



**MHS SENIOR**  
READY FOR WORK



**MAKING**  
MIDDLETOWN MARVELOUS



**FORCE MAIN**  
WORK IN NEWPORT



**WHERE AM I?**  
IN MIDDLETOWN

# MIDDLETOWN TODAY

## “Opportunity Of A Lifetime” For Middletown Schools Middletown, Newport Pledge To Work Together For Students, Community

**T**he Town Council recently went all in on an “opportunity of a lifetime” for the Middletown schools.

A couple weeks ago, the council voted 7-0 to pursue a \$235 million bond proposal to build all new Middletown schools that could go before voters on Election Day as well as legal language to create a regional school system with the City of Newport.

Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) officials have said the state will pay at least 80 cents of every dollar for the bond, by far the best deal Middletown has ever seen. As a result, Middletown taxpayers would be on the hook for about \$46 million for the new state-of-the-art schools.

The opportunity came about unexpectedly for both Middletown and Newport under the regionalization model, which would be governed by a joint School Committee, Finance Committee and school administration.

One aspect that makes this version of regionalization different is Middletown students would go to class at Middletown schools and Newport students will continue

to attend Pell Elementary, Thompson Middle and Rogers High schools unless they chose to attend a program in the other community.

Before the proposal goes to voters, the council must decide in

August whether to move forward formally and place the \$235 million bond and regionalization language on the Nov. 8 ballot. The Newport City Council has to decide about the regionalization language alone.

“It’s been said several times leading up to (the

vote), but this really is an opportunity of a lifetime,” Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said. “This is something that just sort of fell into our laps, but it’s not too good to be true. This is a reality and once all the information is rolled out, we’re confident our voters will see how this could be the biggest tax break we’ve ever received as a community and will be better for every student from an educational standpoint too. We keep talking about the money we’re going to be saving, but the lasting legacy will be the improved education our children will realize for generations to come.”



“There’s a historic amount of money that’s available that’s never been available before,” council President Paul M. Rodrigues said. “It’s not sustainable for the taxpayers of the Town of Middletown to spend and put a ‘Band-Aid’ on it and then have to come back and ask for another \$100 million and we’d still have old buildings. Or do we want to spend \$46 million and regionalize from a governance perspective and have two brand new facilities.”

Rodrigues apologized to the City of Newport and its residents for how some officials treated the City-By-The-Sea previously when they sought assistance. Admitting it wasn’t Middletown’s best moment, Rodrigues said he personally said sorry to Mayor Jeanne-Marie Napolitano, a gesture he hoped would help solidify a great partnership for years to come.

“This could set this town up financially and educationally for the next 30, 40, 50 years and that’s what’s important here,” Rodrigues said. “It’s not about me, what I think. I’m going to make a decision based on the facts.”

If everything is okayed, a new combined high school-middle school would go at the former Starlight Drive-In property now multi-use fields at 1225 Aquidneck Ave. next to Gaudet Middle School.

Grades six through eight would be in one part of the building completely separate from the high school grades nine through 12. Initial planning showed the building would

share a 500-600 seat auditorium, cafeteria and library media center. Importantly, middle and high school students would not be in those spaces together.

The combined elementary school would go on part of the existing footprint of Middletown High at 120 Valley Road. Eventually, both Aquidneck and Forest Avenue elementary schools would close after construction of the new combined elementary school was complete. A pre-kindergarten center for Middletown youngsters will be built on the new elementary school campus, creating a synergy around early childhood education.

The way the school construction project is phased, temporary trailers would not be needed. Construction of the combined high school-middle school would come first, with students staying in the existing schools until work wrapped up. Then, building would begin at the Valley Road campus, with the Aquidneck and Forest Avenue schools in service until they were no longer needed.

Construction of the new schools would be overseen by the town, with school administrators, teachers and other educators playing an important role.

Although it’s early in the process, town leaders have floated the idea of eventually using the entire Aquidneck School site at 70 Reservoir Road for community ballfields. As for the Forest Avenue property at 315 Forest Ave., that location has been considered for affordable housing.

Under the terms of the regionalization model, Middletown’s taxpayers would be responsible for paying the \$47 million in debt for the new local schools. Per bonding requirements, the town has to borrow the entire \$235 million, but pay only 20 percent of that amount under an ironclad agreement with the state.

