

City's made strides in security

Contributed by Mayor John M. Picard
Thursday, 17 July 2008
Last Updated Sunday, 27 July 2008

As the financial stability of our great city significantly improves from the crisis we inherited more than two years ago, we have cut our long-term debt from \$271 million to \$223 million in that time by restoring fiscal management and accountability.

Our annual debt service payment is estimated to drop \$1 million in fiscal 2008-09 and is ahead of projections. By raising the bar to ensure that our tax money is spent wisely and efficiently, we are making great strides. Our current tax-collection rate is estimated at 95 percent, with each additional percentage equaling \$800,000 in annual revenue. For the first time, we have hired a firm, Northeast Financial Management Associates LLC of Old Saybrook, to help collect business equipment taxes. To further assist the tax office, we are in the process of hiring a certified professional to help collect back and current taxes. To secure additional funding, we have been working to expand and streamline the grants office to research, write and administer more state, federal and foundation grants. The office's expansion would allow the city to continue providing the same services with less borrowing and tax dollars. As the city heralds an exciting renaissance and forges an important path forward, the opportunities now before us are limited only by the size of our dreams and goals. To bolster our financial picture, we have instituted a four-point plan to control expenses, augment grant revenue, boost tax collection and spur economic development. To stimulate our grand list and help pay down our debt, we are aggressively pursuing and fostering a bevy of fresh economic development initiatives, including the major addition of Yale University's West Campus and the major expansion at Star Distributors Inc. off Frontage Road. With the arrival of the nearby Metro Self-Storage facility at the old Academic Industries site on Sawmill Road, the newly renovated American Steakhouse complements the retail strip's new Texas Roadhouse and Wal-Mart. The future Hampton Inn & Suites and Holiday Inn Express hotels on Sawmill Road will join the neighboring Best Western Executive Hotel to offer the area's best lodging accommodations. Demolition crews recently tore down a brick office building and small garage at the old Connecticut Refining Co. site at 105 Water St. to move forward on the proposed 30-acre West River Crossing redevelopment project. The waterfront property, formerly Shiner's Cove Marina, one day could include a hotel, retail and office space, restaurants and limited housing. In the historic downtown business district, preliminary work has begun to turn the former Masonic Temple on Center Street into a cultural arts center, while our state-endorsed regional transportation plan for a train station is on track to straddle Hood Terrace and Railroad Avenue near Sawmill Road. Construction should start on the estimated \$100 million project in early fall 2009 and finish in summer 2011. In Allingtown, conceptual plans are under way for a new hotel where the Sunrise Plaza now stands on Campbell Avenue near the University of New Haven, which, like neighboring Notre Dame High School, has launched ambitious expansion projects. A block down near ShopRite and Railroad Salvage, city and state officials recently celebrated the grand reopening of McDonald's restaurant on Campbell Avenue. The rebuilt McCafe, the first such eatery in Greater New Haven, features a waterfall, fireplace, flat-panel TVs and Wi-Fi access. Up the thoroughfare, the future site of the Penske Truck Leasing facility on the Boston Post Road is nearing completion. With renewed energy and effective leadership, we are focusing on sustainable development that reduces our tax burden, we are recruiting companies that create jobs for our residents, and we are demanding development that represents our seaside community's charm and preserves our undeveloped shoreline. As we rise to the challenge of new opportunities and ideas, the future of West Haven has never looked brighter. The state of our improving finances and budding renaissance will continue to add to the prosperity and character of our community and make it a better place. The city is in good hands.