



**EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT**  
BRIAN DEFREITAS



**SENATOR JACK REED**  
HERE TO HELP



**PROPERTY REVAL**  
MIDDLETOWN  
MIRRORS TREND



**NEW WEBSITE LIVE**  
TRY  
MIDDLETOWNRI.COM

# MIDDLETOWN TODAY



## Welcome Spring — And Change

For the past few months, I’ve used this space to talk about COVID-19 and how we all need to do our part to hold the line with the virus.

And all of that remains true: Wear a mask, distance, get a vaccine as soon as you can, help others wherever possible. The sooner everyone gets vaccinated, the sooner everything can return to as “normal” as possible.

While we all need to keep these words at the forefront, it’s important to recognize that things are turning a corner on many fronts. The weather is getting better, students are expected to be back in school by the end of the month and we’re prepping the beaches for summer.

In short, there’s a lot to look forward to on the horizon. Rest assured, after some rough times over the past year, things are heading in the right direction.

Regards,  
Shawn J. Brown  
Town Administrator

# Employee Spotlight

## Fire Battalion Chief Brian DeFreitas

People often talk about how no two days are ever the same with their jobs.

Middletown Fire Battalion Chief Brian DeFreitas really means it.

One minute, DeFreitas said he could be riding in the back of a rescue wagon heading to Providence, doing everything possible to keep a patient alive. The next, he could be on a boat heading out into Sachuest Bay to assist with a missing swimmer. Or maybe at the top of the ladder truck, trying to break down a window to get someone trapped inside a building.

DeFreitas said genuinely, when you work for Middletown Fire, no two days are ever alike – and he wouldn't have it any other way.

“You hear people talk all the time about the ‘best job in the world,’ but it really truly is,” DeFreitas said. “Day to day, it’s always something different, which makes everyday unique and to work in the community I grew up in? What could be better than that? I feel very, very fortunate.”

Born and raised in Middletown, DeFreitas was a graduate of Middletown High Class of 1998. The son of Mary and Jaime DeFreitas, he went to Roger Williams University and studied biology before receiving a certificate in paramedicine from Northeastern University in Massachusetts.

Growing up, DeFreitas loved the small town feel of the community, knowing everybody and exploring the neighborhood with family and friends. DeFreitas is now married to his wife Sarah and the couple has two daughters, 12-year-old Cailynn and one-year-old Isabella.



Looking back, DeFreitas said he always wanted to be a doctor, likely because his mom worked at Newport Hospital and he was exposed to the wonders worked there every day.

Before he signed on with Middletown Fire in 2005, DeFreitas got hands on experience wherever he could, including a field internship with the New York City Fire Department right after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the Big Apple. He responded to the Station Nightclub fire in 2003 as a member of a private ambulance crew that was at the scene, helping any way possible. He worked for Fall River Fire, handling EMS runs and honing his skills.

“I remember when I was hired here, (retired) Chief (Stephen) Martin said ‘So, you were in Fall River? I just want you to know it happens here too,’” DeFreitas said. “He was right. Every day, we say you can’t make this stuff up, but I feel so lucky to be here.”

Knowing Middletown Fire has the support of the entire community goes a long way, DeFreitas said.

“Working for a town like Middletown is so important,” DeFreitas said. “You know the town is well managed and financially stable, not like other places where there are layoffs out of the blue or people aren’t getting paid. Here, it’s not like that and trust me, none of us take that for granted and when we need something, the community comes out and supports us.”

Chief Robert McCall said Middletown Fire – and the entire town – was fortunate to have DeFreitas among its ranks. McCall noted that DeFreitas has played an instrumental role in the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination to area residents and serves as the department’s EMS Chief.

“Battalion Captain DeFreitas certainly has brought our EMS services to the next level,” McCall said. “He’s so good with making sure we’re on top of all the standards and have all the right equipment and training. He’s a big part of our day-to-day operations here.”

DeFreitas said the current group with Middletown Fire is especially tight. And he said each of the firefighters in leadership positions focuses on different aspects of the job, helping everyone to raise their game.

“There’s definitely a camaraderie to it and when we have a big call, it just pulls everyone closer together,” DeFreitas said. “I specialize in the EMS component and other people here cover other parts of firefighting they’re interested in and the town sees the benefits.”

Based on everything he’s seen, the support in the community are a significant driver behind the success of the department.

“This isn’t one of those jobs you do because it pays well,” DeFreitas said. “That’s not what this is all about. It’s about giving back and helping the community and the rest of that stuff just sort of takes care of itself.”