RIDE officials have said Newport would receive about \$50 million immediately back from the state to help pay off its new Rogers

**PROPOSED NEW MSIHS**  
Grades 6-12

Projected Enrollment: 1,098  
(NESPAC 2026/2027 Projection)  
HS - 618 Students  
MS - 480 Students

RIDE Allowable Building Area:  
205 gsf/student - HS  
183 gsf/student - MS

Current MHS Area: 132,000 gsf  
Current GMS Area: 114,800 gsf  
(144,800 gsf - includes Gr. 4 & 5)

Proposed New Building:  
3 Stories - 214,530 gsf  
(MS 87,840 + HS 126,690)

- Greater economy of site, maintenance, systems, etc.
- One new facility with separate “schools”
- Shared cafeteria, auditorium, and media center
- Works with existing site
- Gr. 4 & 5 to remain until new ES is complete



High School, one of the many benefits of the deal for the City-By-The-Sea. The city would also get a better rate of reimbursement for Rogers and the Pell School addition.

After the regionalized school district is established, the responsibilities for paying for future projects would be the joint responsibility of both communities.

Because there are so many moving pieces, the council recently asked the Open Space & Fields Committee to review the town’s athletic fields and potential impacts of the new school construction. The goal is to make sure every field that currently exists would be replaced with something equal, or better.

The idea for Middletown and Newport to join forces with their schools arose again in March. That came about after Middletown officials learned the community was facing at least \$190 million in repairs and upgrades to its four existing schools.

Usually, when communities regionalize their schools, Chapter 16 of state law provides the template. Schools are combined and students and staffs from the member communities are merged.

Because the situation between Middletown and Newport is so unique, the deadline so tight and so many amendments would have been required to Chapter 16, the special legislation made more sense.

Since then, officials from both communities have been working almost round the clock to hammer out details of the proposed arrangement, from how labor issues would be dealt with to how the regional school district would be comprised.

RIDE leaders have outlined a number of benefits of regionalization. To assist, the state is providing the services of consultants from RIDE and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University free of charge to Middletown and Newport.

For Middletown, the community could replace each of its aging 50 and 60 year old



buildings with state-of-the-art facilities for 20 cents on the dollar.

The community could also save close to \$150 million and get new school buildings, not “Band Aids” on the ones it already has.

Middletown and Newport can also keep their own schools, sports teams, bands and identities, with each institution having a proud tradition that would not be lost.

Modern buildings could reduce the close to \$700,000 spent on utilities like electricity, heat and water, netting long-term savings for Middletown.

The new Regional School District would go live on July 1, 2024. RIDE officials have said there could be at least \$2.5 million in annual savings from duplicate administrative costs on salaries, central office functions and business operations.

The collaboration would result in improved offerings in classrooms, particularly at the high school level.

Educational leaders have talked about how Middletown High and Rogers High could specialize in different areas, enabling both schools to build even stronger cores without spending precious resources duplicating services.

In the next couple weeks, Middletown and Newport officials will meet with RIDE leaders and Brown University consultants to investigate the specific academic benefits to students of regionalization.

Middletown officials have said one will be getting the districts aligned with curriculum

and making sure what's taught in each grade builds better on what was learned previously.

Importantly, the enabling legislation before the General Assembly next week guarantees existing employees under a collective bargaining agreement the same or a substantially similar job.

Under Section 4 of the 25-page document, it specifies "All employees employed by the respective school committees as of June 30, 2024, who are subject to a collective bargaining agreement, will be offered employment by the regional school district in the same position or a substantially similar position, subject to the terms of the applicable collective bargaining agreement. Any such employee who on the date of his or her employment with the regional school district is on tenure may continue thereafter to serve on a tenure basis. All employees who become employees of the regional school district shall be given full credit for the period of their employment with the local school committees of the respective member towns for the purposes of seniority, pensions and all other relevant purposes."

Middletown and Newport have retained a labor attorney to answer questions and help navigate the differences between the various contracts and agreements. Middletown officials also said pension debt and other legacy benefits will be the responsibility of the original community, not the regional district.

The non-partisan election of the new Regional School Committee will take place in November 2023. Voters in each community would vote on a ballot of at-large candidates from both Middletown and Newport.

The top three vote getters from each Middletown and Newport would be elected. From there, the seventh member would be named to the Regional School Committee based on the highest remaining number of votes, whether from Middletown or Newport.

To start, the special legislation spelled out that each member of the first Regional School Committee has a three-year term. During the next election for Regional School Committee in Nov. 2026, the special legislation specified candidates would serve two-year terms.

