



# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

## TOWN OF MONROE

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Hello Monroe citizens,

Monroe is one of the most charming towns in Connecticut. While having historic charm, outstanding park facilities, and an extreme regard for public safety, we have so much more to reflect on and be extremely proud of as a community in 2024. Our home values have increased between 40-70% since the last re- evaluation which is extremely impressive. This administration was able to maintain Monroe's AAA bond rating and as a result of our bond rating our 2024 bond issue realized a total interest cost of 2.92% which was one of the lowest in Connecticut.

Our Department of Public Works showed their expertise and efficiency by getting Monroe back on track within a week after the 1000-year flood. Additionally, our emergency services such as Fire, Police and EMS handled an extremely busy year in 2024. Despite our challenges, approximately 60 new businesses have opened, creating an estimate of 300 local job opportunities. These advancements contribute to keeping our local environment prosperous and more vibrant while continuing to create more options to dine, make local retail purchases, and introduce new businesses that will better serve the needs of Monroe.

As we say goodbye to 2024, it is not only important to reflect on the accomplishments within our municipal services, but to also provide our tax payers with a look at what we have maintained and accomplished with the overall budget allocation that was passed at referendum. The municipal budget was slightly increased by 1.60% and we have put that money to work. Town services have been more responsive and transparent than ever before, the overall performance of town-wide departments has increased dramatically throughout 2024, and there has been minimal employee turnover.

This annual report encompasses each department so that you can see the changes that have been made in our efforts to better serve our citizen's and community.

## Assessor's Office



*Photo by, Megan Morley*

- The Tax Assessor's office had a very busy 2024, which included new State legislation and a State mandated revaluation. Metrics such as new tax codes, Board of Education budget increase requests, a projected 12% increase from the State for medical coverage costs, and the State mandated commercial & residential revaluation are factors that will dictate how much the mill rate can be lowered for fiscal year 25/26. The goal of this administration is to lower our mill rate and have the least amount of impact to our citizens.
- The Assessor's office successfully completed the State-mandated 2024 Grand List Revaluation Project and the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management's (OPM) revaluation performance standards in accordance with all statutory deadlines.
- A new State-mandated property tax relief program from the Department of Veterans Affairs which provides for a full exemption of the assessed value of the primary dwelling for veterans with a 100% service-connected permanent and total disability rating was implemented.
- Registered motor vehicle assessments were transitioned from a clean retail valuation basis per the JD Power NADA Valuation Guidebooks to an MSRP based straight-line depreciation methodology, as required by newly enacted legislation.

## Building Department



*Photo by, Megan Morley*

- The years of paper applications and having to come to Town Hall for everything will soon be past practice in Monroe. The inconvenience of not knowing the status of a project will soon be fixed and will be available at your fingertips through an online portal called “OpenGOV “. OpenGOV is a nationwide company that has assisted many municipalities in organizing Town Hall functions with a level of efficiency and transparency unseen in other software of its kind. The end user, whether contractor or homeowner, will now have the ability to do the majority of the project diligence from the comfort of their home or office. As live meetings are still needed in regard to wetlands and planning/zoning concerns this will save many folks a lot of time. Earlier this year, the Health Department had successfully launched this software and we anticipate all departments in land use to be online and operational by April 1<sup>st</sup>.

## Current Capital Projects

### Animal Control Facility



*Photo by, Monroe Animal Shelter*

- The First Selectman Credited State Rep. Tony Scott, R-Monroe, with his assistance in securing a \$500,000 Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) Grant from the State of Connecticut to fund a renovation and expansion of the existing facility, which was built in 1992, to improve animal care and sheltering conditions, provide improved customer service, and bring the shelter up to Connecticut Department of Agriculture standards.
- The entire facility will be upgraded at zero cost to the taxpayers of the town, which was made possible by securing the STEAP Grant, funds acquired through the police department roadwork fund, and donations. The original estimate from the architect was for an \$890,000 project.
- Since that was an exorbitant amount, the town put this project out to bid and brought the cost down to around \$690,000.
- Town officials continue to work closely on the project, which began just before Thanksgiving and is expected to be completed by March of 2025.

## Community Center Site



*Photo by, Bill Bittar*

- This purchase provides Monroe with additional community space and the opportunity to pioneer modern energy options, such as geo-thermal heat and solar in an effort to be the first building of its kind to be off the grid.
- The town is currently addressing health and safety issues that needed attention.
- The Historic Commission will be assisting, with a plan to design a building that compliments Monroe's architectural theme and town officials are determined to make it the best it can be for our community's needs.

