



Fairfield Beach Residents Association Newsletter

SANTA CON UPDATE



Residents, below is a letter to all of us from First Selectwoman Brenda Kupchick. I appreciate her responding to concerns raised by our community and “Santa Con” activities this past weekend.

I ask that you also read my report to you on behalf of FBRA on this same subject.

Dear Residents:

On November 26, 2022 a Fairfield University administrator sent an email to town officials and the neighborhood associations stating she had heard the annual “Santa Con party” would take place on the beach on Saturday, December 10, 2022.

Because “Santa Con 2021” was devastating to our community, as FBRA President, I responded immediately to her email with the following questions about this year’s event.

1. Does anyone have any idea of the size of the crowd this year?
2. Any idea on start time and stop time?
3. Have the sponsors made a plan for cleaning the beach, Fairfield Beach Road and Reef Rd before the next morning? The tide, wind and rain all carry debris in our coastal environment. And trash that enters drains goes to waterways.
4. In the past, pedestrian, and vehicular traffic was a problem. What can we tell residents about law enforcement resources?
5. Has Lantern Point Association obtained security that day?
6. Public urination was a problem in the past. Have the sponsors taken into consideration that the public restrooms are closed for the winter?
7. Have students been reminded that fires are prohibited?

8. Is there going to be a live band and loudspeakers?

I received the following responses:

- Fairfield Police Department replied,

“We will have an increased police presence in the beach area.”

- “Lantern Point Association has private security scheduled beginning at 11 AM. ”

- Dec 6: Fairfield University emailed:

“As you know, Santa Con is not a University sponsored event and is planned entirely by the students. The University will send all students a communication prior to the weekend, with an additional email to off-campus students that reinforces expectations of being a good neighbor. This is standard process during weekends where student facilitated activities are planned. Last year the weather was unseasonably warm on the day of Santa Con, while the 10 th is trending 30-40 degrees. Student will most likely play music using speakers during the day. If I hear more information I will send along.”

On Saturday afternoon I was on the beach at Burr Court and then on Reef Road at Fairfield Beach Road.

I cannot determine how many partygoers attended but one private security guard hypothesized there were 800 or more. Aerial pictures on Facebook #santacon #fairfieldu prove that is entirely possible and the number may be closer to 1000.

Residents could not get in or out of their homes/driveways on Fairfield Beach Road or Reef Road. Between foot traffic of intoxicated party goers and Ubers picking up passengers our roads were clogged. I personally saw emergency vehicles having extreme difficulty getting to those in need of assistance.

I have seen one report of 17 alcohol related medical calls to the beach. I and others witnessed drunk partygoers lying on the ground and others being helped into ambulances by FPD.

I witnessed an environment where the health and safety of the community, renters and fulltime residents was at risk.

I returned to the beach Sunday at 7:30 AM. I have pictures of the trashy mess left on the sand and on Reef and Fairfield Beach Road. The Lantern Point Association paid for cleanup, and understand that a Fairfield University administrator and “around 40” students cleaned up the area at approximately 8 AM.

Unfortunately, the pics I took show the trash was originally below the tide line and it impossible to know how much garbage washed into Long Island Sound.

I am writing this long letter because you should know that FBRA has always worked with the town and Fairfield University for the good of our residents and our coastal environment. FBRA will continue to do so, but Santa Con 2022 was beyond disappointing. It was horrifying.

Regards,
Carolyn Kamlet
FBRA President



Town of Fairfield

Office of the First Selectwoman
Brenda L. Kupchick

STATEMENT

December 13, 2022

Following the SantaCon event at Lantern Point on Saturday, December 10th, the First Selectwoman, the Police Department and Fairfield University met Monday morning to review what happened and identify ways to improve going forward.

The estimated 1,000 party goers that showed up Saturday morning at Lantern Point was much larger than the Town and University anticipated based on information available. According to reports, students from Sacred Heart University, Quinnipiac University, and other schools arrived by train, bus, ride shares and with many parking at Veterans Park and Reef Road. While the event was unofficially organized by Fairfield University students, University officials worked with the Fairfield Police prior to the event to exchange information and to ensure additional resources, as is standard protocol when any large event is expected.

