

THE TORRINGTON DEMOCRATIC TOWN COMMITTEE
presents



A VISION FOR A HEALTHY & VIBRANT
TORRINGTON

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BY

THE TORRINGTON DEMOCRATIC TOWN COMMITTEE

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Committee

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A city is neither inherently good nor bad. Like any place, it is the people who live there and their actions that determine a city's character and health. But what types of action and organizing improve the health of a city, and how does that overall health affect how people feel about where they work and live? And if people aren't happy with where they live, what kinds of changes can be made to improve quality of life and increase local pride? Before these questions can be answered, we must first take a good look at where we are now and the future we wish to create.

Torrington is a unique place to live. Nestled in the luscious hills of Litchfield County, the city is one of the largest micropolitans in the continental United States. Basically, Torrington is a mini city when compared to metropolitans like New York City. A micropolitan like Torrington has all the basic amenities you need locally, but with the ease of access of small towns (you can typically travel between any two points within Torrington in fifteen minutes or less). Ours has a wonderful mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas that allow residents to enjoy the best of all worlds. You can escape for a hike into the wilderness or find a secluded place to picnic and still be only fifteen minutes from Walmart or a supermarket. Its geographic location is another factor in what makes Torrington so unique. It is a gateway to the Berkshires—the Massachusetts mountain range which people from around the country visit to experience its natural beauty—and it's within just a few hours of Boston and New York City.

However, despite its location, unique makeup, and natural beauty, Torrington has struggled to form an identity and grow its economy since the deindustrialization of the 70s and 80s. That era saw the closing of the town's namesake, The Torrington Company, and marked the beginning of its ongoing identity crisis. If Torrington wasn't an industrial town anymore, what could it be? Retail and service jobs filled the void, but these jobs didn't pay as well or come with any long-term security.

But the 21st century has changed everything. Thanks to high-speed internet, the world is much more remote, and Torrington is well-positioned to take advantage of a world where fewer people have to commute to work. Entire businesses can exist online now. Likewise, local brick and mortar stores can now sell to customers all over the world. This changes everything, and is a big reason why we have seen many people moving here from places like New York. People no longer have to choose between living close to work in an expensive metro area or commuting for hours so they can live someplace more spacious and affordable. Now they can have the best of both worlds.

Unfortunately, Torrington's current leadership has essentially remained unchanged for the past two decades and so has our model for economic growth. Residents have noticed the lack of progress and have become disillusioned. Of the roughly 22,000 registered voters who call Torrington home, only about 8,000 of them vote in city elections.

To answer the challenges of today and those that will arise tomorrow, Torrington needs a forward-minded vision and an engaged populace. Part of the problem is that when changes are proposed, the city has no larger plan or vision to put those changes into context. If we want residents to make informed decisions, we need to present a detailed assessment of where Torrington is now, and a vision for what it can become if we work together to create a better tomorrow.

We have an opportunity to forge a better way for our city. One of self-determination and economic independence. Together we can create a Torrington that has the political and financial ability to stand on its own rather than depend on the state—one that serves as a model for Connecticut municipalities. A healthy and vibrant city with a vision for the future.

So, what does a healthy and vibrant Torrington look like? What kind of future do we want to build for our children and the future generations that will call Torrington home? And how do we get there from where we are now?

A HEALTHY & VIBRANT TORRINGTON

HAS HEALTHY BUDGETS

A healthy Torrington has enough revenue to cover the costs of municipal services, planned maintenance on properties and infrastructure, and servicing our debt, all while ensuring our schools are well-funded and our economy is growing to keep pace with inflation.

A budget is a window into a city's financial outlook, and right now, Torrington's is in serious trouble. Years of downtown development have been paid for through bonding—essentially



placing it on the city's credit card. Torrington's leadership has failed to grow the economy enough to keep pace with inflation, never mind all the debt they've amassed. Year after year, the grand list of the city's taxable assets fails to grow, the city's financial obligations increase, and the difference gets passed on to taxpayers.