## Economic & Community Development



*Photo by, Solli Engineering, LLC*

- The Town of Monroe saw impressive economic growth and development in 2024. Our businesses are not only the backbone of our local economy, they are the drivers of our growth and future.
- We hired a highly experienced and proactive grant writer that has unlocked multiple areas of opportunity in 2024 to secure more funds for the Town. This year, the Town of Monroe was awarded the Bronze Level SustainableCT which provides the Town with the ability to apply for grant opportunities in the area of green infrastructure and environmentally friendly initiatives.
- Additionally, Monroe's open space acquisition of 65 acres at the Benedicts Farm was achieved through the partnership with our Economic Development Department, the Open Space and Water Shed land acquisition (OSWA) and the Aspetuck Land Trust.
- Working in conjunction with regional partners, the MetroCOG, and FEMA, the Town's Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan was completed. This plan gives our town direction in the prevention and handling the impacts of natural disasters, like we saw on August 18<sup>th</sup> with the 1000-year flood.
- The redesign and relocation of Land Use staff and office space has further facilitated positive customer experience.
- Our Economic Development Department coordinated with all Monroe businesses that were impacted by the August 2024 storm event and assisted with connecting each business to FEMA and/or SBA resources.
- Over 100 grant opportunities were reviewed to determine Town eligibility; and then applications were completed and submitted when appropriate. This resulted in the selection of:



- Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant (Benedict Property – 65 acres - \$1,803,750);
  - CTDOT Active Transportation Micro Grant (Bike Helmets – MPD National Night Out - \$5,000);
  - an unutilized fire truck was sold for \$975,000
  - Progressed to second round Congressionally Directed Spending (Police Body Cameras and Dashboard Surveillance - \$25,000).
  - Completed scope change and technical correction requirements for Senior Center Septic Grant provided under the Congressionally Directed Spending.
  - Completed RFP and Scope documentation for Engineer and Contractor selection, while simultaneously reducing overall cost of Animal Control renovations through STEAP grant.
- 
- Completed site availability analysis and site selection requirements for a new cell tower in the northern area of Town. This tower will provide service to the middle and elementary school that lack cell coverage from several carriers.
- 
- Provided in-depth presentation regarding the Sustainable CT certification and the grant review and submission process. This presentation provides insight on how the two projects were interconnected and can be viewed by clicking the link below.

Edith Wheeler Memorial Library



*Photo by, Edith Wheeler Memorial Library*

- The Edith Wheeler Memorial Library is a captivating building located on the Monroe Town Hall campus. The library has seen a significant increase in use over the year with the development of the maker space and several programs.
- New and improved programs for teens and children such as, reading to Thor (therapy dog), has made our Monroe Library revered by our community and surrounding towns. The activities and programs available for kids, youth, and adults are very well attended with an average of 8,000 visitors per month.
- Regardless of the increase utilization in electronic databases and eBooks, paperback and hardcover books are still widely used throughout our community. If you're not a library goer, I encourage you to stop by for a visit!

## Emergency Services Department



*Photo by, Bill Bittar*

- The EMS Building was completed and the EMS Building Committee was officially dissolved in February. All financial obligations were satisfied.
- We received an Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) for \$10,708.50. EMS staff provided Family & Friends CPR training for interested Town Hall Staff.
- The new EMS facility has proven to show significant value within the training space allocated, as emergency medical services have trained many EMT's and Paramedics from surrounding towns in Monroe.

## Finance Department



*Photo by, Megan Morley*

- Every year Monroe residents cast their votes at the budget referendum. This means that no matter how our Town officials organize and deliberate over the proper use and expenditure of funds in town, our residents have the ability to agree or disagree through their vote. The First Selectman’s office has operational and final budget input on the municipal side only. The Superintendent of Schools has purview over education costs and Board of Education operating expenses. Both budgets are combined to create “The First Selectman’s Budget “. The Town Charter only authorizes the First Selectman to adjust overall increase. During the last referendum, the First Selectman’s Board of Education deductions of the increase totaled \$1,187,000 and at the end of fiscal year 23, the Board of Education had a \$1,200,000 surplus, justifying the overall decrease in Board of Education budget.
- FY2024-25 Approved Annual Town Budget
  - [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f405CsiFpCHBFVwtXZFFdfUGRclqQeU/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f405CsiFpCHBFVwtXZFFdfUGRclqQeU/view?usp=drive_link)
- Monroe had top tier success with Bond counsel and received a AAA bond rating followed by a successful bond sale. The winning bid for Monroe was secured below the market interest cost of 2.92% while recent comparable bond sales in Connecticut have been coming in above 3%. This bond sale exceeded our expectations, as the Town received 13 competitive bids which was an improvement over the 6 that were received in 2021.
- FY2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (Audit Report)
  - [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UbogOD5d7v9KdXNaF-WrYvu-9zTZq7MG/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UbogOD5d7v9KdXNaF-WrYvu-9zTZq7MG/view?usp=drive_link)

