



**OPPORTUNITY WITH WEST MAIN ROAD CORRIDOR**



**BEACH BASICS HAS ALL THE DETAILS**



**PERCUSSION POWER AT SENIOR CENTER**



**NEW FUND WORKS TO GET INSTRUMENTS TO KIDS**

# MIDDLETOWN TODAY

## Middletown Has A Budget For Fiscal 2022

### \$76.4 Million Figure Boosts Services At Reasonable Price

The Town of Middletown has a \$76.4 million budget for Fiscal 2022.

Although not the \$75.9 million figure originally sought by the Town, the numbers adopted on June 7 by the Town Council at Town Hall help move the community forward in meaningful, positive ways without adversely impacting existing services.

In terms of taxes, the new residential tax rate will be \$12.00 per \$1,000 of assessed value compared to \$17.14 per \$1,000 of assessed value for commercial properties. The normalized residential tax rate for the current Fiscal 2021 budget is \$12.07 per \$1,000 of assessed value and \$16.15 per \$1,000 of assessed value for commercial properties.

“After some conversations and some one-on-one (discussions), I think we’ve found some consensus,” council President Paul M. Rodrigues said.

Going into this financial season, local leaders acknowledged it wasn’t going to be an easy budget process.

With questions surrounding the state of the economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on residents and businesses, town officials said they didn’t want to push the envelope too much. At the same time, they acknowledged there were important needs that had to be addressed, meaning a fifth year of no tax increase was unlikely.



Since then, the council met several times, trying to make sure the town got what it needed without asking for too much and potentially impacting taxpayers having a tough time covering the bills.

During the June 7 meeting, those conversations crystalized, with the council finding common ground on a number of items. Among those included:

- Providing a 2 percent increase in funding for the schools, or about \$538,000.
- Reserving up to \$10,000 for a consultant to study ways to improve the educational offerings for students to get them more ready for the “real world,” an item championed by Councilman Dennis Turano.
- Setting aside about \$170,000 to help pay for new firefighters when grant money paying for those eight positions runs out.
- The purchase of two new pumper trucks for the Middletown Fire Department at a projected cost of \$1.3 million. Money for the pumpers will come from the town Rescue Wagon Fund, meaning new tax dollars will not be used.
- Buying two new police cars, again paid for from the Rescue Wagon Fund, not new tax dollars.
- Hiring one new full-time laborer for the Public Works department.
- Reserving about \$1.8 million to replace the sewer pump station at Marshall Village as well as the Paradise force main and related work.
- Allocating \$17,000 to regular water testing of stormwater outfalls to provide data about the community’s infrastructure efforts.
- Adding a new Zoning Enforcement Officer who is responsible for overseeing short-term rentals.
- Providing about \$43,000 for six part-time public safety interns for Middletown Police.

After the vote, Councilwoman M. Theresa Santos thanked Brown and his team for answering all the emails and questions throughout the process.

“Thank you for all your hard work,” Santos said.

For additional information about the approved budget, visit <https://mdl.town/Shares> online.

## Opportunity of a Lifetime

### Redevelopment Requests for Information Go Live for West Main Road Corridor

The Town of Middletown is officially looking for concepts from developers to remake part of the West Main Road corridor.

Earlier this month, the Town’s Planning Department released a Request For Information package for those interested in potentially revitalizing the 15-acre stretch between Coddington Highway and Valley Road.

The property includes the now vacant Navy Lodge parcel at the corner of Coddington and West Main Road. Moving north, the West Main Road Recreational Complex, the Middletown Public Library and former Kennedy School sites are also featured. All are owned by the town in the heart of the community’s commercial corridor, with at least 52,000 vehicles a day driving by the location.



The deadline for submitting a qualified RFI is July 1. That information must be mailed, emailed or hand delivered to Planning Director Ronald Wolanski no later than 4 p.m. on the day of the deadline. To view the RFI directly, visit <https://mdl.town/WestMainCoddingtonRFI> online.

“We are looking for insight from potential developers on feasible options for future use of the property, potentially including the previously discussed mixed-use concept including small-scale retail, office, housing and municipal uses,” Wolanski said.

Located in the heart of family friendly Middletown, the future of the property has been the subject of much discussion over the years.

In March 2008, the Navy notified area officials they planned to release several federal properties across Aquidneck Island they no longer had use for locally. One was the former Navy Lodge parcel, which had housed a hotel for base personnel and their families before those operations moved inside the fence line.

Following a lengthy federal review process, the town bought the three-acre parcel for \$1.3 million in January 2018.

The site is within a stone’s throw of what developers call one of the Top 10 most sought-after commercial intersections in Rhode Island at Two-Mile Corner where East Main and West Main roads meet.

There has been substantial interest in the area, but nothing has taken hold – yet.

Previously, developers have said the town was losing at least \$1 million annually not developing the site and relocating existing uses like the library and softball field to other more suitable locations.