HAS AN ESTABLISHED MODEL FOR ATTRACTING NEW BUSINESS

A healthy Torrington has an established plan for attracting, courting, and accommodating new businesses to develop here, bringing in new taxpaying businesses to reduce the tax burden on homeowners. It is willing and able to address zoning challenges or other potential roadblocks in a timely manner that facilitates the needs of businesses.

Despite Torrington's abundance of reasonably priced, commercial real estate, its easy access to major highways, comparatively affordable housing, and proximity to New York City and Boston, the city has failed to attract significant new businesses.



HAS A REPUTATION FOR WORKING WITH BUSINESS OWNERS TO HELP THEM SUCCEED

A healthy Torrington works with our business owners to help them expand and succeed. Business owners should view the city and its government as partners, not as an administrative

Sadly, Torrington's current reputation concerning businesses is that we are difficult to work with and a bad place to do business. As a result, Torrington has failed to attract businesses that end up opening in other cities or towns. The overall attitude Torrington's government seems to have towards business owners is that they should feel lucky if they're allowed to operate here. The truth is that we should feel lucky to have them, and we share an interest in their success.



HAS WELL-FUNDED SCHOOLS WITH GOOD OUTCOMES

A healthy and vibrant Torrington prioritizes its education and has a strong budget to make sure our schools are well-funded and staffed with the best teachers. It has outcomes on-par with or better than comparable municipalities and works to ensure that students are prepared to work and lead in modern settings or to succeed at a higher education level.

Currently, Torrington is classified as an Alliance District in the state of Connecticut. That means due to our test scores and several other factors, our education budget is essentially co-managed by the state. Being one of the state's 30 lowest performing school districts is not a great incentive for families and businesses to move here. Unfortunately, this is another problem that stems from our lack of economic development and a tough budget. Over the past two decades, Torrington has shut down several schools due to funding challenges. Now, due to poor planning and an unwillingness to spend money on upkeep and maintenance, the city has been forced to build a new middle and high school.



While the new school will offer a state-of-the-art educational environment for Torrington residents, it must be maintained and managed better than the city has done in the past. Otherwise, in twenty years we will be looking at another building falling into disrepair, and millions more in taxpayer dollars to solve the problem.

HAS PLENTY OF WELL-PAYING JOBS AND AN AFFORDABLE COST OF LIVING



A healthy and vibrant Torrington is a place with ample economic opportunities that provide living wages so residents can comfortably afford their rent or mortgage and taxes.

Torrington's median individual income is approximately \$32,000 a year—nearly \$8,000 less than the state's median income. Meanwhile, the average rent is between \$1,100/month to \$1,300/month. A general rule of thumb for financial well-being is that rent should not exceed 30% of your income. For the average, individual Torrington renter, their current living situation is not affordable. For Torrington to have an affordable rental market, the median income would need to rise by almost \$12,000 annually, or the average rent would need to fall to around \$900 a month.

When it comes to families, Torrington fares better, with the median household income surpassing \$63,000 a year. Families who are renting can afford Torrington's rental market. However, it is still difficult for many of them to buy a house.

Torrington has one of the highest mill rates in the states, meaning homeowners pay exceedingly high property taxes. With our current budget problems, this number is set to rise even higher. The only places that rival Torrington's property taxes are wealthy areas of big cities like Hartford and Waterbury. To be clear, Torrington is not wealthy, and these tax rates are not sustainable. High property taxes deter families and businesses from moving here and can even push



existing residents to leave. They are particularly burdensome for seniors and individuals on fixed incomes who see their cost of living increasing every year.



It is imperative that the city...

- **Grow the grand list and tax base to give homeowners tax relief.**
- **Bring in new businesses to raise median incomes.**
- **Pursue smart housing developments that serve the needs of residents, not developers.**

IS A SAFE PLACE TO LIVE

A healthy and vibrant Torrington is a place where people feel truly safe everywhere they go, and where the proper resources are deployed to help vulnerable populations instead of using police to address social issues.