## Fire Department



*Photo by, Bill Bittar*

- All Monroe Fire Departments have been working diligently throughout 2024 and have handled a 40% increase in call volume, which mostly attributed due to natural disasters.
- Notably Insurance Services Office, Inc. (ISO), is the leading supplier of data and analytics for the United States property/casualty industry, and they have recently upgraded the Town of Monroe's Public Protection Classification rating to a 4 on a scale of 1-10, in which 1 is the best score achieved. This rating was based on the independent assessment of the Stepney, Monroe, & Stevenson Volunteer Fire Departments, the Monroe's Emergency Dispatch Center, Aquarion's Fire Hydrant & Water Supply System, and the Monroe Fire Marshal's Risk Reduction Programs. Previously, the Town of Monroe had been rated a 5. According to ISO's latest report, only 16% of the over 38,000 communities across the country that were surveyed by ISO scored a better rating than the Town of Monroe.
- Striving to operate more efficiently, the Monroe Volunteer Fire Service recognized an apparatus that was being under-utilized. Therefore, the 60' KME ladder truck was sold for \$975,000 to another fire department who had an immediate use for the apparatus.

Health Department



*Photo by, Monroe Health Department*

- Monroe's Health Department has many functions from monitoring restaurants, providing vaccinations, and continuously monitoring drinking water quality and supply in parks and lakes.
- This year our Health Department hired a new nurse to assist with vaccinations, expanded community health education outreach through social media, attended town events, and continued to collaborate with other municipal departments.
- The Health Department started several programs for seniors this year including Steady Steps, a fall prevention program and a discounted well water testing program. Additionally, the Health Department completed a Community Health Needs Assessment, which is the Town's tri-annual assessment to gather information that will help the Town better serve the health needs of Monroe.

## Human Resources



*Photo by, Megan Morley*

- The modern employment landscape regarding specific skills is more challenging and competitive after the Covid-19 crisis. With more people wanting to work from home and municipalities needing individuals with specific credentials, the pool of applicants in many areas is limited. In the face of these challenges, our Human Resources Department has become more creative when recruiting and retaining employees such as, hiring staff while they work on credentials needed for positions and by building an environment in which our employees want to stay for years to come. As towns are becoming more and more competitive with salaries, Monroe has retained outstanding staff due to the collaborative, inclusive, and transparent culture throughout town departments.
- Human Resources received a check for \$25,692.00 from our insurer, Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency (CIRMA). CIRMA provides critical and stable protections in risk management and insurance services within the Connecticut Public Sector and is a service program under the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM).
- Through diligent work with the First Selectman's Office, Human Resources negotiated out of a potential 28% increase with United Health Care and into a 9% increase by switching to the State of Connecticut Partnership Plan. Once the switch was approved by Town Council, our Human Resources Department managed open enrollment for all eligible staff without incident.

## Parks and Recreation



*Photo by, Megan Morley*

- The Parks and Recreation Department offers many programs and the community enjoyed many activities throughout 2024 such as, the summer concert series, day camps, and sporting programs. Community is one of the many features that make Monroe a great Town and the Parks and Recreation Department provides a profound contribution to that.
- Fun by the lake and playground will continue with the additional of two newly purchased gazebos which will be enjoyed beginning in the spring of 2025.
- During the season, our town parks were stressed due to several weather events that included but were not limited to, heavy rain in early summer, a microburst tornado, a heavy windstorm that left debris throughout the parks, and the historic 1000-year flood which demanded all of our municipal resources to get our town back on track. The flood was immediately followed by a drought creating a State mandated burn ban.
- While this erratic weather pattern created a difficult season for park staff, most sports and events proceeded without interruption.



