



TOWN OF DARIEN NEWSLETTER

January 20, 2023 - Issue 23

MESSAGE FROM MONICA MCNALLY

Dear Darienites,

Darien continues to be a Town with hardworking, dedicated volunteers and employees. We continuously look for talented people to get involved. For those seeking employment, please visit the Human Resources [page](#) of the Town website, or contact [Linda O'Leary](#) in my office to learn more about volunteering on a Board or Commission.

One group of volunteers who stand out to me each year, particularly during budget season, are the hundreds of volunteer firefighters in Darien. All three of our fire departments are 100% volunteer-run. We are fortunate to have so many people willing to give hours of their time to keep our community safe.

Please continue to keep in contact with me with your thoughts, questions, and concerns.

Sincerely,
Monica McNally



DATES & INFORMATION

UPCOMING MEETINGS

RTM

1.23.23 8:00 PM

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

1.24.23 8:30 AM

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

1.24.23 7:30 PM

RTM EDUCATION

1.30.23 7:30 AM

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

1.30.23 5:30 PM

Budget Workshop

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

1.31.23 5:30 PM

Budget Workshop

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

1.31.23 7:30 PM

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

2.1.23 7:00 PM

RESIDENT REMINDERS, NEWS & TIPS

Train Station Parking Renewals

Renewals for the Noroton Heights and Leroy West waitlists are due back by February 1, 2023. You may renew online at [Darien Parking Authority \(nsolutions.com\)](#), in person or by mail. If no response is received by February 1, 2023, your name will be removed from the waitlist.

Tax Reminders

The 2nd installment of real estate and personal property taxes came due January 1, 2023 (bills were mailed June 28, 2022). Motor vehicle taxes for ownership and registration in Darien between October 2, 2021, and July 31, 2022, also came due January 1, 2023 (bills were mailed on December 28, 2022). All tax bills are available through the following link <https://gemsnt.com/darien-webtax>.

Please see the Taxes & Assessments page of the Town website for information and answers to frequently asked questions:

<http://www.darienct.gov/taxes>, or call the Darien Tax Office (203) 656-7314. Questions related to assessments or exemptions should be directed to the Darien Assessor's Office

RTM FINANCE & BUDGET

2.2.23 7:30 PM

The complete meeting schedule of all Boards and Commissions is available [here](#).

For additional events and programs happening within Darien, click [here](#) to view the Darien Community Calendar available through the Darien Chamber of Commerce.

Keep Vents Clear

When snow accumulates, it is important to remember to clear it away from vents for home appliances such as dryers and direct vent boilers. If these vents are blocked they can combust and create carbon monoxide buildup in the home. Carbon monoxide is odorless and colorless, therefore not easily detectable. Carbon monoxide detectors should be installed in your home and should be checked regularly to ensure they are working properly.

UPDATE ON SNOW PLOWING

The Department of Public Works provides numerous services to Darien residents and local businesses. These include, but are not limited to road repair and maintenance, bulk garbage pick-up, and leaf and Christmas tree collection. At this time of year when snow and ice are a continued threat, the Department of Public Works keeps the 81 miles of public roads, public parking lots, and train station parking lots clear of snow and ice. With a crew of 14 and 11 assigned routes, the Highway Supervisor coordinates the crew to keep the roadways as clear as possible.



The Town has 8 large plow trucks and 4 pick-up trucks for snow removal, as well as backup pick-up trucks to be called in if necessary. In addition to the snow removal, there is a five-person salt crew that salts roadways and train platforms. Each of the trucks is on the road for approximately 2 hours before the drivers take a break. For safety, the trucks travel no more than 20-25 miles per hour and are tracked by a GPS system that indicates their speed.

The Director of Public Works, Ed Gentile, and the Highway Supervisor track three different weather services to prepare for whatever weather conditions may impact us. Roadways are pre-treated with salt and plowing begins when approximately 2 or more inches of snow have fallen. The timing of when the weather hits has a large impact on the removal process. Cars on the roads will always slow down the clearing of the roads, which is why residents should make every effort possible to stay off the roads in inclement conditions. There is always special attention paid to heavy commuter times and school drop off and pick up times. The Superintendent of Schools is in contact with Public Works as part of the decision-making process to open or close schools –the roads need to be safe and clear for students to get to and from school.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Darien Citizens' Police Academy

In an effort to continue to foster "Pride in Excellence" The Darien Police Department is sponsoring the Darien Citizens' Police Academy. The academy is an opportunity for members of the community to become acquainted with the roles and responsibilities of the Police Department. The Citizens' Police Academy includes 7 training sessions, each 2 hours long, from February 2nd to March 16th. The enrollment for the program reached capacity within 24 hours of the announcement – another example of Darien's community participation. Residents 18 years of age and older with no criminal history can be added to a wait list by contacting Officer Amanda Hinkley ahinkley@darienct.gov or Officer Kathleen Gelineau via email kgelineau@darienct.gov.