Statistically, Torrington is a safe place to live. Our violent crime rate is practically non-existent. Petty crime, however, can be a nuisance. Torrington has a lot of parks and public areas like parking lots that aren't well-lit and don't receive a lot of foot traffic. This creates areas where people feel unsafe, and places where petty crime like vandalism can occur.



Installing better lighting and improving ease of access to places like the parking lot next to the library or making changes to facilitate more foot traffic in our parks will make those areas feel safer and more inviting for people.

As the population center for Litchfield County, Torrington also has the responsibility of serving a lot of the county's mental health population.

It's imperative that Torrington continues to build capacity and fund programs to help those in need and prevent people from ending up on the streets.

HAS LOTS OF ACTIVITIES FOR OUR YOUTH

A healthy and vibrant Torrington provides fun and productive ways for young people to spend their time, attracting more people from surrounding areas to patronize our businesses and building enthusiasm for our community. By providing ample leisure and athletic opportunities to our youth, Torrington can ensure they have productive ways to spend their time, which has been shown to reduce juvenile crime and vandalism.



Torrington doesn't have much for kids or young adults to do for fun. There was a skate park, but unfortunately, it was deemed too difficult to manage. We have a public pool, but year after year, the city announces that the pool won't be open due to staffing or funding issues. Our movie theater is from another era—people often drive to Simsbury or Plainville to see movies in big theaters with modern technology. We have nothing to offer for indoor athletics like wall climbing, batting cages, or even mini-golf. We have some sports leagues for kids, but they're under threat of budget cuts.



Suggestions for Youth Activities

- **An ice-skating rink in the winter (can double for hockey)**
- **Organized sledding with hot chocolate stand in the winter**
- **Popular, relevant live music in Fuessenich Park**
- **Revive and improve John Minetto State Park**
- **ATV designated trails**
- **Paddle boat / kayak / canoe rentals at Burr Pond**
- **Laser tag / indoor athletic businesses**
- **An IMAX theater**
- **Basketball courts**
- **A dance club with all-ages nights**
- **Paintball**
- **Prioritized funding for the town pool and teen center**

IS A PLACE FAMILIES WANT TO LIVE

A healthy and vibrant Torrington is a place where families feel safe and supported. It is an affordable place to live with a high quality of life, plenty of economic opportunities, and good schools.

If Torrington wants to be a destination for families, it needs to address the concerns of families: education, affordability, and quality of life.



Through an aggressive and bold plan to attract new business, coupled with better management of our current revenues, ***Torrington needs to...***

- Ensure our schools are well-funded and maintained.
- Reduce property taxes for homeowners.
- Attract more well-paying jobs.
- Increase available activities for young people.
- Build more housing.
- Maintain and upgrade our parks.
- Increase our public transit options.
- Find ways to decrease household energy costs.

IS SEEN AS THE METRO AND SHOPPING DESTINATION FOR LITCHFIELD COUNTY



A healthy and vibrant Torrington has everything residents could want within its city boundaries. Our local businesses benefit from the roughly 185,000 people who live in Litchfield County that routinely visit Torrington to shop, eat, or enjoy a night out.

While Torrington currently has a lot to offer in terms of retail and dining, many residents still travel to Canton or Avon for shopping. We have limited fashion brands and clothing shops, a tiny movie theater, no clubs, and only a couple fine dining establishments.

HAS WELL-MAINTAINED ROADS, BRIDGES, SIDEWALKS, AND PUBLIC AREAS

A healthy and vibrant Torrington not only ensures its infrastructure funds are spent responsibly, but it also ensures utility companies aren't leaving our roads in tatters. It approaches new developments by considering ease of access, walkability, and regular maintenance. It quickly addresses things when they fall into disrepair.

