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Frosty Night Festive Crowd

LOCAL NEWS BRIEFING

POLICE AND FIRE

Attic Fire on Ramhorne Road

On December 5, firefighters extinguished an attic fire on Ramhorne Road after a quick call from the homeowner helped limit damage. Crews from several neighboring departments assisted, and firefighters remained on scene for approximately three hours to ensure the fire was fully out. No injuries were reported, and the cause is under investigation.

NCPD Awards Ceremony



The New Canaan Police Department recently held an awards ceremony recognizing members of the department for achievements including Meritorious Duty Awards and long-term service milestones. Photo credit: New Canaan Police Department.

AROUND TOWN

New Canaan Park Fees Rising

New Canaan will raise fees for pool, park, tennis, pickleball, and paddle court permits starting March 1, 2026, while adding discounted rates for resident veterans. Officials said the increases reflect annual reviews, high nonresident demand, and upcoming maintenance needs.

LOCAL BUSINESSES AND NONPROFITS

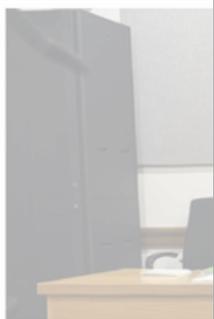
Yale Alley Cats Perform



On December 9, The Yale Alley Cats performed at the New Canaan



The chilly weather last Friday for the annual Holiday Stroll miniature horses greeted people as they walked down the street. Director of the New Canaan Temperatures to come out and show. The true spirit of New Canaan was on display as a brass quartet played season Street. "The Stroll is such an important tradition for our town, and we are grateful to all the groups who helped make it so special." said the director.



State Representative

Lawmakers Urge

By ELIZABETH BARHYDT

Residents filled a meeting room at the New Canaan library to understand a law that arrived in their town with the speed of a winter squall. Senator Ryan Fazio opened the evening with a sentence that framed the entire discussion: "All of this process has been on late notice, hasn't it?" he said. The law, sprawling and dense, had been delivered to legislators and the public barely an hour before the vote.

"That's no way of doing business in my mind," he told the crowd.

The new housing law—53 sections long—revives elements of June's vetoed omnibus bill and layers new requirements on Connecticut municipalities. It affects how towns plan, zone, fund, and ultimately define their own development. For

Behavioral Health Grants Awarded

By JOHN KRIZ

The New Canaan Community Foundation (www.newcanaancf.org) has awarded behavioral health-focused grants totaling a little more than \$33,000 to six recipients. These grants are "intended to support programming that responded to the findings of last year's community health and wellbeing survey, which surveyed adults in New Canaan," says Lauren Patterson, the Foundation's president.

This survey, the results of which were released in early 2025 (find the Sentinel's coverage at <https://www.newcanaansentinel.com/2025/02/03/survey-highlights-behavioral-health-opportunities>), was the result of efforts by the New Canaan Behavioral Health Alliance (www.newcanaanbha.org), a grouping of more than thirty community organizations striving to identify and address behavioral health issues in the New Canaan community.

In making these grants, Ms. Patterson stressed that the grantees' projects "touch a variety of different issues that the survey revealed. For example, two of the organizations that we're funding are both launching different kinds of cohorts or support groups for parents in town. One takes

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New Canaan's Downtown Dazzling -- and even a Budd, executive vice president, braved the chilly temperatures who put on the turnday, with a roving office on Elm Street to all the different performing arts center Photos by John Kriz.



by Tom O'Dea

ence

at public ritual.

"Hour Before Debate" the senator walked through the timing. "This 53-section law of major consequence to the state of Connecticut in every town and he said, "and it was fully read to the public about one before debate and voting on the floor." He pointed to a witnessed housing attorney—

which that Fazio

of the original co-authors of the law—who had told reporters: "I have been doing this for 40 years and I do not understand what the major provisions of this law do... and I do not see how it will all work in practice."

Town Seeks New Operator for Playhouse

By PETER BARHYDT

The Town of New Canaan has issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a new operator for the New Canaan Playhouse. Currently, the Playhouse is being operated by Luke Park Bowles and his team from Cinema Lab, which is based in New Jersey. Cinema Lab is not participating in the RFP and have stated they will continue in their role until a replacement can be found.