In the interim before the new district launched in July 1, 2024, the Regional School Committee would be responsible for picking the administration for the district, including a superintendent, assistant and other administrative jobs.

A new joint Finance Committee would control the pursestrings of the district. The way the arrangement is set up, if there are four Newport members on the School Committee itself, Middletown would have the majority on the Finance Committee. Payments to the district from Middletown and Newport would be based per pupil enrollment.

Despite being led by a Regional School Committee and administration, Brown said Middletown's schools would retain what makes them special.

"Middletown High School will continue to field its own football and girls basketball teams, its own bands, its own art programs and classes," Brown said. "We know we have special teachers and staff and none of that will change. The same is true for Rogers. (Newport and Middletown) will continue to play each other in sporting events and share resources wherever it makes sense.

"This is all really exciting and the sense of partnership and camaraderie we're forming with Newport is only growing and we're so thankful for their interest and involvement to get us to this point. Regionalization has been talked about for decades and we're closing in on a groundbreaking agreement that will be a model across Rhode Island and makes sense for everyone for so many reasons, all of them positive."

## Ready For The “Real World”

Middletown High Senior James Cawley Has A Full-Time Job Waiting After Graduation

**A**s recently as seven or eight years ago, the thinking at most secondary schools was everyone needed to go to college to have the best chance to “succeed.”

Nationwide, billions of dollars and entire curriculums were geared towards getting students ready for the rigors of advanced education, whether that’s what they wanted — or was right.

Not so for James Cawley. Since sixth grade, Cawley said he’s known he “wasn’t college material,” something he’s absolutely fine with.

That’s because upon graduation, Cawley has a full-time job paying a living wage with benefits at Horan Building Co., constructing and remodeling high-end homes across Aquidneck Island.

“There’s nothing better than seeing what you accomplished at the end of a day,” the Middletown High School senior said. “I’ve always known I wanted to do something a little different. There will always be people who tell you it’s not a good idea, but if you believe in yourself and are willing to work hard, you can make almost anything happen.”

The son of Jim and Toni Cawley, the 18-year-old is a product of the Middletown school system, first Forest Avenue Elementary School, Gaudet Middle School and now Middletown High.

A “hands on” person, Cawley said he remembers times as a young boy with his grandfather Jim — a retired plumber — tackling projects. The more the two worked together, the more Cawley said he enjoyed

building and fixing things, no matter how big or small the problem.

In his free time, Cawley said he was never a beach guy and he didn’t go to the arcade or movies much like his buddies. He had another destination always in mind, one with more of a purpose. “When I was younger, my parents just knew,” Cawley said. “They’d drop me off at Home Depot and I’d walk around the store for an hour, checking out all the different tools. That’s what I liked to do in my free time.”

As he got older and more experienced, Cawley said the size and scope of the jobs expanded. Last summer, he and his grandfather tackled a makeover of a bathroom at his family’s home.

“It needed to be done,” Cawley said. “With everything so expensive these days, I knew I had the skills we needed and with my grandfather knowing the plumbing, we did the whole bathroom over. The peel and stick tiles, tub shower and a handle that fell out had to go and it looks so much better now.”

To free up his schedule enough during his senior year for an internship with Horan Building, Cawley took an aggressive course load his first three years at the Valley Road high school. Cawley also had classes at Rogers High School and the Newport Area Career & Technical Center, where College & Career Coordinator Kerry Clarke connected him with Horan Building.

Behind the scenes, Cawley said his parents advocated strongly on his behalf so he could clear hurdles and get the education



he needed without getting snagged in too much red tape.

Now, minus required English and mathematics courses, Cawley works weekdays as an intern for Horan Building. From the moment he met Mark Horan, the founder and president of Horan Building, Cawley said he knew he was teamed with the right person. In recent days, Cawley has been on a job in Newport on Gibbs Avenue.

“I’ve worked for a lot of people and there were definitely days before on those jobs when I didn’t want to go to work,” Cawley said. “Mark isn’t like that. He’s the boss, but he doesn’t act like he’s the boss. I think that’s part of the reason he’s so successful. I feel so, so lucky to be working for him and can’t say ‘Thank you’ enough for the chance he took on me.”

Horan said he was impressed with what he’s seen from Cawley too.

