

April 8, 2024

Board of Finance
Board of Representatives
888 Washington Blvd, 5th Floor
Stamford, CT 06901

Re: Letter In Support of the Mayor's 2024-2025 Budget

Dear Members of the Board of Finance and the Board of Representatives:

My name is Chris Dawson and I live in North Stamford. I am a member of People Friendly Stamford. People Friendly Stamford is a local, all volunteer, community advocacy group of residents from across Stamford. Our mission is to create walkable and bikeable neighborhoods, improve transit, reduce car-dependency, and support housing abundance.

I strongly support the Mayor's 2024/25 budget because it directly supports our mission to make our streets safer and less congested while also addressing our housing crisis which are all central to our mission.

One of the primary responsibilities of the Board of Representatives is the "welfare and safety of its inhabitants" while the Board of Finance has "duties related to fiscal policies" that directly affect the welfare and safety of our fellow residents. Nothing imperils the welfare and safety of our residents as much as Stamford's streets which continue to be a death trap for anyone who walks, bikes, runs, uses a wheelchair, pushes a stroller, or drives on them. In the past two years our community has lost many loved ones to traffic violence: Marie Jean-Charles on West Main St, Rev Tommie Jackson on Wire Mill Rd, Ronald Molina on Tresser Blvd, Giovanni Vega Benis and Yuliana Arias Lozano on Washington Blvd, and Cesar Cabrera-Guzman on High Ridge Rd.

These tragedies prompted advocacy groups like ours as well as the State of CT and the City of Stamford to push for the passage of the "Vision Zero" law last year by the CT General Assembly. It introduced Automated Traffic Enforcement or "traffic cameras" among other enforcement and education improvements. Through its community outreach project, the City of Stamford's Vision Zero Action Plan will identify many more concrete steps to improve safety. We must make the investments like those proposed in this budget in order to bring about the sweeping changes necessary to keep everyone safe. But keep in mind that speed-related deaths and injuries burden many residents beyond the immediate families impacted by these tragedies because the rising costs of crashes (medical, hospital, and auto repair) have led to a 25% territory increase in auto insurance rates affecting all vehicle owners in the city. Talk to any auto insurance agent in Stamford to confirm this fact.

Also central to People Friendly Stamford's mission is making housing both abundant and affordable. Stamford suffers from a massive housing shortage leading to unaffordable rents and displacement. These issues won't go away without decisive action and investments like those proposed in this budget. Keep in mind that new development and housing work hand in hand to make the streets safer and less congested as developers build housing near transportation hubs or Transportation Oriented Communities (TOC). Wider sidewalks, room for protected bike lanes, and open space can be negotiated in advance which will lead to more people walking, biking, and using public transportation. That in turn will reduce our carbon footprint and improve our health and wellbeing.

We believe that investments in the city-wide goal of Vision Zero and implementing the Housing Affordability Plan will help to create a safer, more walkable, more bikeable, healthier, more inclusive, cleaner and more economically powerful city.

PFS supports the following actions in the Capital Budget:

- Vision Zero Action Plan to make Stamford safe for all.
- Citywide Sidewalks Reconstruction to create safer, accessible sidewalks on Long Ridge Rd and other high priority sites.
- Roadway Design and Reconstruction to support grant funded projects for safety improvements along Third Street and at the intersection of Newfield and Vine.
- Safe Routes to School to leverage state and federal funding for sidewalks that enable children to safely walk to school.
- Strawberry Hill/Newfield Ave Corridor Improvements to match a large federal grant for a transformative corridor project for all users.
- Two affordable housing projects ~ 1) 40-50 new family-sized, affordable, homeownership units, and 2) Charter Oak Communities' rehabilitation of Stamford Manor's 215 higher quality, deeply affordable housing units for seniors and non-elderly disabled individuals.

We also support other items in the Mayor's budget including:

- Parks: doubling the amount of funding for city parks to provide safe and accessible spaces for residents.

Thank you for your consideration.

Chris Dawson