As part of the RFI packet, the Town seeks a variety of information. That includes documents outlining who is pursuing the project, their understanding and approach as well as their leadership team. Qualified submissions must also include a statement of experience, a comprehensive discussion about the financial approach to the project along with an explanation of building and site development and other related issues.

The Town is expected to select candidates for further discussion on July 28 to continue the process.

“Given its highly visible location, redevelopment of this property offers an opportunity to enhance this stretch of West Main Road by using high-quality design and providing uses that will meet the needs of the community,” Wolanski said. “And we hope whatever happens on this property will set the stage and promote redevelopment or upgrades to commercial properties in the surrounding area.”

## “Beach Basics” Webpage Has Everything Middletown Beaches

### Get All the Details In One Place to Add to Beach Experience

Wondering about high tide or the surf at Second Beach or who sells those awesome tacos at Surfer’s End?

Try “Beach Basics” for those answers and more through the Town’s website.

Accessible at <https://mdl.town/BeachBasics> online, the goal is to give beachgoers all the information they’re looking for in one place to make Middletown’s family friendly beaches that much more accessible.

“We’re always looking for new ways to improve the experience at Second and Third beaches,” said Will Cronin, the town’s Operations & Facility Manager who oversees the beaches. “As part of our new outreach, we wanted to make it as easy for visitors and those thinking of coming to our beaches, whether it’s our hours of operation to where to get a parking sticker and everything else.”

On a typical summer Saturday or Sunday, town estimates indicate approximately 10,000 people visit Second – or Sachuest – and Third beaches.

For some, the beaches are the perfect getaway from the hustle of everyday work life, the manageable surf and natural environment like paradise. Others enjoy the fine sand, beautiful vistas and catching up with family and friends. Whatever the reason, the beaches are known among the best in the region.

As part of the new “Beach Basics” page, there’s information and links about:

- The hours of operation.
- The daily parking rates.
- Where to buy a parking pass for the day or season.
- Where to call if you have questions during business hours.
- How to file a compliment or complaint about the beaches any time of day for the beaches.
- Whether swimming is open for the day.



- When and where dogs are allowed on the beaches.
- The current weather at the beaches.
- Up-to-the-minute surf and tide reports for Second Beach.
- Who the vendors are at the beaches and more information about those businesses.
- Links to cameras to see the action at Surfer's End, the main lot and by the main concession stand.

Cronin said all the information has been available in different places online, but it made sense to combine everything in one place.

"Rain or shine, people love our beaches," Cronin said. "Everyone says their unspoiled beauty is the crown jewel of Middletown and they're really the town center of our community. We love sharing them and want everyone to have the best experience possible."

## The Power of Percussion

### New Program Gets Local Seniors Drumming



For most people, a drum circle is something you might see at a folk concert or a local park, not the Middletown Senior Center.

But Jessica Shea is changing that. Recently, Shea used the power of percussion to get more than a dozen drummers moving and grooving to tunes from Elvis to pop sensation Bruno Mars as part of a new program at the Green End Avenue facility. With each participant armed with a pair of drumsticks, an overturned blue recycling bin and a metal folding chair to sit, the group sounded tight after a couple songs, with smiles and laughter throughout.

"I heard about it and I figured I'd give it a

try," local resident Betsy Brick said. "I like that it's exercise and an upper body workout, but it doesn't seem like exercise. After COVID, I want to get in better shape and this is one way to do that."

The program is one of more than two dozen offered regularly at the Senior Center. Shea's class known as "Drums Alive" is held every Friday at 11 a.m. in the Main Hall. For a complete listing of programs, visit <https://mdl.town/SeniorCenterPrograms> online.

Director Arleen Kaull said it's nice to have the Senior Center reopened after it was closed for more than a year due to COVID-19. Kaull and her second in command Chris Johnson kept extremely busy during that period, delivering free brown bag lunches to more than 30 residents across the community in need of sustenance during the pandemic.

As the Senior Center got ready to open its doors again, Kaull said she and Johnson agreed it was important to offer a mix of familiar classes like computer lab with something new and fresh.

Asking around, Kaull said Shea came with rave reviews for her work at the Middletown YMCA along with the senior centers in Bristol, Portsmouth and Tiverton. From Day 1, Kaull said the class has been a blockbuster.

“To see what she does and how much everyone is enjoying themselves, feeling young again, that’s the best,” Kaull said. “It’s so important to get this population out and about and having a good time and Jess certainly does that with her class.”

For Shea, a Portsmouth resident, it just feels right to help get people moving.

“I don’t care who you are or what age you are, movement is so important,” Shea said. “Drumming is good for your cognitive function, you get to use a full range of your motor skills and that doesn’t even include the social interaction you’re getting here. That’s good for your spirit and your soul, especially with what we just came out of.”

On one recent Friday, Shea opened the hour-long class by introducing herself and explaining first and foremost, she wanted everyone to focus on fun.

