NEWS

"After the keen still days of September, the October sun filled the world with mellow warmth."
ELIZABETH GEORGE SPEARE, AMERICAN WRITER

At center of city politics, Vin Mauro plays 'fat guy in the middle'

BY ELIJAH HUREWITZ-RAVITCH
STAFF REPORTER

From an early age, Vincent Mauro Jr. cared about two things in life: the Boston Red Sox and New Haven.

A longtime behind-the-scenes political operator in the Elm City, Mauro, 52, said that love for his hometown was instilled in him from birth.

Mauro went straight into local politics after graduating from Quinnipiac University and — aside from a few years of law school for "different critical thinking" — never left.

"I pretty much have stayed on I-91 my entire life," he said.

He began his career as a legislative aide to state Sen. Martin Looney and, when Looney was elected as majority leader, served as his special counsel. From 2015 to 2023, he served as the state Senate Democrats' chief of staff.

But Mauro has never strayed far from New Haven. He served as Ward 8 alder from 2000 to 2004. And in 2014, he was elected to chair New Haven's Democratic Town Committee, which endorses and helps elect candidates. Since late 2023, he has also worked as a government affairs advisor at the Hartford office of law firm McCarter & English.

Mauro comes from an "old time New Haven Italian family," according to Chris Mattei, a prominent lawyer whom Mauro advised on his unsuccessful 2018 run for Connecticut Attorney General.

He grew up around Legion Avenue, which he said was one of the first ethnically diverse areas in the city. Unlike in other communities, Mauro said, "identity politics didn't really work there." Mauro said this is where he first learned the value and power of coalition-building.



ELIJAH HUREWITZ-RAVITCH
Vincent Mauro Jr. has spent years keeping New Haven's dominant political coalition intact, guided by the same local loyalty that has defined his family's legacy.

He sees New Haven as a melting pot without parallel — a place that combines "a blue collar world with an ethnic world with a racially diverse world with an Ivy League world."

Chairing the Democratic Town Committee is more or less in Mauro's bloodline. His uncle Arthur Barbieri — who once worked with President Bill Clinton LAW '73 — ran the local party from 1955 to 1975. Vincent Mauro Sr. took the reins in 1980 and served until his death in a car accident in 1987; Barbieri stepped back in and chaired the party until 1996.

Mauro was just 14 when his father died, and though he explained that "there was a numbness factor to it," he said he had an unusually strong support network thanks to his father's deep involvement in New Haven.

"I became my father's friends' friend," Mauro said.

People would often stop him to offer stories about the elder Mauro, and Mauro said he learned more about who his dad was from these anecdotes than he had while he was alive.

As Mauro grew up, a career in politics simply felt natural.

Josh Geballe, Yale's senior associate provost for entrepreneurship and innovation and who once served as Connecticut's chief operating officer, wrote in a text message that "Vinnie is a brilliant political strategist who is always thinking several steps ahead."

Mauro, for his part, said that he likes problem-solving in politics far more than running for office.

"I think we can generally solve most political problems at a kitchen table or at a dining room table before they become problems," he said. "That, to me, has always been a hallmark of how to keep this city's politics from blowing up."

His job, as he put it, is to "play fat guy in the middle."

Nick Balletto, who has chaired both the New Haven and Connecticut Democratic Parties and who has been friends with Mauro since he was 13, explained that running the local party can be a thankless endeavor.

"No one ever calls to say hello," he said. "Because usually, first thing when you pick up the phone, somebody's yelling at you for something, or they want something, or they're looking for something."

As a political operator, Mauro is both "very clear-eyed" and "very blunt," Mattei said.

Mauro himself said that he pulls no punches: "If you want my opinion, understand, I'm going to be honest with you."

But behind Mauro's gruff exterior, Balletto said, he has "a big heart."

"He's much softer than he wants people to believe he is," Balletto added.