During Monday's meeting, all parties acknowledged the serious impact this large scale event had on Fairfield residents in the beach area and the reported behavior the community were witness to throughout the afternoon. The University expressed real concern for the disruption that transpired and the scale to which this event escalated so quickly, likely due to student social media promotion. The safety of all in the area, including the students was put at risk when this event grew much larger than expected.

In an effort to create a better experience for year-round residents and University students who live in the beach area, the Living at Fairfield Beach Guide was developed by the Town in conjunction with the University to help inform all stakeholders of relevant rules and policies. As highlighted on page 24, Lantern Point is private property governed by the association that independently leases housing to Fairfield University students for the school year. Their rules for student living clearly state that no large gatherings are permitted, specifically listing a prohibition on SantaCon. Additionally, while there is a legal injunction prohibiting more than 250 guests at the point, it is a legal civil order that is not enforceable by the Fairfield PD. The Town has inquired to the Lantern Point Association (LPA) what consequences will result for the students who broke the LPA Rules of Student Living.

The LPA hires private security for known events, which has had success in limiting the size and scope of student events in the past. The LPA reports that for Saturday's SantaCon, they hired seven guards for the event. The LPA also coordinated with Lund Court and completely shut down access through that path. Gates were all locked, and resident and guest passes were checked and enforced. The majority of access came from the beach side down lighthouse point and from the direction of Penfield, which overwhelmed the guards on duty.

In advance of the event, the University did attempt to hire more Police Officers to be on duty, but many of the posts went unfilled due to staffing issues. As a result, the Police Department had to order three officers over after dayshift to increase their presence when it became obvious that the crowd had grown to an unreasonably large event. The PD also diverted five on duty personnel from other patrols in town, to assist with calls for service, crowd management, and pedestrian/vehicular traffic control. The staffing of both the LPA guards and our Police Department was simply no match for the size of the crowd at the Point.

Both Fairfield University and the Police Department are limited in their ability to prohibit or sanction students without being direct witness to illegal behavior. Identifying students after the fact can be difficult, though the University has pledged to pursue all avenues in an effort to identify those responsible through police reports, social media and resident reports, and hold them accountable.

Law enforcement has no authority to treat University students any different than other citizens with regard to first amendment rights. Infractions were issued on Saturday for open containers and other misdemeanors, but it is important to note that while a Police Officer is writing those tickets, they are taken away from other crowd control and other matters that require a police response, including motor vehicle violations and other law enforcement issues.

The PD and the Town regret that due to this large scale event, for periods of time residents were unable to travel certain roads to access their driveways while police were managing ambulances and crowd dispersal.

The SantaCon event on Saturday was similar to Clam Jam events that took place many years ago, before the University adopted it as a sponsored and ticketed event, which is monitored and contained. This adjustment made in partnership with the Town, completely changed the size of the event, improved safety and security, and dramatically reduced the impact on Fairfield beach neighbors.

The Town and University agreed on Monday morning to make similar changes to SantaCon for next year to have a more controlled event on Town-owned property, ensure all guests are 21+ and attended by Fairfield University students only.

In an effort to minimize the impact on residents, the University organized a beach cleanup Sunday morning, as they do weekly through-out the semester, with roughly 40 students along the beach and side streets on Fairfield Beach Road, and Reef Road. The Town will continue to maintain a collaborative with both the beach area residents and the University to identify methods to improve preparation and response going forward.

About the FBRA:

Founded in 1955, the Fairfield Beach Residents Association is a 501(c)4 advocacy organization comprised of homeowners from the Old Post Road south to Fairfield Beach Road west to the end of the road, and Reef Road east to Beach Road. The FBRA aims to: Represent and implement the interests and desires of the membership in maintaining and improving Fairfield Beach and vicinity; promote cooperation among the owners and renters; represent the common interests of the membership in relation to governmental authorities; and provide for the mutual assistance, enjoyment, and quality of life for all people residing in the Fairfield Beach area.



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