



**PREPPING
FOR ELECTIONS**



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GETTING INPUT**



**CHURCH
RECOGNIZED**



**MAKING
MIDDLETOWN
MARVELOUS**

MIDDLETOWN TODAY

School Regionalization Touted At Forum

If Approved, Education & School Environments Improve

The positives of school regionalization between Newport and Middletown were discussed recently.

During a forum at the Knights Of Columbus Hall on Valley Road, the 50 people on hand heard a consistent message about the opportunities regionalization creates.

More money from the state for education, for sure. But also the possibility of more funding in each of the classrooms as well as improved offerings to students both in and out of school, whether that was more Advanced Placement courses, career ed or extracurriculars.

While organizers acknowledged it will be difficult to map out the specifics until after regionalization was approved, they said there was no doubt it opened many potential doors for improving education across both communities.

"In each of these models, you can see pre/post that there were opportunities that the districts were able to leverage for gains academically, behaviorally, financially," consultant David Sturtz said. "They happened to different degrees in different circumstances, which should be expected. Towns, kids and situations differ, but what was common throughout was when benefits were made financially, academically and behaviorally, they were made intentionally. The adults at the helm intentionally sought to improve the position of their kids and of their district. They looked at the regionalization and took advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves to benefit the kids. Nothing happened laissez faire."

The opening for the forum took on a similar feel as the first two sessions, one in June, the other in July.

In order for regionalization to move forward, Newport and Middletown voters must approve ballot questions on Election Day, Nov. 8 supporting the proposal. Middletown voters are also being asked to back a \$235 million bond for construction of a new middle-high school along with a combined elementary school. In





addition to having clean, safe, new buildings, the fact the state has pledged to pay 80.5 cents of every dollar for the schools is a major selling point. That means the new schools are projected to cost Middletown about \$47 million. The price tag for upgrades to Middletown High School alone are projected at about \$90 million.

And those figures don't include the \$2.4 million to \$4.8 million of annual savings realized from efficiencies by combining the two districts, primarily from cuts to the administrative level.

Newport City Vice Chairwoman Lynne Underwood Ceglie said she'd like to see the councils in Newport and Middletown commit at least some of the overall savings generated by regionalization back into education.

"We were expecting 52.5 percent reimbursement (for new building construction) and now we could possibly get 80.5 percent reimbursement," Ceglie said. "I think it is only fair for the students to benefit from some of that money. Some of it has to go to paying off the bond, but I believe there has to be a promising decision by future councils that there is money that will be used to educate our children."

Former Middletown council President Christopher Semonelli said if regionalization doesn't work, it won't be because of the students.

"I want to commend everybody for working this through and trying to work together," Semonelli said. "It's difficult... (The late) Jamie Crowley was a principal (in the

Bristol Warren School District) and I asked him 'What was it like out there?' and he said 'Chris, it was the parents that had a problem with everybody getting together.' The kids didn't know that they were from two different regions and they got along very well."

Should regionalization be okayed, the state legislation guiding the process lays out a defined timeline to move forward.

That includes the implementation of a transition team to help the two districts merge. A new seven-member regional school committee would be elected during a special election in November 2023. Newport and Middletown would each have three members on that board, with the seventh seat going to the next highest vote getter, regardless of what community they live in.

The regional school committee, regional finance committee and unified school administration will act as the drivers from there. This includes determining what students go to which schools, how the school day will run, the curriculum and other important details.

In Middletown, consultants have outlined a number of exciting possibilities for the new school buildings. Natural lighting, open and inviting learning spaces, safe, secure and state-of-the-art 21st century facilities were among the items that led that list.

The \$47 million projected price tag is a fraction of the \$190 million plus in "Band-Aid" repairs the schools now need to keep the 60- to 70-year-old buildings operational for another 10 or 20 years.

According to consultant designs, a new combined high school-middle school would be built at the former Starlight Drive-In property now multi-use fields at 1225 Aquidneck Ave. next to Gaudet Middle School.

Students in grades six through eight would go to classes 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, a cafeteria and library media center. Importantly, middle and high school students would not use those spaces together.

The combined elementary school would be constructed on part of the existing footprint of Middletown High at 120 Valley

Road. Eventually, both Aquidneck and Forest Avenue elementary schools would close after the new combined elementary school was complete. A pre-kindergarten center for Middletown youngsters will be built on the new elementary school campus too, creating a synergy around early childhood education.