“We are excited to have James Cawley join our team,” Horan said. “Over the last several months he’s had an opportunity to work with some of our best carpenters and has shown a strong work ethic, desire to learn and enthusiasm towards the craft. He has earned the opportunity to join our team. We look forward to a long relationship.”



Cawley’s mother Toni — a beloved third grade teacher at Forest Avenue School — said she and her husband — a physical education teacher and former athletic director at Rogers — are extremely proud of all their son has accomplished.

“As James was growing up, we were pretty sure that his path would involve carpentry,” Toni Cawley said. “He was always up for a trip to Home Depot, especially when it was the first Saturday of the month, that meant it was the Kids Workshop.”



“He started building night stands for a teacher at Gaudet and quickly moved onto paid projects for teachers and friends,” she added. “Watching James make educational choices based around his interest and still catching glimpses of the three year old at Home Depot has paid off for James immensely and we love the smile these opportunities have put on his face.”

Asked what his friends thought about his decision and whether he felt he was missing out on anything, Cawley said far from it.

A member of the Middletown High golf team as well as the Unified Rogers-Middletown-Rocky Hill hockey squad, Cawley’s GPA would put most scholars to shame. He also finds time to run his own business — JPC Lawncare and Landscaping — work as a youth hockey referee and other jobs and volunteer opportunities.

“At first, some of my friends were wondering if I just worked all the time and I can understand why they’d think that, but I really enjoy what I do. Now, they’ll ask me if I can fix things for them,” Cawley said, chuckling.



## “Making Middletown Marvelous”

Melody Mulcahey

Whenever launching a new feature like “Making Middletown Marvelous,” there’s always a certain amount of uncertainty.

Will people get it? Is there interest? What if people are too busy to fill out the form at <https://mdl.town/Marvelous> online? But then the nominations for Melody Mulcahey started flowing in and the rest is history.

Officially, Mulcahey is the first nominee for the new feature “Making Middletown Marvelous” and the Town of Middletown couldn’t think of a better selection.

Described as “great person” who goes above and beyond for the community and its residents, Mulcahey runs a “Middletown RI Residents” page on Facebook. There, Mulcahey posts news items about Middletown, often including information from the Town’s website [MiddletownRI.com](http://MiddletownRI.com).

But that’s not all. Need a job? Mulcahey is known to reach out and try to help. How about an apartment or a place to live or someone to plow a driveway or mow the lawn? Mulcahey’s got your back.

Informed that she’s was the first “Marvelous” nominee, true to form, Mulcahey greeted the news with a smile, thanks and excitement.

Asked why she gives back so much to Middletown, Mulcahey said the answer was simple — her daughter Cynthia, a seventh grader at Gaudet Middle School and son Aiden, a kindergartener at Aquidneck Elementary School.

“My kids are the reason I do everything,” Mulcahey said. “I want them to grow up in a place they are proud of and I want to show them they have the ability to create the lives they want also.”

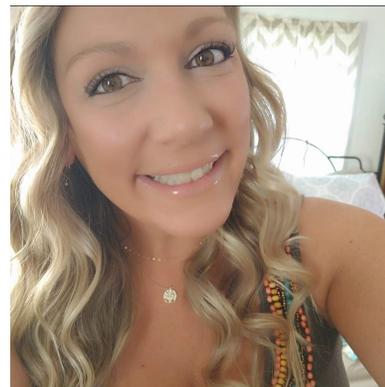
Others said Mulcahey has impacted them in a positive way and she’s always delivers. Another pointed to Mulcahey’s work “marketing” not just Middletown, but Aquidneck Island for years. Whether it’s her “Family Bingo” nights to school fundraisers, organizing community events and so much more, Mulcahey showcases the giving spirit and best that Middletown has to offer.

“When I need something, I always reach out to (Melody) and she never disappoints me,” one person said.

In response, Mulcahey said she was proud to be making such a positive difference in the community.

“Middletown is such a beautiful, unique and special place and I just want to share with as many people as possible all of the great things we have to offer,” Mulcahey said.

*To suggest your “Making Middletown Marvelous” nominee, visit <https://mdl.town/Marvelous> online and submit a form and photo and the the Town will take care of the rest.*



# Middletown Busy With Sewer Work — In Newport

## Memorial Boulevard Force Main Upgrades

Over the past few weeks, Middletown has been busy with a sewer improvement project — in Newport.

As part of the community’s ongoing sewer agreement with the City, the Town is responsible for fixing and maintaining the force main that runs underground along most of Memorial Boulevard.