RTM
REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING

RTM Finance & Budget Committee (RTM F&B)

The Finance & Budget Committee is a subcommittee of the RTM, the Town's legislative body. This committee is charged with reviewing, analyzing, and recommending (or not) all things financial as they relate to the BOE and BOS budgets. When budget and capital projects are proposed, the F&B independently analyzes the financial impact and whether such expenditures are a reflection of the ongoing needs of the residents of Darien. Most importantly, RTM F&B ensures that the public process is transparent, proper, and appropriate.

Throughout the budget process, committee members are assigned to two or more areas of the BOS and BOE budgets on which they personally focus. This ensures that feedback that is representative of their constituents is taken into account in the decision-making by each of the Boards. Areas of the budget covered by F&B include, but are not limited to: Education, Parks & Recreation, Police and Fire, Public Works, the Darien Library, Pension Obligations, and Debt and Investments. F&B works collaboratively with other RTM committees and Town boards throughout the budget process so that when the time comes for the RTM to approve the Town budget, there should be no major questions, concerns, or outstanding issues. They accomplish this through early involvement, communication, and adherence to public process.

F&B plays a significant role in the RTM, often serving as the primary committee charged with recommending Town projects and budgets to the full RTM. With a 100 member RTM, 51 votes are required for an item pass. A vote through the RTM ensures that a project has broad-based support throughout the Town.

Ultimately the F&B committee strives to provide valuable feedback to Town boards, so that when decisions are made, there are no surprises on the floor of the RTM.

TOWN BUDGET

First Selectman Monica McNally, and Town Administrator Kate Buch, have been working closely with Town Department Heads and the Director of Finance Jenn Charneski, reviewing the requested Town budget for Fiscal Year 2023-2024. The budget will be available to the Board of Selectmen for their individual review next week, with full Board review commencing on January 30, 2023.

Complete meeting schedules and documents can be found on the Town of Darien website under [NEWS](#) on the home page.

PARKS & RECREATION

Ice Skating on Town Ponds

The Town of Darien has ponds in three public locations that occasionally freeze and become usable for ice skating: Tilley Pond Park, Cherry Lawn Park, and the front Town Hall field near the split rail fence. In November, "No Skating" signs are put out at each location. If the ponds do open for skating the signage is changed to "Skate at Your Own Risk".



When temperatures drop below 30 degrees for 3-4 days in a row the Park Management will go out and drill areas of the ponds at Cherry and Tilley to take measurements of the ice thickness. There are standards based on the ambient temperature, forecasted high temperature, and quality of the ice that determine whether or not the ice is safe for skating. Due to our moderate winter climate, it is important to monitor the signage frequently.

The Police Department is also notified when the Town begins checking the ice so they are aware of the current ice conditions.

Project Buddy Up

The Parks and Recreation Department has a Buddy Leader Program called “Project Buddy Up” available in a limited number of programs. Middle and high school buddies provide extra support for participants of all abilities, to create an environment that is inclusive, values individualism, and allows all participants to feel a sense of accomplishment regardless of their starting point. The teen volunteers partner up in small group settings to help engage students, of any and all abilities during programs including Grit Ninja, Sprout Chefs, Woodworkers club, and a few others. If your child requires special accommodations simply contact the Parks and Recreation Office about Project Buddy Up. Spring/Summer Buddy Up programming is being finalized and will be available soon.

Volunteers are always welcome and needed. Students aged 16 and older are preferred, but with approval 14 and 15-year-olds may be considered. To become a volunteer email projectbuddyup@gmail.com.

HUMAN SERVICES



OPERATION FUEL

Beginning Monday, December 19, 2022, Operation Fuel began administering an energy assistance program for clients who need aid with meeting their home utility or heating needs (electricity, gas, or deliverable fuel). This energy assistance program is for households living on up to 100% of the state median income (\$66,270 per individual) with no asset limit: a household with one person has an income limit of \$66,270, a household of four has an income limit of \$127,443. The maximum grant amount will be up to \$1,000.

This is a large increase in assistance from the previous 75% of the state median income limit. Clients may now apply for assistance two times a year versus only once a year previously. The dramatic increases are a result of utility companies Eversource and United Illuminating (UI) working with state leaders on a short-term/interim *Customer Relief Plan*. Due to the unusually high energy prices this winter, the program is designed to provide immediate energy assistance to customers in need, including moderate and middle-income customers who are struggling to pay their bills. The Customer Relief Plan includes an Eversource shareholder expense of \$10 million.

Call Darien Human Services for more information or to make an appointment, (203) 656-7328.

INTERESTING INFORMATION

The Town Code of Darien, also referred to as the Town Charter, is the governing document of all Darien local rules and ordinances. Most of what residents need or want to know about how the Town of Darien operates and what is allowed or disallowed in Town, is included in the Code of Ordinances. The full Code of Ordinances is available to view on the Town of Darien [website](#) under the Government drop-down, listed as [TOWN CODE](#). It is an easily searchable document, so residents are able to quickly access answers to questions.

