

Welcome everyone! I'm honored to share the stage with BOE Chair Lee Goldstein and I'm so happy to be here, with all of you, in the beautiful and award-winning Westport Library – the only 5-star library in the state and a true treasure! We are so fortunate to have this incredible asset – and it's fabulous staff - in our community.

And speaking of treasures, I want to extend a warm thank you to the Rotary Clubs for hosting our annual State of the Town address - and for your many valuable contributions to our community. I think I can speak for everyone – and as a fellow Rotarian - when I say we are grateful for everything you do. You truly make Westport a better place for us all.

Westport is a special place, with a vibrant and engaged community - just look around at all the people that are here with us today! We're making great progress on the top five priorities I laid out when Andrea and I took office two years ago, as well as on many other exciting initiatives.

There's a lot to talk about!

First and foremost, my guiding principle, and that of my administration, is to ensure that Westport continues to be the best place to live, work, play and learn in the region – a place where everyone is welcome and feels like they belong. Many of you have heard me say this before and I think it's incredibly important that we begin there today. As First Selectwoman, it's my North Star and the driving force behind everything my administration does.

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In a year dominated by issues, whether they be local, national or international, that have put members of our community on edge, it is our job to make sure people feel safe, and seen, and heard. We all want to feel valued. We all want to feel like we belong. This is at the heart of who we are as a community, and it will always be a priority.

We've taken steps large and small to accomplish this that I will share with you:

First, we have come together many times as a community – and will continue to do so - to support each other and to show we care about the safety and well-being of our entire community - following the horrific terrorist attack on October 7th

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Westporters continue to raise money for vital equipment for our sister city Lyman thanks to Dan Woog and his efforts. Foti and I visited Lyman to meet their elected officials and residents in person, to show

our support and solidarity, and to see firsthand how our contributions were making a difference under the leadership of the non-profit and our partners Ukraine Aid International. Foti and I are in regular contact with our counterparts as they continue to endure a long and devastating war.

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We now have 4 full-time School Security Officers at our schools solely focused on keeping our kids, parents and school staff safe. After a frightening car-jacking incident in town, we held a town hall to keep residents informed on what we're doing – proactively, every day - to protect Westport.

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We installed a rainbow crosswalk downtown to celebrate our LGBTQ community

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We invited Jennifer Wallace, author of *Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic – And What We Can Do About It* to speak to our parents about the high achieving, and intense, culture our kids face and to help determine what we, as parents, can do to provide a better environment for our kids.

While this is not an exhaustive list, I thought it was important to just name a few steps we've taken so you know that we don't just talk, but we also take action.

As elected officials, we are here to serve you. We're listening and we're doing everything possible to ensure that every member of our community feels safe, heard, and valued. Priority #1.

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Before I share the progress we've made on many other initiatives first, I want to thank our dedicated and talented town staff and my leadership team, the department heads. While we regularly highlight our unparalleled police, fire and EMS departments, I thought it would be fun to show pictures of some of the other departments who work every day to serve you and help ensure Westport remains the best place to live, work, play and learn in the region.

Please stand.

All right.

I could stand here for hours recounting all the things that we have accomplished this past year. Don't worry, I won't! But I will share some of the highlights as well as the things we're working on for the

future. I'll start by commenting on the other 4 stated priorities which Andrea and I ran on 2 years ago and of course I will address some other important initiatives.

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Traffic – The number one quality of life issue continues to be traffic – and we continue to make progress. We receive regular feedback from residents through email, the website form and phone calls, in addition to the 2 in-person public meetings we have committed to hosting, one in the fall and one in the spring. The Traffic and Pedestrian Safety Task force works through these issues prioritizing them in the most informed and organized fashion to date, which allows us to take decisive action.

