

ZIP code study highlights family appeal

By Ignacio Laguarda
STAFF WRITER

FAIRFIELD — Old Greenwich checked all of the boxes for Katie Witten when she was looking for a place to settle down with her husband and three children about six years ago.

A transplant from New York City, Witten was looking for a home removed from the hustle and bustle but with some of the aspects she liked about urban living such as walkability and closeness to friends and neighbors.

“Coming from the city where I enjoyed being around people, I wanted something that had a little more interconnected-

ness,” she said Wednesday afternoon. “I like city living so this was kind of a nice in-between.”

The local schools were a major draw. Greenwich is known for its variety of top-rated private schools and a public school system often ranked among the very best in the state in standardized testing, among other metrics. When choosing where to send her children, Witten said she liked the “community school feel” of the public Old Greenwich School, the 1902 building that still stands along Sound Beach Avenue, the neighborhood’s main thoroughfare.

“We wanted our kids to walk to school,” said Witten, who

has children in kindergarten, second grade and fifth grade at the school.

The Old Greenwich ZIP code of 06870 scored fourth highest across the state for families as part of a data analysis conducted by CT Insider. The study looked at the change in the number of children in any one ZIP code, the share of households with children in the same area, the poverty rate and how local schools performed on state assessments. Those figures were used to come up with a combined score that provides a snapshot of which areas of the state are seemingly more desirable for families.

The top performer in the ZIP code continues on A4



H John Voorhees III/Hearst Connecticut Media
Libby McKinney-Tritschler, who owns On The Harbor Real Estate in Fairfield, on Friday.



Steven Goode/Hearst Connecticut Media
The owner of a mobile home park in Middletown is appealing the Planning and Zoning Commission's denial of an application to build housing at 500 Washington St.

Developer appeals denial of 76 apartments, 23 mobile homes

By Steven Goode
STAFF WRITER

MIDDLETOWN — The developer behind two proposals for apartments and mobile homes on Washington Street has appealed the Middletown Planning and Zoning Commission's denial of both applications.

Mobile Home Park LLC sought special permits and site plan approval to build 76 apartments in two three-story buildings on 8.5 acres, with 122 parking spaces and 38,000 square feet of usable open space. The company also proposed a 23-unit mobile home development on 3 acres that would include relocating seven of the 16 mobile homes already on the site.

The commission voted 3-4

against each application after a public hearing Sept. 23. During the hearing, residents raised concerns about site access and drainage. The applicant's traffic engineer said the study showed no change in traffic volume.

The appeals, filed Oct. 13 in Middletown Superior Court, allege that the commission improperly disregarded the developer's traffic engineer's analysis. The engineer concluded the apartment proposal would not materially affect traffic patterns or operations or change applicable levels of service after full build-out, according to the complaints.

The complaints also allege that the commission relied on speculation, generalized concerns, anecdotal observations and personal opinions from commission-

ers or members of the public about the development's traffic impacts, rather than competent evidence that the project would cause adverse impacts.

Regarding the mobile home application, the complaint alleges that the commission failed to state a reason for the denial or identify a zoning regulation, approval criterion or other legal standard the application did not meet.

It also alleges that the denial lacked substantial evidence showing that relocating seven existing mobile homes to property already used for mobile homes violated zoning requirements, would cause an adverse impact warranting denial or otherwise provided a lawful basis to reject the application.

Domestic violence made up a record share of state's homicides in 2025

By Lisa Backus
STAFF WRITER

In 2025, domestic violence homicides made up about one-third of the state's murders — an all-time high since at least 1987, when the last data was available, according to state police analysts.

That's likely because the overall number of murders in the state has been declining, while the number of family violence and intimate partner violence murders have remained steady, state police analysts and advocates said.



Jim Shannon/Hearst Conn. Media
Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence CEO Meghan Scanlon, speaks during a news conference at the Hartford Public Safety Complex in Hartford on Oct. 14.

With 18 deaths in 16 family or intimate partner domestic violence homicides so far since January, 2026 is shaping to end the year with a similar percentage of the state's murders.

It's a fact that concerns service providers but is understandable, said Meghan Scanlon, CEO of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

“Traditional approaches to reducing violent crimes don't work with domestic violence,” Scanlon said. “What we need is sustained evidence-based prevention approaches that start at sixth grade or

even earlier if they are age appropriate.”

The state also needs more education and training in workplaces and medical offices in addition to schools and within the community, she said.

But the problem is funding, Scanlon said. Without an annual stream of funding set aside for prevention and training, the best her organization and the 18 domestic violence service providers under the umbrella of CCADV can do is to cobble together some resources for awareness,

Homicides continues on A6

Vaping nicotine remains common among young adults

By Cris Villalonga-Vivoni
STAFF WRITER

Although cigarette use has declined over the past decade, nicotine use remains a public health concern in Connecticut.

About 26.9% of state residents ages 18 to 25 said they had vaped nicotine in the past 30 days, according to the CT Data Collaborative. About 1 in 10 Connecticut high school students also say they vape.

CommuniCare Inc., a behavioral health nonprofit, has launched a program to help adults and young people with behavioral health conditions quit using tobacco.

“We've come a long way, but it's still out there,” said John O'Rourke, director of CommuniCare Inc. “It's still harming a lot of people.”

How many people are smoking cigarettes?

About 8.4% of Connecticut adults currently smoke, according to state data. The state's rate of past-month cigarette use is below the national rate and has declined since 2015.

Smoking rates are highest among middle-aged adults and people living in urban communities. Black and Hispanic people also often have higher rates of cigarette use, in part because of how major tobacco companies have targeted those communities, O'Rourke said.

“Cigarettes can mean a lot of things to a lot of different people. ... The reality is they need to smoke the cigarette because they're going into withdrawal every hour,” O'Rourke said. “When you smoke a cigarette,

Vaping continues on A4

Conn. now has 399 known species of bees

By Jordan Nathaniel Fenster
STAFF WRITER

On a cold, rainy day, Tracy Zarrillo and her colleagues went looking for a bee that Connecticut had not recorded in more than 50 years.

The target was *Andrena nida*, a small mining bee that depends on willow pollen to feed its young. That meant the search had to happen early in the year, when willows were blooming and when most people are not yet thinking about bees.

They were hoping to find one specimen. In-



Courtesy of David Mantack/Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
Yellow-banded bumble bee, or *Bombus terricola*, on spotted knapweed in Colebrook.

stead, they found a nest.

The discovery was not just a lucky find. It was the point of a years-long effort to build the most complete inventory yet of Connecticut's bees. Once researchers know which bees have been found here, which plants they need and which habitats they use, they can begin to figure out what may be missing.

“When the checklist published, there were at least 43 bee species that had not been seen in Connecticut for more than 25 years,” Zarrillo said in a U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Bees continues on A6