## Planning & Zoning



*Photo by, Megan Morley*

- Planning and Zoning as well as the Inland/Wetlands Departments was restructured due to the overwhelming applicants in need of services. Filling previously empty positions, and the hiring of new Planning & Zoning Administrator, Inland Wetlands Officer, and Zoning Enforcement Officer has enabled the land use departments to handle the demands for service efficiently and effectively. Many regulations are dictated by State statute, therefore if anyone experiences an issue, our staff will work with you through the process of compliance.
- In early 2025, Open Gov, a municipal software will be operational and will be an instrumental piece in making our town services more efficient and transparent for applicants and citizens. Simple permits will be handled with this software, enabling applications to be administered and monitored on any electronic device. We continue to see an increase for development opportunities in Monroe. Our staff meets with every applicant to make sure the process and information relating to each project is explored prior to the application going to any oversight and/or approval board or committee. This simple step promotes the correct utilizing of resources for our investors and our staff. Time is money and in some cases these projects are very costly. This due diligence gives staff the opportunity to express the regulatory abilities for a project to move forward in the town of Monroe.
- Monroe is a growing location and our staff works diligently to mitigate the expressed needs and wants of our citizens to those who wish to develop in town. Our commercial base is directly related to the taxpayer's responsibilities however, the goal is to bring structures into Monroe that will be useful for a long time to come.

## Police Department



*Photo by, Megan Morley*

- Maintaining public safety is crucial in every community. The Monroe Police department has maintained full staff since the new contract in 2023 which is in complete opposition of regional and national departments of all sizes.
- A new union contract was established with First Selectman Rooney sitting down with the Police union shortly after taking office in 2023. This contract was negotiated by the First selectman and the police union through long discussions and deliberations resulting in significant critical decisions made to reduce unnecessary overtime expenditures, sick leave concerns and overall retention.
- Chief White was command Emergency Management Director through our 1000-year flood. Chief and staff were instrumental in putting Monroe back on track through partnerships with DEMHS, FEMA, SBA, and Eversource.
- The Monroe Police continue to expanded community relations with the record setting annual event “Monroe Night at The Park”.

## Public Works Department



Photos by, Monroe Department of Public Works

- Our Public Works Department has been more responsive to the citizens of Monroe than ever before. Maintaining roads and safe travel conditions is an arduous task, therefore Public Works strives to respond to every safety hazard that is brought to their attention immediately.
- Public Works employees had a very busy year with several weather and natural disaster events. Notably, the August 18<sup>th</sup> storm (1000-year flood) shown in the photos above, detail the volume of restoration work that was handled by our Public Works Department. Through the staff's hard work and dedication to the Town they saved an estimation of over one million dollars and the roads were repaired in record time. The impact of the storm did impacted service to other areas

in town, solely due to man power. All personal worked diligently through this disaster to get our roads ready before the first day of school, which made day one seamless for the busing of our children.

- Employees worked on drainage repairs and new installations therefore not needing the assistance of outside vendors.
- Increased permanent repair of delaminated and deteriorated road segments with the utilization of milling & newly acquired paving equipment.
- Public Works continues with ongoing coordination and management of the Pepper Street, Housatonic Rail Trail & Judd Road Bridge replacement projects.
- The department coordinated the State-mandated MS4 permit and met all of the goals and requirements.
- The parks practice field development project was competed with a focus on a turf establishment forthcoming.
- The roof replacement projects at Stevenson #2 & Stepney #2 fire stations were completed.
- Fuel prices for all town departments were secured with beneficial pricing.
- The Town of Monroe continues to work with 11 other municipalities in a solid waste consortium which recently negotiated a new disposal agreement. The new agreement however, resulted in an increased tip fee and disposal cost at the Trumbull Transfer Station. In collaboration with the Public Works Director Chris Nowacki and Finance Director Ron Bunovsky an opportunity was recognized to utilize a portion of the fiscal year 2024 budget surplus to help mitigate passing this cost along to permitted haulers. The Board of Finance unanimously voted in favor of this transfer and we are hopeful this initiative will assist our local haulers to stabilize costs to our residents.

Registrar of Voter's



*Photo by, Megan Morley*

- Early voting was implemented for the first time this year and the Registrar of Voters were well prepared. Many citizens took advantage of this opportunity. Early voting was an added expense to our Registrars and they worked diligently to secure State grants in an effort to relieve some but not all expenses.