Poll Workers Getting Prepared

Sept. 13 Primary & Election Day Nov. 8 Rapidly Approaching

Local poll workers are getting ready for the upcoming elections. With Sept. 13 primary in Rhode Island less than a month away, more than a dozen Middletown election officials were on hand this week in Town Hall to learn the ins and outs of running an election.

While most in attendance were more than familiar with the process, they acknowledged that every election brings its share of updates, changes and new technology to learn.

Marshall said. "Making sure an election runs smoothly is one of the most important things we do and the Rhode Island Board of Elections does an excellent job making sure we have all the pieces we need."

Marshall said at this point, the town has more than enough poll workers for the Sept. 13 primaries. However, applications to work early November voting and Election Day, Nov. 8 itself were still being accepted at the Town Clerk's office during normal business hours and <https://mdl.town/Election> online.

As poll workers listened attentively to Regan while sitting in front of a large screen, she stressed the importance of following the rules and having checks and balances in place to make sure there were no issues.

During her upbeat, engaging presentation, Regan covered everything from where to place what signs around a polling station to the handling of a ballot, what's expected during the day, what types of IDs people can present to vote and when lunch and dinner breaks should be taken.

"We start the day as a team and end the day as a team," Regan said.

Marshall said she appreciated all the effort the state Board of Elections has put into the 2022 races.

"I know everyone here takes it very seriously," Marshall said. "We're looking forward to the primary and Election Day.



The online training session from the council chambers was led by Jennifer Regan. She works for the Rhode Island Board of Elections with nursing home ballots and training election staff.

"It's important that everyone gets the same training," Town Clerk Wendy J.W.

New Group Formed To Assist With “Middletown Center”

Goal Is To Promote Public Involvement

There are literally hundreds — if not thousands — of different design elements part of “Middletown Center.”

To give the town and its residents even more say over the proposed mixed use development, a new Middletown Center

Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was recently created by the Town Council.

The idea of residents Karen Barbera and Melissa Welch, the goal is to help shape the landscaping, look and elements to give the proposal at 600-740 West Main Road even more of a Middletown feel.

“The purpose of a CAC would be to create a forum where people can offer ideas, make suggestions and explore possibilities, particularly regarding the municipal spaces for the project,” Welch said at a prior meeting. “For example, the proposed tower on the corner of West Main and Coddington, we’ve come up with a design modeled after a windmill that actually stood on West Main Road back in the 1800s.”

“This committee could help facilitate the outcome of the overall look, feel and use of the open space as well as help fulfill the goals

of the project,” Barbera said. “It is very important that it should feel authentic to Middletown, not a cookie cutter, generic development that could be anywhere in any state. The group could help develop a place that draws people to it, that functions by the thoughtful use of space in its buildings and

grounds as the community center that all residents can enjoy.”

The town and the Middletown Center development team are in the process of negotiating a ground lease and other specifics for the future use

of the 15-acre site between Coddington Highway and Valley Road.

Local officials have said if the project is developed, it would bring some much needed revenue from the land, which hasn’t generated a nickel in taxes since at least World War II. That’s true even though the site is in the heart of Middletown’s commercial district.

They’ve also spoken highly of the new housing, spaces for small businesses and construction of a new public library, which is envisioned on the northern part of the site.

Town Solicitor Peter B. Regan said he spoke with Girard Galvin about the Citizens Advisory Committee recently and the attorney was firmly on board with the





concept. Galvin represents Christopher Bicho, James Karam and Rocky Kempenaar, the local development group the town teamed up with to reuse the "Middletown Center" property.

Regan said there were no announcements yet regarding the negotiations around "Middletown Center," but talks were ongoing.

Previously, Barbera and Welch said the CAC could serve as a clearinghouse for residents to air their constructive ideas about what they'd like to see aesthetically from "Middletown Center."