Switching on a standard from Elvis oozing out of a large black portable JBL speaker, Shea described and demonstrated what she was looking for from each drummer, hammering away on the recycling bin with the drumsticks.

Tunes like “Wipe Out,” “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough,” “Happy,” “Dancing Queen” and “We Will Rock You” from Queen got participants drumming, tapping their feet and even dancing on more than one occasion.

By the time the 60 minutes were up, the group sounded as cohesive as the drum corps of the University of Southern California march band.

“It was so much fun,” said Carol Perry, a 1965 graduate of Middletown High who now lives in Portsmouth. “I thought it was absolutely wonderful like all the programs they offer here. I can’t wait to come back for more.”

“I’ve done other classes with Jess. She’s the best,” said Shirley Lally, a Portsmouth resident best known for her work monitoring the piping plovers at Second Beach. “It was great fun. To hear some of those songs brought back memories and I definitely feel like I got a good workout.”



# Giving Back For Travis

## New Fund Created to Get Instruments in the Hands of Area Children

Travis Swager was the kind of person who knew someone, no matter where he went. Whether grocery store or downtown Newport for a bite to eat, his mother Sarah and sister Beck Schlip said it was like riding with a celebrity.

So, when Travis passed away unexpectedly of a heart attack at the age of 46 in 2020, Schlip said her family agreed they wanted to find a way to share his love of music that touched so many others through his life.

Toward that end, Schlip has been working hard getting the “Make Noise! Music Fund” to provide financial aid for local youngsters interested in getting into music but who are unable to pay for lessons and instrument rentals.

The Music Fund is running a clothing drive all month long to raise money for the cause. To schedule a pick-up of gently used clothing, email [makenoisemusicfund@gmail.com](mailto:makenoisemusicfund@gmail.com). Additional details are also available through the fund’s Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages. Donations are also accepted at [gofund.me/7a0fc9fb](https://gofund.me/7a0fc9fb) through the online site GoFundMe.

“I know he’d be proud, honored really, but he probably wouldn’t have shown it,” Schlip said chuckling from an Adirondack chair in the family’s front yard by Middletown High.

“He’d probably make some kind of sarcastic comment because he was always joking around, something like ‘Good job Peanut!’ or ‘Good job Pumpkin!’ That’s the thing we miss the most, his humor. He was so funny.”

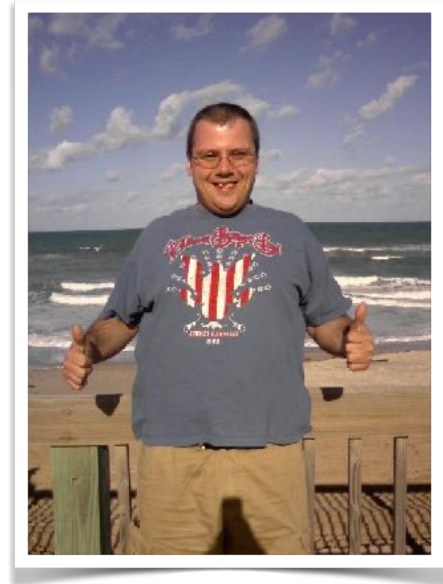
A 1991 graduate from Middletown High, Schlip said Travis was a self-taught musician and loved playing guitar for anyone who’d listen. He was big into Pearl Jam, Van Halen, Led Zeppelin, Eric Clapton and Tool, among others.

Schlip said one game was when Travis would walk around the house and strum a few notes on his omnipresent guitar and look at her – or anyone else nearby – for the answer to the tidbit of the song he just played.

“He had this look on his face when he did it that just made you laugh,” Schlip said. “He just had that way with people and usually I didn’t guess the name of the song right.”

He also delved into the bass, banjo and drums, but guitar always took the lead. Schlip said her older brother inspired her to get involved with the bands and choruses at school while teaching herself flute, piccolo and trumpet.

Schlip said music helped both her and her brother through high school, finding new musicians who spoke to them with their words and songs. She graduated from Middletown High in 2000.





“They were always playing music around the house, loud, and it used to drive me crazy,” Sarah Swager said. “I’m not a big music person, but my kids sure were.”

Her brother worked at several local establishments from the restaurant at Howard Johnson’s to the Fourth Street Diner, One Pelham East and Franklin Spa, all in Newport.

No matter where he went, she said Travis was able to make friends and connect with those around him, whether they had anything in common or not. Music was usually the bond that brought everyone together.

“I saw the impact that music had on his life and know the same would be true for a lot of kids who just can’t afford it,” Schlip said.

“That’s why we created the Make Noise! Music Fund, so that kids who want to play can and get something out of music like we did.”

To date, Schlip said everyone who she’s broached the idea with has been very supportive. And such assistance is more necessary than ever before coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“When you hear about school budgets, one of the first things that gets cut is music and the arts even though those are the only reason some students go to school every day,” Schlip said. “We want this to be one way for everyone to remember Travis and what a positive spirit he was.”