While Mauro has no children of his own, he loves kids, according to Mattei, who added that "he's kind of like a little kid on the inside."

Eddie Camp, a UNITE HERE researcher and a friend of Mauro's, wrote in a text that his daughter and Mauro have "a running joke about Doritos."

Over almost six two-year terms running New Haven's Democratic Party, Mauro said that he is proudest of the city's stability.

Though it "ebbs and flows like the Long Island Sound" — with "good days," "bad days" and "okay days" between the city's government, its unions and Yale — "we have avoided the pitfalls of other places," Mauro said.

He attributes this steadiness to a long-standing coalition of people who have put their differences — and their personal ambition — aside for the good of New Haven.

"Good jobs, keep the taxes down, lower crime, have better schools — people are invested in that as opposed to, 'I gotta run for this office,'" he said.

Much of Mauro's work as the city party chair involves getting more people to vote for local Democratic candidates.

Watching newcomers in their twenties and thirties move into the Elm City's new apartment buildings, Mauro said he thinks the best way to get them involved in politics is to start with neighborhood and civic organizations.

"New Haven is not just a waystation," Mauro said.

Mauro said he is beginning to think about the best way to enable a smooth transition in the city's Democratic leadership.

"We're all heading for that generational change that will inevitably occur down in Washington and Hartford and New Haven," he said.

For now, though, Mauro is not going anywhere.

Since his earliest memories — handing out campaign literature as a little kid — his motivations have not changed, he said.

"It is and has always been just about the city," he said. "People say, 'Where're you from?' I never say I'm from Connecticut. I only say I'm from New Haven."

The Trinity Bar serves 18 "Vin Mauro's Wings" for 22 dollars.

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Dogs descend on West Haven park to support animal shelter

BY ISABEL LI
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

West Haven hosted its first ever Westie Pawlooza. Small but lively, the event featured 13 local vendors, a raffle, live music and a bus from Halfway Home Rescue, which brought a number of dogs for adoption. The event served to raise awareness about animals' rights and local businesses, while also creating a space for dog-owners to mingle.

West Haven councilmember Meli Garthwait and Margaret Longo of West Haven Parks and Recreation came together in June to plan the event. Both are avid dog lovers and advocates, they said. Garthwait herself is a self-described "third-generation rescuer" and co-founder of Green Fur Kidz, a nonprofit dog rescue that takes in dogs from open admission shelters, also known as high kill shelters.

Longo saw Saturday's event as an opportunity to help the West Haven Animal Shelter. All of the proceeds from the day went to the shelter, she said.

"The city has a general fund, so they wouldn't directly get the money. So, this way here, it's something that we could do so that it directly goes to the animal shelter," Longo said.

Around 12 p.m., West Haven Police Department Sergeant Tom Marchitto gave a K-9 demonstration with his police dog Ado, an 8-year-old German Shepherd and Belgian Malinois mix.

The demonstration began with basic commands like "sit" or "down" and ended with a bite work demonstration mirroring real situations in which Ado would need to apprehend suspects.

For Marchitto, demonstrations are not only fun, but also break down the stigma of police dogs as dangerous creatures.

"It helps bridge that gap between knowing that they're not hyenas, they're not these wild animals," he said. "They get a little bit of an understanding as far as what goes into these dogs, the ability to see the training of it."

Following the K-9 demonstration, dog trainer Michelle Douglas from Refined Canine gave a short talk on basic dog training.

Halfway Home Rescue — a North Haven nonprofit that takes in cats, dogs and rabbits, as well as various farm animals — brought a total of eight dogs up for adoption.

Volunteer Sarah Miller said that events like Westie Pawlooza are important for educating people about low adoption rates and high euthanasia rates.

"Animals are staying in shelters for considerably longer than they have before. And there's never enough funding, and the animals who are in need, the number never goes down," she said. "Our rescue gets called every day for people who want to surrender their pets for one reason or another, so we like to be able to talk to people about that."

