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BEE·INTELLIGENCER

Informing the towns of Middlebury, Southbury, Woodbury, Naugatuck, Oxford and Watertown

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Officials present test results

By NANCY DZIJA VAUGHAN

MIDDLEBURY/SOUTHBURY – The Region 15 Board of Education, meeting November 9, listened to a presentation comparing district standardized test results to the state and to the District Reference Group (DRG B) towns. A Connecticut DRG is a group of public school districts with similar socioeconomic status and student needs.

Superintendent Joshua Smith and Assistant Superintendent Carrie Chiappetta reviewed assessment data for Smarter Balanced, School Day SAT, AP tests, and district and school performance indices. They provided comparisons to the state and DRG B results for the Smarter Balanced and School Day SAT results.

Smith asked the board and listeners to refer back to previous board meetings for more detailed information and for School Improvement Plan presentations.

The overall District Performance Index on Smarter Balanced assessments for Region 15 was 79. DRG B, the group of towns with demographics similar to Region 15, was 81.97. Selected town scores on the slide presentation were: Avon, 83; Brookfield, 82.5; Cheshire, 83.3; Monroe, 81.4; Newtown, 81.3; and Region 14, 82.3.

On the Smarter Balanced, the district's student performance increased in ELA (English/Language Arts) over the past two years, both viewed from year to year and also as cohort data following a group of students from one grade to the next. Strategies included the use of phonics, updated resources, and professional development.

The district did especially well in math, outscoring both the state and DRG B in Grades 3 and 5. The state tests science in grades 5, 8, and 11. Region 15 students scored higher than both the state and the DRG in grades 5 and 8.

On the School Day SAT, students met or exceeded the state's test goal with 74.6% percent in ELA (versus 55.3% for the state and 77.2% for the DRG) and with 48% in math (versus 31.1 for the state and 53.6% for the DRG). The district saw improvements in both ELA and math from the previous year.

The district reported 365 students took a total of 802 AP tests last year. Of those 365 students, 355, or 92%, scored three or better on the exams, AP tests are scored from one to five, with five equivalent to an A. An AP Scholar summary shows 177 students received some type of AP scholar recognition, scoring an average of 3.98 points.

Several years ago, the state initiated an Accountability System Index, the percentage of total possible points a school or district earns across 12 holistic performance indicators under the state's Next Generation Accountability System. This system scores schools and districts based on a number of criteria in addition to test performance, including participation in assessments, chronic absenteeism, preparation for college and career, physical fitness, arts access, and graduation success. It takes into account the performance of high needs students as well as all students.

The overall district level ASI was 79. The DRG was 81.97. Individual schools were as follows: Gainfield, 87.5; Long Meadow, 82.5; Middlebury Elementary, 82.8; Pomperaug Elementary, 78.7; Memorial, 65.8; Rochambeau, 70.3; and Pomperaug High School, 78.

Based on these numbers, schools are placed into one of five categories, with the high-performing schools in category one and the lowest performing schools in category 5. Region 15 has schools in categories 1, 2, and 3. Schools eligible to be placed in Categories 1 or 2 based on the numbers are dropped if there is an outlier achievement gap, a graduation gap or a participation gap.

Gainfield is in Category 1, the other three elementary schools are in Category 2, and the two middle schools and high school are in Category 3. Memorial has a gap in both ELA and math, Rochambeau has a gap for math, and the high school has a gap for science, and for participation for high needs students in ELA, math and science.

Smith and Chiappetta also reviewed some of the many strategies the district has implemented to help improve student achievement on these standardized tests, including assuring that students are exposed to the types of questions found on these assessments and continued work on supporting students in the classroom.

School staff have also begun emphasizing the importance of doing well on these state tests. Smith noted Connecticut is one of the few states that use the SAT as a state assessment. Some students ask why they need to take it. There also is some apathy among students taking the Next Gen science test in Grade 11, Smith said.

Following the presentation, board member Steve Suriani said he found himself feeling optimistic after listening to this and previous presentations from district administration on the assessment results and school improvement plans. He said he felt the district will continue to turn things around. "Based on what I've seen so far, in the past year," he said, he would "borrow a quote from Bill Clinton and say, 'I believe there's nothing wrong with Region 15 that can't be fixed.'"

The board recognized three Pomperaug High School seniors, Luke Bevilacqua, Abigail Friedman, and Shaivi Gaddam, as Commended Students in the 2027 National Merit Scholarship Program. They earned the designation for placing among the top 1% of students on the 2025 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.

In other action, the board approved the Three-Year School Calendar (2027-28, 2028-29, and 2029-30) as presented. It also approved the educational specifications for the roof replacement and solar project at Middlebury Elementary School.