But without the support of his family and Middletown Fire family, none of it would be possible.

“I tell people everyday that I couldn’t do this without my wife and kids, my parents,” DeFreitas said. “I know a lot of us feel that way. My wife is a godsend and my kids always bring a smile to my face while my parent’s dedication is something I cannot and will not ever forget.”





## Revaluation Numbers Up In Town

### 20 percent hike in average home values reflects nationwide trend

So, the assessment on your residential property went up during the recent property revaluation in Middletown?

According to statistics from the tax department for the town, you're not alone, far from it.

Tax Assessor George Durgin said single-family residential property values increased by an average rate of 20 percent as part of this statistical revaluation. On the commercial side, Durgin said the average increase was slightly higher than 8 percent.

Taxpayers are reminded they cannot use their updated assessments to determine their fiscal 2022 tax bill because the Town Council has not set the new tax rate yet. Typically, that comes in late May, when a new budget is expected to be adopted.

"The trend in Middletown and throughout Rhode Island is consistent with what we're seeing nationally," Durgin said. "This week, 'The Wall Street Journal' reported that home values are increasing the fastest pace in 15 years and that national values increased by nearly 12 percent over the past 12 months alone.

The piece, which ran in Tuesday's Journal, referred to the current situation with real estate as a "super seller" market highlighting the high demand and limited supply in almost every part of the country.

According to the Journal piece, the median existing home price in the United States is now about \$310,000. In Middletown, revaluation numbers showed that number at \$430,000 for residential and \$805,000 for commercial property.

Durgin said the total assessed value of all property in Middletown was now at \$3.578 billion. That's close to a 15 percent hike since the last property revaluation.

As for why there's such demand for housing, the Journal cited a number of factors. In addition to historically low mortgage rates, the Journal said millions of millennials are now in the market in their 30s and looking to buy. The Journal also said new home construction is lagging far behind demand and many owners are keeping their homes longer.

The Journal went onto say the COVID-19 pandemic has played a role too. With more people than ever before working from home, the Journal indicated that people are looking for more office space in their homes and feeling more comfortable being further away from their offices.

The Town Council isn't sitting on the sidelines with these issues though. Well aware of the trends, the council recently commissioned separate committees to work on ways to make Middletown more affordable for senior citizens and families.



As part of the town's revamped website, there's a new community portal called "Middletown Shares." Through the page, people can learn the latest about senior affordable housing and offer feedback through a passively moderated community forum. Click on the following link <https://tinyurl.com/MiddletownShares> to visit that portal.

In terms of what's next, Durgin said there are a number of factors in play. Among those include:

- Property owners have had the opportunity to talk about their proposed assessments with Vision Government Solutions, which handled the revaluation process. This process has been done in-person typically, but because of COVID-19, the hearings were conducted by telephone.
- Notices will be sent to property owners whose values have been adjusted.
- Property owners who did not get an opportunity to speak to Vision can contact Durgin's office about the assessments prior to the certification of the tax roll.
- The tax roll is expected to be certified in late June and the tax rates are set.
- The next opportunity to challenge an assessment is through the formal appeal process, which runs from Sept. 10 through Dec. 10.

"Middletown's is a suburban oceanfront community, which enhances its market appeal," Durgin said. "Other factors that influence the value trend include a strong economy and low interest rates. For most commercial property types like office, retail and industrial, rents are not increasing to a point where values are increasing significantly."



## U.S. Senator Jack Reed Visits Here To Help

U.S. Senator Jack Reed has a message for Middletown this afternoon – I’m here to help.

In between visits to the Federal Emergency Management Agency COVID-19 vaccination center at the former Benny’s storefront and the joint Newport-Middletown operation at Community College of Rhode Island, Reed dropped by Town Hall for a visit.

There, the high-ranking Senator was briefed by Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown and Fire Chief Robert McCall about different initiatives in the community from the response to COVID-19 to the overall state of the economy.

Based on everything Reed’s seen and heard, he came away impressed and hopeful that more vaccines will be delivered soon, something that will be good for everybody.

“Right now, you could say there’s more of a supply issue,” Reed said, speaking from the upstairs conference room in Town Hall. “Based on everything I’m hearing, within a couple of weeks or a month, there’s going to be more of a demand issue because of all the vaccine projected to come online.”

For Reed’s read, the more people are vaccinated, the more the economy will open up and help get folks back to work.