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We've accomplished quite a bit from installing new stop signs to building new sidewalks and everything in between. Also, currently we're tackling one of the most difficult corridors – Cross Highway, between Bayberry and North Avenue and at a public meeting this Thursday, 2/8 we will share redesign plans for both intersections and for the corridor in between which will include both short-term and long-term plans. Running concurrently, Tighe and Bond has been hired to formulate a comprehensive and strategic "safe streets for all" action plan which we are launching now, with the \$450,000 federal grant we were awarded. Beginning this month and likely running for the next 6 months we will be seeking public feedback through multiple platforms. Please make your voice heard. Thank you to our Police, Fire, Public Works departments and the Operations Director for the never-ending work you are doing on this important issue.

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The Longshore Capital Improvement Plan – After engaging the public and receiving feedback from residents during months of public meetings and information sessions and numerous on-line surveys, 10-year capital improvement plan was finalized and includes everything from installing pickleball courts to upgrading the pool.

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We will also see a multimillion-dollar upgrade to the Inn at Longshore. As part of the amended lease agreement my team and I negotiated with Longshore Hospitality, the tenant at the Inn, they will be funding the upgrades. We are delighted to have such a highly regarded and well-known operator with deep expertise in the leisure business due to their operational ties to the Delamar in

Southport. Plans are being finalized now and will be presented before multiple boards and commissions over the following months. I want to thank our Parks and Recreation Department and Commission, including Chair Dave Floyd, for their tireless work on one of Westport's most important assets.

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Let's talk about Downtown – Downtown Westport is a vibrant destination for families, shoppers and diners. We are near full occupancy! After engaging the public and receiving feedback from residents and business owners during months of public meetings, information sessions and surveys, the Plan to improve Parker Harding Plaza will be back in front of Planning and Zoning shortly.

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We will be implementing and enforcing 3-hour parking this Spring and electric vehicle chargers in public lots will soon be paid spots. So, the spaces that were previously 1 and 2 hours will become 3 hours. The remainder of the spaces will be all-day parking. In addition, we will be beginning the design process for Taylor Lot, Jesup Green and the Imperial Lot – which is this side of the Post Road. We welcome and want public feedback and will go through a similar process to ensure that residents and business owners have ample opportunity to share their thoughts. I want to thank the Downtown Plan Implementation Committee - including Chair Randy Herbertson and virtually every department – as this is a complicated project - for their work to ensure our Downtown is and will continue to be destination.

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Flood Mitigation and Stream Management – This is a high priority given that the Saugatuck River runs through our community, along with 7 streams, and changing – more intense - weather patterns. The Flood and Erosion Control Board has studied the seven streams that run through Westport and hosted multiple public meetings as they've worked through this complicated and long-term project.

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They have prioritized Muddy Brook and Pussy Willow Brook. Stream channel improvements along with culvert and bridge improvements will be part of the work within these drainage corridors. This work has been decades in the making and will be decades in the making. So, it's critical to have a Board – along with support from Town experts – that's prioritizing a systematic and strategic method of tackling these issues. I want to thank PW, Conservation and P&Z departments for their leadership along with the Flood and Erosion Control Board.

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We'll continue to update you on all of these initiatives. You can go to our Town website to stay informed and, as I've mentioned, please attend the public meetings where these initiatives are discussed. In the meantime, the list of priorities continues to evolve. As new ideas, new issues, new concerns arise, the priority list grows.

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Which brings us to Long Lots Elementary School – We have a positive 8-24 report on a schematic plan for the Long Lots campus, which represents a compromise. It includes a brand new school, multi-purpose fields, and a community garden. I want to thank the LLS Building Committee, DPW and PR for taking on this multi-year project with the BOE and the school administration, as well as everyone who has contributed to the conversation and helped us to get where we are today. The next phase will be to secure the funding to hire the architect, engineers and other specialists to design the school. The BOF will vote on the appropriation on Wednesday, 2/7 and the RTM will vote on the appropriation on Tuesday, 2/13. The goal continues to be to start construction before the end of 2024.