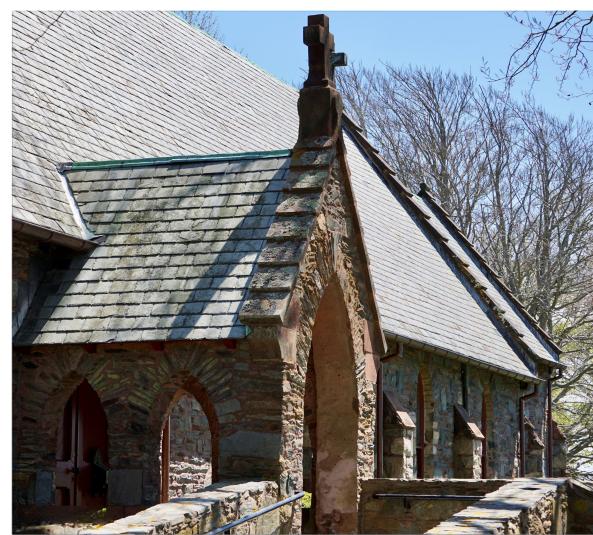
They were both clear the CAC would not interfere with the current planning work happening at the Middletown Public Library. However, they said if the library wanted help designing the space out front of its new proposed location to act as a "gateway" to the facility, they were ready to help.

"We realize the library staff is already thinking about what's needed for a new library and we would not seek to duplicate their efforts, but we would hope to share ideas with them and coordinate our approaches," Welch said.

Ideally, the CAC would act as a clearinghouse for ideas from residents. They said the group could also channel that information to the town, the developers and serve as a preliminary focus group. They also said the CAC could work to secure grant money to help pay for add-ons to the "Middletown Center" project and similar efforts.

Historic Local Church & Churchyard Added To National Register Of Historic Places

St. Columba's, The Berkeley Memorial Chapel on Vaucluse Avenue is recognized for contributions to architecture, art and community development by the National Park Service. The Register is the federal government's official list of locations across the country whose historical and architectural importance makes them worthy of preservation.



Making Middletown Marvelous

Katie Tavares

Just getting to school and making it through the day is an accomplishment for some students.

As the Homeless and Family Liaison for the Middletown school system, Katie Tavares knows this reality far too well.

A social worker by trade, Tavares said she tries to emphasize the positives for students and staff, just part of the reason she was nominated recently for "Making Middletown Marvelous."

"The reason I went into social work is I want to help others like my former teachers and educators helped me in the past," Tavares said. "I became a social worker because I wanted to be able to help others and in a way repay others who have helped and supported me throughout my life. I have a passion for guiding others in the right direction and proving an ear to listen to."

Tavares works under Aquidneck Elementary School Principal Erica Bulk and Superintendent Rosemarie K. Kraeger through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The federal act provides rights and services to children and youth experiencing homelessness. That includes those sharing housing with others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; staying in motels, trailer parks, or camp grounds due to the lack of an adequate alternative; staying in shelters or transitional housing; or sleeping in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, or similar settings.

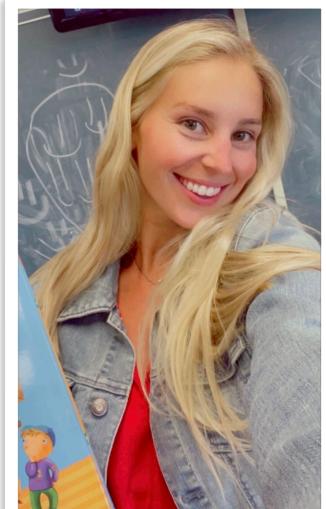
Despite what some might think, there is a real problem with homelessness in Middletown. According to 2021 data from Rhode Island Kids Count, Middletown has the second highest level of childhood homelessness in the state, trailing only Providence. That's where experts like Tavares and others in the school community step in to help, rallying around each student to provide additional supports for success.

"Unfortunately, there is an issue of homelessness in Middletown," Tavares said.

"As the District Homeless and Family Liaison, I provide services to the children and youth in the McKinney-Vento Program to help them overcome obstacles and barriers to receiving an education and assist families with social services needs. I plan, oversee, and monitor those social services. Under the direction of Superintendent, Rosemarie Kraeger and Aquidneck Elementary School, Principal, Erica Bulk, I am the bridge between the home, school, and community, with the goal of supporting children and families to achieve and make

sure their basic needs are met and children can attain educational success within Middletown Public Schools. I work with students and parents, building staff, and community members to meet the needs of the all students."

"She is a proactive social worker who is always working with students and families," Bulk said. "She is always willing to work with kids to help them navigate their emotions. She is friendly and welcoming to all. She works as a great team member to get students and families the services that they need. She is always in classes and hallways to help students feel welcomed at Aquidneck."



Where Am I?"

Pebble Beach

There are 10 state recognized public rights of way to the water across Middletown.

Only one leads to the beauty and majesty of Pebble Beach.

