number of possible changes to the Town's Charter.
- Develop Comstock Community and Senior Center design plans.
- Continue emergency preparedness training and community education.
- Operate cost effectively to limit tax rate growth. This is critically important, as 2008 is a scheduled assessment revaluation year.

In summary, although it is not possible to cover every subject in this report, I have tried to present information that covers a spectrum of past, present and future activity in our Town. Improving municipal services is a never ending process, and I remain dedicated to providing frequent communications to our citizenry to keep you well informed on the Town's accomplishments and challenges.

I would like to thank all of our Town employees for all their hard work and dedication. They contribute to making Wilton a great place to live and raise a family. Lastly, I also wish to express our appreciation to the more than 150 unpaid resident volunteers who serve on various Town boards, commissions and committees. Without this generous commitment of time and effort, Wilton would not be the vibrant and exciting community that it is today. (Slide 18)

Thank you and best wishes for a healthy, prosperous and peaceful 2008.