In between the demonstrations, dog owners mingled, showed off their dogs' tricks for prizes and perused the vendors.

Constance Joshua, owner of Shadow's Blankets, was a featured vendor. Joshua sells homemade animal blankets, bandanas, bowties and poop bag holders. She highlighted the benefit of these types of events for promoting local businesses.

"It helps people who don't have brick-and-mortars of their own to come out and show their wares," Joshua said.



ISABEL LI
Dozens of dog owners attended a fundraising event at Old Grove Park in West Haven on Saturday to support the West Haven Animal Shelter.

Attendees were impressed by the event.

"This has given me so many ideas how libraries can even get involved in events such as this and supporting animal dog rescues and animal rescues," Chris Hemingway, a librarian at Hagaman Memorial Library in East Haven told the News. "It's great to see everybody out here and supporting the rescue."

Both Garthwait and Longo hope to continue the event and turn Westie Pawlooza into an annual tradition for West Haven residents and local businesses alike.

Old Grove Park is located on Oak Street in West Haven.

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New Haven ended fiscal year in the black, Elicker announces

BY ELIJAH HUREWITZ-RAVITCH
STAFF REPORTER

New Haven's general operating budget for the last fiscal year was balanced, Mayor Justin Elicker announced at a Tuesday press conference.

According to a financial report published Wednesday, the city brought in revenues of $681,543,089 and spent $681,484,371. This marks the fifth consecutive year of balanced or surplus budgets at City Hall, after decades of extensive borrowing. This year, the city ran a much smaller surplus than last, when Elicker redirected surplus money to the public school system.

"The departments did a pretty good job of managing their expenditures and keeping their costs down as much as possible," city budget director Shannon McCue said in a phone interview. "The education budget was over, which we knew."

McCue said that several other departments came in under budget and that their savings balanced out the Board of Education's overages.

Elicker, who is currently running for reelection against Republican Steve Orosco, said that during his mayoralty New Haven had made "a ton of progress" in stabilizing its finances.

"We work very, very hard to be transparent in our budget process, to not use budget gimmicks to pass on our problems to future generations and to grow our revenues," Elicker said.

At a mayoral debate on Sept. 30, Orosco criticized Elicker's fiscal management.

"We're short in every single department, yet our taxes keep on going up," Orosco said to an audience of around 180. "The budget keeps on going up, but our city services continue to decrease, which means we're paying more for less."

On Tuesday, Elicker also touted New Haven's improving financial stability. Just last month, the credit rating agency Fitch upgraded its rating of New Haven's bonds from A- stable to A-positive. Moody's, another credit rating agency, changed its rating from Baa1 positive to Baa1 stable. The improved credit ratings will allow the city to borrow money at lower interest rates.

Looking to the 2025–2026 fiscal year, which began on July 1, the mayor identified several challenges facing New Haven, including funding for the city's public schools, a new contract with police officers and rising pension and debt service costs — along with uncertainty about federal funding.

McCue called the 2025–2026 budget "more conservative" than the previous fiscal year's. She explained that it includes $1.7 million in labor reserves, which is available for the city's contract negotiations with municipal employees, and $1.4 million in expenditure reserves which "provides cushion in case we need it throughout the year."

McCue added that looking forward, "it's all about minimizing spending growth."

New Haven's medical fund, which pays for city employees' healthcare, was more than $2 million over budget. McCue said that the city is currently "looking at different options" in order to "get it at the best cost."

At the press conference, Elicker continued to draw a sharp contrast between New Haven and the federal government.

"At a time when the federal government is shut down and different folks in Washington can't agree on a pathway to resolve the federal budget problems," he said. "We in New Haven are continuing to do things differently by providing transparent, reliable and stable budgeting. It's what our residents deserve."

The general fund budget approved by the Board of Alders for fiscal year 2025–2026 totaled $702,310,050.

Sabrina Thaler contributed reporting.

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