Torrington is infamous for its potholes and crumbling sidewalks. Not only are these functional issues for the residents who depend on them every day, they also paint a terrible picture of our city to passersby and visitors. While more revenue would help, there's an open question about how existing funds for local infrastructure are being managed. Between the funds we get from the state and our own local revenues, we should be doing a better job keeping our infrastructure maintained.



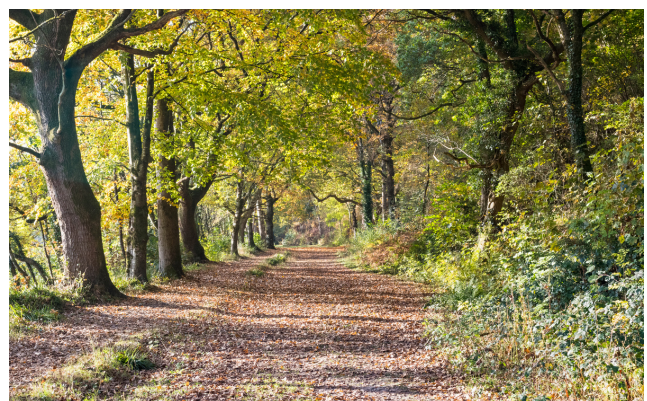
Another issue with our roads is the lack of accountability when utility companies tear them up to do maintenance. Connecticut law mandates that these companies patch and restore the road to the condition that it was before they dug into it, which is not currently being done. The city leadership needs to be far more proactive in holding utility companies to their responsibilities under the law.

IS A SCENIC DESTINATION FOR NATURE LOVERS FROM CT, MA, AND NY



A healthy and vibrant Torrington is a scenic destination for nature lovers in the tri-state areas. They come to Torrington for its parks and beauty, but also for its ease of access to all the breathtaking natural destinations of the Litchfield Foothills and Berkshire Mountains. Torrington is a place where people can stay, eat, and shop, while using the city as a starting point for their adventures into nature.

Torrington has a long list of parks, trails, ponds, and rivers that provide ample opportunities to enjoy nature. Unfortunately, a lot of our natural resources are lacking funds to maintain ease of access and enjoyability.



- John Minetto State Park was once a treasure of the area, but has been defunded, fenced off, and allowed to become overgrown and forgotten. Local leaders should work with state officials to obtain funding to restore the park.
- The city should expand the riverwalk and make the riverfront more accessible for recreation and viewing.
- The Parks and Recreation Committee is currently limited to building scheduling. They should be empowered to make decisions regarding the operation and management of parks.

IS A PLACE WHERE RESIDENTS ARE ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN IMPROVING THEIR COMMUNITY



A healthy and vibrant Torrington is a city with high civic participation. It supports and coordinates with its nonprofits and volunteers while actively engaging its residents on important issues. It has a high voter turnout rate and well-attended city council meetings. Its leadership imbues the city with a sense of community.



When it comes to civic involvement and community participation, Torrington is not a model city. While we have dedicated volunteers and nonprofit organizations working to help those in need, the city government could do a lot more to support those efforts. An even bigger issue when it comes to a lack of leadership from city hall is the dismal efforts to educate and engage its residents. One need only look at the graffiti and litter everywhere to get a sense of how residents generally feel about Torrington. City council meetings are not attended, people don't vote, and most are not keeping up with the local news.

It is incumbent upon city officials to get residents involved and engaged. The complete lack of effort on this front speaks for itself.

HAS ROBUST PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

A healthy and vibrant Torrington has free-at-use public buses and other transit options for residents. It has commuter options for easy travel to other parts of the state—allowing residents to find better jobs without increasing their commute times. In turn, people from other parts of the state can easily visit Torrington to shop, eat, and enjoy its natural offerings.



There was a time when you could take a Kelly bus almost anywhere in Torrington. Unfortunately, Torrington's large area coupled with its relatively low population makes operating transportation for profit very difficult. Cities, however, have a vested interest in ensuring people can get back and forth for work, or travel to other parts of town to shop with ease. Currently, Torrington has barely any transit options for residents, leaving those without cars to depend on Uber or other rideshares to get around.