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Diverse Housing – We are overseeing a complete overhaul of the Gillespie Center, a town-owned property that's run by Homes with Hope which is located across Jesup Green right in the middle of Downtown. It is an emergency shelter for single men and women, a community kitchen which serves 3 meals a day and a food pantry. We plan to renovate the entire building which will allow for more privacy and dignity for the clients. Thank you to Building Official Steve Smith, Director of Human Services Elaine Daignault, Homes with Hope ED Helen McAlinden and her team and board and the CT Department of Housing for your incredible work on this unique project – the only one of its type in Fairfield County. We are also actively looking at other town-owned land and physical assets that we can add to our diverse housing stock by converting to Affordable Housing.

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Startup Westport – Last year at this time, Startup Westport was just an idea. It came from two Westport Residents Cliff Sirlin and Stefano Pacifico, who reached out to me separately - they didn't even know each other - but both had a similar idea. How do we leverage the amount of local talent right here specifically in Westport – the large number of founders, funders and leaders in the tech and innovation

space. One year later, 5 events later, 100s of event attendees later and over 800 subscribers to our regular newsletter later we now have a public private partnership and organization which aims to activate and engage Westport's growing tech and innovation community. I have a quick story to share about the impact of StartUp Westport. I just received news yesterday from a CEO of a Westport-based cybersecurity firm that they were awarded a large contract with the Air Force as a result of connections made at our StartUp Westport events. Unbelievable. Going forward, we have 3 events scheduled in the next 3 months. We are also launching a mentorship program aimed at high school and college students. Please sign up at www.startupwestport.org for more information. This is our team and we want to make Westport the tech and innovation start up hub of CT.

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Skip the Stuff Campaign – This is a townwide initiative launching now, in partnership with Sustainable Westport, the Westport Farmers' Market, the Chamber and the WDA, to encourage our restaurants and eating establishments to change the way they distribute accessories like utensils, napkins, condiment packs that go unused and are just thrown away in take-out and delivery orders. In addition to the obvious environmental impact, restaurants spend \$19 billion on disposable items and local governments spend \$1 billion annually on managing the waste and litter - based on pre-pandemic data. This will be an education campaign by meeting with our local eating establishments and communicating to the general public through various platforms. Thank you to the leadership of Sustainable Westport, the Westport Farmers' Market, the Chamber, the WDA and our Town Conservation Department Director and Operations Director for leading the way on this important and impactful sustainability initiative.

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I have people from other parts of the state and the region regularly tell me how much they love Westport. We have such a beautiful town, in every season, with absolutely gorgeous natural assets and what I refer to as a great vibe. My response is always the same ... yes I feel so lucky to be the leader of this beautiful town,

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but what makes it really special is the people, our residents, our business owners, our non-profit leaders – many of whom I have thanked today. We're so fortunate to have such an engaged community that cares deeply about our collective future.

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It seems very appropriate at this time to recognize Bill Vornkhal, who just passed last week. He was a great example of an engaged, caring resident. For over 50 years, he was Mr. Parade – planning our beloved Memorial Day parade and our Veteran’s Day service. He will be deeply missed but his legacy lives on in both of those events. And his love for his country and our democracy lives on here in Westport.

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Let’s talk for a minute about democracy. Have we had very robust debates recently? Yes - and putting aside the acrimonious tone of some of it - that’s democracy in action. A strong, functioning democracy requires all of us to be part of the solution. It requires compromise – sometimes compromise is the only way for us to keep moving forward – to keep making progress. Is it messy sometimes? And frustrating at times? Sure. But at the end of the day, time and again, our democratic process, as stipulated specifically by our charter here in Westport, yields the best decisions for the future of our community. And that is the responsibility of your elected leaders, to follow the democratic process and sometimes make compromises to ensure progress. Thank you to my fellow elected and appointed board and commission members – and specifically to Selectwoman Andrea Moore and Selectwoman Candice Savin - for helping me move Westport forward.

Please stand

It takes all of us working together to ensure that Westport continues to be the best place to live, work, play and learn in the region – a place where everyone is welcome and feels like they belong. And really, when you get right down to it, that’s what it’s all about. I’m honored to be your leader.

Thank you for your time today. I’m looking forward to answering your questions.