## Community & Social Services



*Photo by, Bill Bittar*

- Staffing levels in the department were increased by changing the Social Services Coordinator position from Part Time to Full Time and by the hiring of an Elderly Services Coordinator, Administrative Assistant, revamping volunteer services, and adding 2 part time drivers.
- The department applied for and was awarded the Community Impact Grant to fund the projects of food pantry renovations that included a new ramp, removal of a bathtub, installation of new shelving, and new flooring in the entry area.
- Through the generous donation from community and business members, the department was able to provide Thanksgiving meals to 7 homebound seniors and 2 families in need.
- Tours for various groups (schools, scouts) continue to increase public awareness of pantry,
- Applied for and received \$23,250.00 for Project Warmth through the Neighborhood Assistance Act (NAA) Tax Credit Program.
- The Department continues to collaborate with Social Workers in the school system regarding assistance with school supplies, giving tree, food pantry, state programs and support services for

families as well as collaborate with civic organizations such as the Lions Club, Rotary Club and Masons to assist families in the community.

- Received American Rescue Plan Act funds which were used for programming, building upgrades, and the replacement of tables and chairs.
- The department completed building updates that included the installation of blinds throughout the building and installed a Quench water system. Additionally, curb blocks for parking spaces and pole base covers were purchased.
- Transportation and ride availability increased by having 2 buses and 1 car on the road.
- Congregate Meal & Senior Dine Programs continue to be highly utilized throughout the community.
- The Department continues to collaborate with the Parks & Recreation department to offer indoor & outdoor pickleball, and with the Health Department, Parks & Recreation, Edith Wheeler Memorial Library & EMS to hold an annual health & wellness fair that includes vaccinations, educational sessions, and vendors.
- Continued success in applying for Title III grants through the Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging for programming (recreation, chore service, transportation) and caregiver assistance (information & assistance, education and, new this year, caregiver support). Grants allow the department to offer various activities at no charge, to continue the monthly caregiver education series, and to now offer a monthly caregiver support session.
- TRIAD programs continue to be successful. TRIAD programs offer a variety of educational programs on senior health, wellness, scam and fraud education, healthy eating and more.
- The Department is a part of a Fall Prevention Team in conjunction with the Health Department and EMS.
- The collaboration with local businesses, home care agencies and health care facilities to offer free educational and recreational programs continues to be beneficial to our community.

Tax Collector's Department



*Photo by, Megan Morley*

- The Tax Collector's Office is trending at a stellar 98.9% tax collection rate. Our Tax Collector has reported that many back taxes have been collected in the past year making the overall collection better than previous years.



## Technology



*Photo by, Monroe Technology Department*

- Cyber security continues to be an extremely important initiative within the town. The installation of new technology provides our IT department with the ability to locate where threats originate from and to protect our information from hackers. As our technological world advances, our IT Department strives to be a step ahead.
- Swatting incidents have been on the rise and our IT Department is on top of these and several other forms of cyber threats. In addition to new software, we are also installing new cameras on the campus of Masuk High School creating the ability to retrieve high resolution video and pictures when needed.
- Our cyber security efforts were favorably viewed by bond council and was a very integral part of Monroe receiving one of the lowest bond rates in the state.

## Town Clerk's Office



*Photo by, Megan Morley*

- Our Town Clerk and assistants are proudly serving our residents with everything from dog licenses, marriage licenses, land recordings, and providing municipal meeting information to our residents.
- In an effort to maintain a high level of land record security, the Town Clerk's Office implemented a Property Fraud Alert System that can be utilized by property owners in town.
- The Historic Preservation Grant is applied for each year. This year the town was awarded \$6,000 which will be used to digitally preserve and make available online, land records dating back to March, 1963.
- The Town Clerk's office successfully planned and organized the 2024 Presidential Preference Primary for Absentee Ballot Voting/Poll Districts/Early Voting, successfully planned and implemented the 2024 Federal (Presidential) General Election for Absentee Ballot Voting/Poll Districts/Early Voting, and successfully planned and implemented 2024 Federal (Presidential) General Election for Absentee Ballot Voting/Poll Districts/Early Voting.
- Our Town Clerk's Office staff successfully completed the Secretary of the State's Security Awareness Training course.

As we welcome 2025, I would like to take a moment to thank all of our town staff, elected officials, and volunteers for their commitment and hard work in 2024.

Thank you to our businesses in Monroe both new and existing, and to our citizens. Our strong community and Monroe spirit continues to make our town an exceptional place to raise a family and live a healthy lifestyle.

Thank you for your attention,



Terrence P. Rooney  
First Selectman