A robust public transit system supports local businesses, provides greater mobility to residents, cuts down on smog and pollution, and eases traffic.

Torrington is also geographically isolated from much of the state, which limits our economic development. Bringing more transit to Torrington could be challenging, but the benefits are massive. Torrington's leadership should be vocal and persistent in their efforts to expand transportation options for its residents.

PRODUCES ENERGY LOCALLY



A healthy and vibrant Torrington produces plenty of local energy that subsidizes the supply for residents and businesses, cutting their costs. It has an eye on the future and invests in sustainability and energy independence.

Connecticut has a major energy affordability problem. Our infrastructure was built mostly to operate on natural gas, of which we produce zero locally, and is now increasingly expensive. To make matters worse, the state's energy is practically controlled by a corporate monopoly: Eversource. While residents struggle to keep their lights on with the highest energy costs in the continental United States, Torrington officials have been busy giving away resources and land to Eversource. In fact, several key figures in city hall are on Eversource's payroll, creating a massive conflict of interest.

Despite how it may appear, there is nothing that mandates municipalities to line up at the Eversource trough. Wallingford is a great example of a town that is completely energy independent. If Torrington wants to be an attractive place for families and businesses, it needs to take steps to lower their power bills. We have lots of empty, flat rooftops downtown and plenty of land on which to put solar panels or wind turbines.

HAS A HIGHER EDUCATION PRESENCE

A healthy and vibrant Torrington has institutions where residents can pursue higher education and where other people from our corner of the



state come to learn. Businesses know they can move to Torrington and find specialized, skilled workers.

Torrington is the only urban center for a county with a population of 180,000 people. This entire corner of the state has no four-year degree institutions, and, except for the community college in Winsted, no higher education opportunities at all. That means individuals who want an education have to leave home, and they will build their professional networks elsewhere, decreasing the likelihood of them returning to Connecticut. Companies with high-paying jobs want to be in places with educated workforces.

It was heartbreaking when UCONN decided to shut down its Torrington campus, but it was the inevitable result of the school and the city not working together and the school's refusal to make entire degree programs available at the campus. Local leaders should aggressively advocate for a higher education presence in the city.

IS A CITY PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME



There is truly nothing about Torrington's makeup, geography, climate, or location that prevents it from becoming one of the best cities in Connecticut. Our unique mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas truly provide the best of all worlds. All we need is a vision and leadership that's dedicated to achieving that vision.

A healthy and vibrant Torrington is a place where people are proud to live and raise their families. It's a place where families want to move because it has a great quality of life, is affordable, and has a strong sense of community. It's a place where businesses want to operate and expand because the economy is strong, and the local government is a partner in their success. It's a place where young people have lots of fun, productive things to do, and plenty of options for their education and future.

It's a place people don't grow up dreaming of leaving. Instead, it's a place that people couldn't imagine leaving.

It's not unachievable. Let's make Torrington the best place it can be. It starts here, with a shared vision and an agreement that we can do better—that for our children and young people, we must do better.

It starts with you.

VOTE ROW A

EARLY VOTING BEGINS OCTOBER 24TH

1

LOWER TAXES

Make economic development the city's top priority. Stop giving tax breaks to developers while hiking taxes on residents.

2

ATTRACT NEW BUSINESS

Aggressively pursue new businesses. Work with the state to expand our industrial park and attract warehouse/logistic centers.

3

IMPROVE OUR SCHOOLS

Listen to our BOE and insist city officials work together on shared goals. Develop an action plan to improve student performance.

4

ENSURE SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

Restore police and firefighter benefits so we can attract and retain more first responders.

WE WILL FIGHT FOR YOU!

CITY COUNCIL

PAUL CAVAGNERO ★ ED COREY ★ KEITH FARRELL ★ STEPHEN IVAIN

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FIONA CAPPABIANCA ★ KRISTEN CONWAY ★ GARY EUCALITTO

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