When you click on [TOWN CODE](#), the main page of the Code of Ordinances comes up. On the left side of the computer screen, all of the Chapters and Headings are listed. On the top of the screen, just below the web page search bar (or favorites) is a search window, image seen below. The code can be searched by typing in the desired topic.

☞ Darien, CT

Search or jump to

In addition to the website, the printed copy of the Town Charter is available in the Town

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

January is National Radon Action Month

Radon is a naturally occurring, invisible, odorless, tasteless radioactive gas that is found throughout the US. Most of the time, it is harmlessly dispersed in outdoor air, but it can reach harmful levels when trapped in buildings and homes. Exposure to elevated levels of radon has been shown to cause lung damage and cancer in humans. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S. after smoking and the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that radon is responsible for more than 20,000 lung cancer deaths per year.



Radon gas is drawn into a house through foundation cracks and openings, such as sump pump pits and plumbing features. The lower levels of your home tend to have the highest levels of radon and pose the highest risk.

Radon levels vary seasonally and tend to be higher in the winter months. Indoor radon levels are normally at the highest in the winter or colder months because of the thermal stack effect, a snowy barrier, and tightly sealed homes. Cold temperatures increase the pressure within the home, meaning more air is being pulled in from the ground, which elevates the risk of radon entering the home. The best time to test for radon is during the winter when the home is closed up and the furnace is running. The only way to know if your home has elevated radon levels is to test. The Health Department strongly recommends residents test their homes for radon gas, especially now that many families are spending more time indoors at home. Testing homes for elevated levels of radon is simple and inexpensive. Radon test kits can be purchased at home improvement stores for under \$25.00 or can be obtained *free* while supplies last at the Darien Health Department.

When discovered, radon problems can be fixed by qualified contractors at a reasonable cost by installing ventilation systems, sealing entry routes for radon gas, and/or installing sub-slab depressurization systems to reduce radon levels. Testing is also encouraged when planning a renovation to a lower level of a home, such as converting an unfinished basement area into living space.

For more information see CT DPH Radon Program:

<https://portal.ct.gov/dph/Environmental-Health/Radon/Radon-Program>

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT

SCOTT PLANK: Chief, Noroton Heights Fire Department

Scott is in his 41st official year as a volunteer with the Noroton Heights Fire Department. Born and raised in Darien, Scott has been part of the Noroton Heights Fire Department “family” since he was born.

His father was a firefighter with the department as well. At the age of 5, Scott started “hanging out” at the firehouse with his dad and all of the other volunteers. He was able to join as a member at the age of 18. In his 41 years, Scott has served in virtually every role possible within the department, including serving as the Chief for 6 years. Now, in addition to being an active firefighter, he is the Chairman of the Town of Darien Fire Commission. The Fire Commission is the organization that maintains communication among all three volunteer fire departments in town: Noroton Heights, Noroton, and Darien.



Professionally, Scott worked for the Norwalk Fire Department for 30 years as the head of

apparatus maintenance. After his retirement from the Norwalk Fire Department, he started his own heavy equipment maintenance company servicing our local area.

Scott's service to the fire department is a family passion. Along with his brother, 3 of his 5 grown children volunteer at the Noroton Heights Fire Department: one is Assistant Chief, one a Captain, and one an Engineer. Scott is clear though, the life of volunteer service to the department is a family commitment and without his wife's support he would not be able to do what he does.

Every firefighter carries a pager, and when the pager goes off, out the door they go if they are able. According to Scott, many family events have been cut short over the years. In addition to the time fighting fires, the volunteers train two days a week for 3 hours at a time. It is absolutely a passion for the work and a life of dedication. "It is truly a family", Scott says. One of the things he loves is watching the young volunteers come in, "some of them don't say a word for three weeks, then all of a sudden, you can't keep them quiet." Watching them grow, and speaking with their parents as they watch their children thrive in the Department is clearly something Scott enjoys.

The Noroton Heights Fire Department is always open and Scott invites everyone to "stop by and say hi." To learn more about the Department and volunteer opportunities (non-firefighting opportunities exist too) either stop by the firehouse, 209 Noroton Avenue or visit their website <https://www.norotonheightsfd.com/>

PLANNING & ZONING

Low and Moderate Income Housing in Darien

In September 2022, the Darien Planning & Zoning Commission adopted the Darien Affordable Housing Plan. The Plan, required by State Statute, was the result of more than six months of work, by in-house staff and an outside consultant working closely with the Commission. It includes comprehensive information about housing within Darien, including all low and moderate-income housing within the community. The document is available on the Town website [here](#) and provides a number of recommendations.

Currently, Darien has three developments constructed under the State's affordable housing Statute, CGS 8-30g:

1. Avalon Darien on Hollow Tree Ridge Road, contains 189 apartment units, 47 of which are rented as deed-restricted affordable housing. The deed restriction on those 47 units runs until about 2030 when they will then revert to being market-rate units.
2. Garden Homes apartments at 397 Boston Post Road contains 35 studio and one-bedroom units, 11 of which are deed-restricted affordable apartments.
3. Pemberton 16 Condominiums with 16 age-restricted units; 5 of which are also deed-restricted affordable units.

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