“There’s definitely a huge pent-up demand,” Reed said. “There’s only so much you can do in terms of renovations to your house and people are going to start looking to travel and enjoy themselves.”

Brown said based on what he’s seen and heard, the defense related local economy hasn’t been too deeply impacted by COVID-19, but the tourism sector definitely needs a shot in the arm, something the vaccines are already helping out with.

“I’ve talked to people in the business and others in tourism and they’re saying they’re already seeing the number of reservations going up,” Brown said. “That’s definitely good for us here on the island as we work to transition out of COVID.”

Opening the conversation, Brown and McCall thanked Reed sincerely for his constant work on the community’s behalf in Washington, D.C. and beyond.



They said this was especially true with the \$1.76 million in federal Staffing for Adequate Fire Emergency Response (SAFER) grant money Reed had a large part in securing for the community last September. Those funds will help cover the costs of eight new firefighters hired by the town to help improve response times and bring more resources to every emergency in the community.

Brown went onto chat about Reed’s continued support for plans to bring a new public fishing pier and recreational area to the west side of town by Greene Lane. He also talked about the community’s need to do more infrastructure upgrades, particularly with its stormwater and sewer networks.

Reed said in coming weeks, a major infrastructure bill aimed at just the kind of work Middletown was focused on would likely be put forward in Congress, something he’d fight hard for the town.

McCall also spoke of the need for Middletown Fire to upgrade its radio equipment so it could better communicate with neighboring departments – including Naval Station Newport – during emergencies and mutual aid calls. Known as the 800-megahertz network, McCall said such communication can be critical when seconds matter and resources are being deployed.

In response, Reed agreed, saying that it was nice to see Middletown have such a good working relationship with its neighbors and the radios would only promote those efforts.

In coming weeks, Reed urged the community to put together projects that he could get behind and support because now that COVID-19 vaccines are more widely available, it’s time for Middletown – and the rest of the country to take significant steps forward.

“If there’s a specific project, or projects, let us know so we can get it on the list,” Reed said. “The infrastructure bill and a ‘Green’ infrastructure bill we’re talking about are going to help a lot of people at a time when they need it.”

## Town Council President Sylvia Steps Down Replacement Expected To Be Named Later This Month

President Robert J. Sylvia has resigned from the Town Council.

Citing “personal reasons” and the need to spend more time with his family, Sylvia submitted a one-page letter outlining his decision last month.

A member of the Town Council for 13 plus years, Sylvia was the council president the last seven. Before that, he was chairman of the town’s Personnel Committee.

“During these 19 years, I have worked alongside amazing people – Town Administrator Shawn Brown and his staff, council members, our solicitors, district and school leaders, business owners, volunteers, faith groups and friends and neighbors – all working to make our community a better place to live, work and play,” Sylvia wrote.

Sylvia went onto personally thank Town Clerk Wendy J.W. Marshall, Deputy Town Clerk Karin Clancey and most importantly, his wife Barbara.



“I want to thank my wife for standing by my side during this endeavor and being the person, I could always depend on,” Sylvia wrote. “This I know has been a long road for her as well.”

Speaking later, Sylvia expanded on his decision, saying the timing seemed right for him to move on. He said he looked forward to having more time for family, friends, travel, golf and other experiences.

“Let’s face it, the town is in good shape,” Sylvia said. “Why not leave on a high note? We’ve accomplished so much over the years that, it just makes sense right now. Look at what happened with COVID(-19).

When other communities were struggling and totally shut down, we found ways to do more for our residents at the beach and gave them their beach back. That’s the kind of things I’ll look back at fondly.”

He added that helping residents solving problems big and small was something he would miss.

“I want to thank all the people who’ve supported me over the years and I can go out undefeated,” Sylvia said, laughing. “When it comes down to it, one of the things I’m most proud of is how we have a solvent town now, one where a problem doesn’t equal a crisis. It wasn’t always that way. There were times 20 years ago when we struggled to make payroll.

“We had a game plan and we stuck to it and I don’t think the town has an equal in the state of Rhode Island. Our retirement buckets are filled, we’re able to keep our budget moving forward and we’ve maintained our discipline over the years while creating a war memorial, new recreational fields, acquiring open space, the Navy Lodge, helping secure the \$10 million bond for the school, new police headquarters and new fire headquarters. I’m very proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish and continue to move forward long term.”