Town Engineer Warren Hall said the pipe and temporary paving work is expected to wrap up in late May, with a final coat of pavement being put down this fall.

“Keeping our sewer system operating properly is of the highest priority for our Public Works operations,” Hall said. “Through diligence, planning and funding, we keep our system operating at its best.”

Like most sewer and infrastructure work, few want to hear about such projects. That is until something breaks and the toilet or other services aren’t working properly.

The Town ran into just such an issue in July 2006, when a section of the force main by Red Cross Avenue in Newport let go, spilling more than a million gallons of partially treated sewage into Easton’s Bay.

Ultimately, the Town Council opted to replace the entire force main from the Town’s sewer pump station on Wave Avenue to the Bellevue Avenue area.

The Town has made proactive maintenance of the force main — and the rest of the sewer system — a top priority since.

The way the Middletown sewer system is designed, about 90 percent of the effluent from homes and businesses gets routed through the Wave Avenue pump station. There, heavy duty pumps push the wastewater up the hill on Memorial Boulevard on its way for treatment at Newport’s plant on Connell Highway.



Stormwater from rains are handled by a separate system in Middletown.

The town engineer Hall said this portion of the project is replacing the remainder of the force main along Memorial Boulevard that Middletown is responsible for.

All told, Hall said about 1,660 linear feet of the pipe will be slip lined. Through that process, a sock-like material is pulled through the existing line and adheres to the walls after being superheated by steam. The Town has used this technique across the community to dramatically reduce costs and save existing lines, which can have their useful life extended 50 years or more.

Besides the heavy construction equipment and regular activity along the beautiful thoroughfare, a large black pipe serves as a very visible reminder of the ongoing effort. Known as a bypass pipe, that line allows certain segments of the force main to be fixed without having to take the entire system off line.

Hall said the bypass pipe is protected by jersey barriers in case of a motor vehicle accident. At the end of the work day, Hall said sewage flow is returned back to the underground pipe.

The National Water Main Cleaning Company is leading the project, with East Coast Construction and Rain for Rent working as sub-contractors. Funding for the project is through the Middletown Sewer Fund as well as the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank.

# “Where Am I?” In Middletown

## Middletown Valley Improvements



Tree Commission Chairwoman Karen Day said the benches were welcome amenities at the park and have drawn positive reviews.

“The locations were considered for the distance from the entrances and the view provided,” Day said. “It now gives walkers an opportunity to rest and enjoy the park at different intervals along the way.”

As for the park itself, Day said it’s been embraced by those in

the surrounding neighborhoods — as well as the community itself.

“The park continues to be a popular walking destination,” Day said. “We look forward to extending the walkways into the southern area of the park which the Town has acquired. Hopefully this will be done in the near future, after the plans are reviewed by the necessary agencies.”

Town Planner Ronald M. Wolanski said the cost of the benches was paid for through a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation. As for the new trails, Wolanski said ideally construction would start before the end of the year. That way, there would be even more for people to enjoy at Middletown Valley Park.

“The park offers an opportunity for passive outdoor recreation and to experience nature in a densely developed part of town,” Wolanski said.

**W**hen Middletown bought the Kempenaar Valley property, there was talk of transforming it the community’s version of “Central Park.”

Looking at the parcel behind Aquidneck Centre today, it’s not too far off.

Sure, there isn’t a carousel, Strawberry Fields or the Great Lawn, but Middletown Valley Park has evolved into an oasis, just like its better known relative in the heart of New York City.

No matter the weather or time of day, it’s not uncommon to see people walking the packed gravel trails, enjoying the quiet park on High Street and O’Neil Boulevard. Thanks to the work of the Town’s volunteer Tree Commission, a variety of trees now grow there, providing refuge for the birds and small animals that call the park home.

Over the winter, the Town’s Department of Public Works installed new benches in the park, a low-key addition to make the park that much more attractive.



# Dog On The Beach?

ALWAYS ON A LEASH

[HTTPS://MDL.TOWN/DOGS](https://mdl.town/dogs)

A photograph of a beach scene with people sunbathing on lounge chairs. A lifeguard stand is visible in the background, and a large building is on a hill in the distance. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

## Beach Season Begins Saturday, May 28

PARKING PASSES REQUIRED 8 AM-6 PM



MIDDLETOWN  
TOWN OF MIDDLETON