In a statement to the New Canaan Sentinel, Luke Park Bowles and Brandon Jones said: "It has been one of the great honors of our careers to help bring The Playhouse back to life, and to be welcomed so warmly by the Town of New Canaan throughout that journey. None of this would have been possible without the steadfast support of our investors, as well as the Town and the State—who are, quite frankly, the true heroes of this effort. While we will continue to manage the building in the interim, we look forward to working closely with a new operator to ensure a smooth and seamless transition. The film industry is undeniably challenging, but we believe we have laid a strong foundation for future creative, vibrant, and successful endeavors at 93 Elm Street—a place that has been a joyful and beloved home for our remarkable staff and for us and we will sincerely miss it."

The town owns the Playhouse building and intends to lease it to the successful respondent.

The Playhouse is a landmark two-story building located in the heart of downtown New Canaan. The Playhouse building was originally constructed in 1923. In 2022, the Town commenced work on an \$8.5 million interior and exterior renovation project. The project was completed in June 2024. The Playhouse held its grand re-opening later that month. Included in the renovations were a new pub like restaurant and upstairs lounge. During the warmer months there is outside dining.

Since its reopening the Playhouse has hosted many events; included special screenings, director and actor discussions, theme nights in the lounge and holiday events. There is no intention of closing the Playhouse.

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GRANTS

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a mindfulness approach, for example, and is pretty broad in serving parents. And then another one is specifically to engage folks in the ‘sandwich generation’ that are raising kids and caring for parents concurrently.”

However, helping to fund a new or expanded program does not mean people will be aware of it – a point that the survey highlighted. To that end, “the Community Foundation and the Behavioral Health Alliance will also help to widely market those opportunities so we can really reach parents in the community that might be interested in something but not necessarily looking for it. And certainly one thing the survey highlighted last year was that people don’t necessarily know all the rich programming that’s available in the community. So we definitely want to help these organizations do the outreach and take their time to build it in a format that’s really appealing for people to engage,” stresses Ms. Patterson.

These grants are part of a broader follow-up initiative by the Behavioral Health Alliance and the Community Foundation, with the Foundation being a lead member of the Alliance. One effort is a “work group of the Alliance that is doing more in-depth work on marketing and outreach, and that was a direct result of the survey findings that said that most parents didn’t know where to turn to for resources or support for themselves or for their kids or another family member,” notes Ms. Patterson. “We’re trying to help support work groups that can really move the needle.”

More Surveys Planned

Another follow-up initiative is a targeted youth survey, which the Alliance hopes to administer in the autumn of 2026, working with the schools. Details of survey construction, partner groups, and specific youth cohorts to be surveyed are still under discussion.

In addition, the Alliance wants to re-administer at the same time the adult survey done in late 2024. The hope is that the efforts by the recent grant recipients, as well as ongoing work by Alliance members who are better informed of the issues through the survey, will demonstrate real progress.

Ms. Patterson emphasizes the value of longitudinal surveys, which help identify what’s working and what’s not. That said, outside environmental factors can affect results – she cited COVID – with the challenge being causally linking actions to results. The Alliance is working with its research partner to best identify “how we manage for that and where we can isolate in the findings if some things are moving in the right direction, others are stuck, others are trending in the wrong direction – can we credit that to different efforts or is it largely

environmental factors?”

Additional Grants

Separate from its work with the Alliance, the Community Foundation has recently awarded \$75,000 in grants from its community behavioral health fund to several organizations. These are Systems Change grants, focused on “broadly improving access and care options in Fairfield County.”

According to Ms. Patterson, the largest grant, at \$50,000, has been made to Laurel House, one of the Foundation’s longtime grantees for direct service work. “In this case, the \$50,000 is helping them actually create a network of behavioral health providers in lower Fairfield County, so to create a stronger provider network that can share a lot more information and coordinate better along their organizations, even individual practitioners.”

Ms. Patterson emphasizes that the \$33,000 in grants related to the survey results and the \$75,000 in Systems Change grants are designed to act symbiotically and “are all intended to help lift all boats. So I think the survey grants are at the ground level. They’re interacting directly with people in New Canaan. The systems level grants are going to make sure the broader environment around people is better set up to access behavioral healthcare.”