Located on Kingfisher Drive at the intersection of Indian and Peckham avenues, the rocky isolated beach features a panoramic view of the town's Third Beach, the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge along with the Sakonnet Light and Sakonnet River itself.

The entrance to the right-of-way is well marked with a Coastal Resources Management Council sign. Another specifies the area is maintained by Clean Ocean Access, the local nonprofit group that cleans up various locations across Aquidneck Island.

For years, the parking situation for the right-of-way — known as "Y-7" in many circles — was an issue.

However, after the town created designated parking on the right-of-way itself in April 2017, those problems have largely been addressed. Now, there are spaces available on a first come, first served basis for anyone looking to visit the scenic spot.

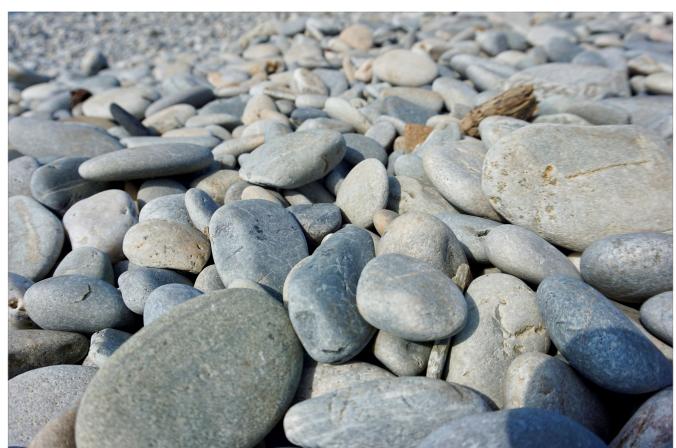
In terms of getting to the shoreline itself, Pebble Beach can be a test. To the right, there's a steep slope that presents a challenge even to the most fleet of foot. The most direct route to the beach is a path that requires visitors to jump from stone to stone.

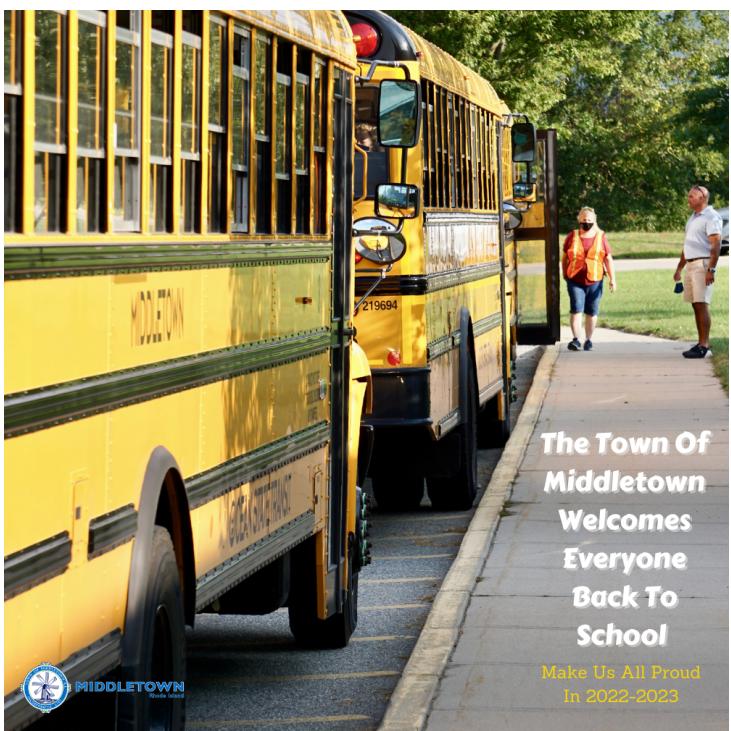
Once on the shoreline, thousands upon thousands of stones of various sizes make up the beach, earning the place its name.

On one recent morning, the distinctive sound of waves smoothing stones fills the air as a group of fishermen cast lines into the water.

For those who've visited the shoreline along the eastern side of Sachuest Point

wildlife refuge, the area has a number of similarities, but is typically far less trafficked.





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 MIDDLETOWN
Rhode Island

ELECTION WORKERS NEEDED

For Early Voting & General Election Day Tuesday, Nov. 8

- Come help democracy in action
- For information, call 401.847.0009 or 401.849.5540
- All election workers must attend a mandatory training session
- Election workers will receive a stipend for their service