Local leaders said they understood the move and need for Sylvia to turn the page on this chapter of his life. A high-ranking executive with the Hudson Lock Company in Hudson, Massachusetts, it was not uncommon for Sylvia to be traveling and busy with his day job and arrive in town at night to oversee a meeting.

Learning of the news, council Vice President Paul M. Rodrigues said he had one word he was feeling to describe the departure of this friend from the council – sad.

“I’m sad, that’s the best way to describe it,” Rodrigues said. “I’ve been honored to serve with Bob all these years and to accomplish so much, but you have to do what’s best for you and your family. He’s helped put the town in a great position and I was honored to work together with him.”

The list of accomplishments for the town under Sylvia’s lead is long. Holding the line on taxes in the last four years, the town has continued to make forward progress with open space preservation, building improvements and recreational opportunities.

“Middletown is a fantastic place to live, but that doesn’t happen by mistake,” Sylvia said. “It takes a lot of hard work, a lot of work. Some people think the council presidency is just a ceremonial job, but I can assure you I’ve never looked at it that way.

“You need to work hard in this position and I’m proud of the relationships and the bonds we’ve built over the years. Like with our federal delegation, when we needed help to improve our corporate park or assistance with resiliency down at our beaches or to bury utility lines, they were there and that’s all because of relationships.”

# New Website Goes Live

## Get Everything Middletown At MiddletownRI.com

For the past decade plus, the Town of Middletown’s website had a particular look and feel that made it dated and less user-friendly.

While MiddletownRI.com did the job and was reliable, many people said the site wasn’t a true reflection of the dynamic, diverse place that is family-friendly Middletown.

Until today. As part of a six-month project with consultants CivicPlus, the town is unveiling its new website, a place where so much more of Middletown will be highlighted and showcased.



“This is an exciting day,” Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said. “More and more, people are interacting with government online and our new website will be there to help them 24/7, whether it’s purchasing beach stickers to getting permits, learning about the facilities in town to so much more, it’s all right there, just a click away.”

In recent months, the town has placed renewed emphasis on transparency and making local government easier to understand.

As part of that outreach, the town posts at least one item of local interest online and through social media a day. Town staff are also encouraged to update their webpages regularly to reflect the latest in their departments – and the community.

Among the new additions to the MiddletownRI.com home page:

- A streamlined, user friendly design to make it easier to find what you’re looking for fast, including a FAQ section called “How Do I...?”
- An improved search function to scour the site in minutes for that document or picture.
- A new place to submit concerns and compliments called “Middletown Helps,” where an easy to fill out form can be completed in moments about fixing that pothole, repairing a damage mailbox and so much more. The app can be found by clicking the light blue button in the middle of the webpage.
- A true “Community Calendar,” where happenings across Middletown can be posted not only by town officials, but also by residents and local organizations free of charge. The app can be found on the bottom right of the webpage.
- A complete “News & Upcoming Events” listing, featuring the latest of Middletown and stories you can only read here.
- A new “Topic of the Moment” button available in the middle of the webpage, which will rotate depending on the time of year and what’s happening in Middletown. To start, the Topic of the Moment will be dedicated to getting to know this new website.
- A photo gallery designed to spotlight the best of the community, whether it’s the beaches, work that happens in the schools and so much more.

- A new “Middletown Shares” platform, where visitors will have an opportunity to view documents on the bigger topics in Middletown and discuss their thoughts with others in a moderated, free flowing chat. The first “Middletown Shares” will be focused on affordable housing in the community.
- A list of all public facilities in Middletown, from municipal buildings to parks, playgrounds and public right of ways to the ocean.
- In coming weeks as users get more comfortable with the website, the town will roll out more and more features and tools available through the new MiddletownRI.com online.

The Website Redesign Team was led by Middletown Public Affairs Officer Matt Sheley. Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown, Information Technology Director Matthew Wainwright, Principal Planner Rita Lavoie and Middletown Police Capt. Jason Ryan were also part of the web team.

“Quite a bit of work and thought went into this new website and hopefully residents, businesspeople and visitors are able to find what they’re looking for and more that much easier,” Sheley said. “One of the things I like most about the site is it features the people that make Middletown such a special place to live, work and play far more than we ever used to before.”

The town administrator Brown agreed, saying that for some, the website is the only interaction they might have with the town.

“We need to make that interaction as positive as possible,” Brown said. “Whether it’s a resident looking for how to buy beach stickers online to a business looking to expand or relocate to Middletown, our new MiddletownRI.com is a much better representation of who we are as a community.”