L to R, Make a Home Foundation co-founder Anita Pettengill, Middlebury Lions Club President John J. Holmes and foundation co-founder Dan Telesco display a $1,000 donation check at the foundation's Middlebury facility on Veterans Day, Nov. 11. Part of the organization's showroom offerings are visible. (Terry McAuliffe photo)

Lions donate funds

By TERRENCE S. MCAULIFFE

MIDDLEBURY – The Middlebury Lions Club presented a $1,000 donation to Make a Home Foundation on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2026, in support of the Middlebury-based nonprofit organization that provides furniture and household essentials to veterans and others in need. Anita Pettengill, who co-founded Make a Home Foundation with her husband, Dan Telesco, in 2010, spoke to Lions Club members at their Oct. 14 meeting about the organization's work and its current needs.

The couple established the foundation after watching an Oprah Winfrey television program about homeless female veterans. What Pettengill and Telesco began as an effort to help veterans soon expanded to serve others facing difficult circumstances, including families escaping domestic violence, victims of fires and floods, people experiencing homelessness, individuals with disabilities and seniors in need.

The foundation collects donated furniture and household goods and puts them to use helping individuals and families establish homes. What began with a small pickup truck has grown into an operation occupying a 7,000-square-foot facility at 199 Park Road Extension in Middlebury.

During her Lions Club presentation, Pettengill explained that the organization hopes to replace its aging truck, which is essential to collecting donated furnishings and delivering them to people in need. In addition to accepting donated household goods, Make a Home Foundation raises funds through an eBay store and monthly online auctions featuring donated merchandise. The Lions Club's unrestricted contribution will support the foundation's ongoing charitable work.

For more information about Make a Home Foundation and its activities, visit makeahome.org.

Selectmen choose town counsel

By MARJORIE NEEDHAM

The Middlebury Board of Selectmen, at their November 16, 2026, meeting, appointed Zabel Schellenberg of New Haven as the new town attorneys some eight months after Middlebury First Selectwoman Jennifer Mahr first brought the firm's name before the board. The appointment fills the vacancy created when Middlebury First Selectwoman Jennifer Mahr terminated the town's agreement with former counsel, Robert W. Smith, on March 3, 2026.

As previously reported, the Board of Selectmen, in a 2-1 vote on March 18, 2026, appointed Barbara Schellenberg of the firm Zabel Schellenberg to serve as town attorney through the June 30, 2026, end of the current fiscal year. First Selectwoman Jennifer Mahr and Selectman Brian Shaban supported the hiring while Selectman J. Paul Vance Jr. did not. A lengthy discussion preceded the vote.

At the June 1, 2026, selectmen's meeting Mahr made a motion to appoint Barbara M. Schellenberg and Zabel Schellenberg as town attorney, noting their familiarity with legal issues the town was facing. Shaban seconded the motion with the condition the board would wait through the June 23 special election so whichever selectman was seated then could have a say in the vote. Shaban won that election.

Mahr disagreed with waiting because that would leave the town without an attorney between June 30 and its July 6 meeting. Shaban said there would be no gap. Vance motioned to amend the appointment so it ended July 31, 2026. The motion passed unanimously.

At the July 20 meeting, Shaban and Vance pushed for the town issuing an RFP for the town attorney appointment. Mahr motioned to continue to appoint Schellenberg with discussion continuing without a second to the motion. Mahr then amended her motion to appoint Schellenberg for 90 days starting August 1, 2026, to provide time for the RFP process. Discussion again continued without a second to the motion. Shaban and Vance said the motion didn't mention an RFP. The motion was unanimously approved and then

See **Town Counsel** ... *Page 7*

Commission sets hearing

By MARJORIE NEEDHAM

The Middlebury Planning and Zoning Commission, at their November 5, 2026 meeting, set a public hearing for an application from Kade Courtois for 927 Southford Road LLC for Thursday, December 3, 2026, at 7 p.m. in Shepardson Community Center, Room 26. Applications seek a special exception for excavation and grading and site plan approval for industrial/commercial building.

Per the commission's minutes, the 927 Southford Road site is a 5.1-acre parcel in the GID District, to the southeast, bordered by Interstate 84 and across the road from Middlebury Pickle ball. The land is vacant except for an existing home.

The project is planned in two phases. Phase 1 plans include two industrial buildings. Building 1 is 6,960 square feet, with four 1,740-square-foot units. It will have its own standalone access way and associated parking. The drainage system does not connect to the DOT. The site has its own standalone retention pond, which will overflow into the existing wetlands if necessary.

There are three wetland pockets. The two standalone pockets are closer to the center of the site and are relatively small. The larger pocket is along the northeastern edge of the property and extends inward. Wetlands approval has already been granted, and the applicant is currently seeking WPCA permits for sewer and water.

Building 1 will have 140 4-by-4 units and an underground retention and filtration system. Building 2 will have 245 4-by-4 units. Phase 2 will not include these units; instead, storm water will flow into the retention pond and, during severe storms, through a pipe in the northeast toward the wetlands, where it can infiltrate.

The applicant is seeking a special exception for earthwork because of the amount proposed. Phase 1 will involve 2.72 acres of disturbance, with 75 cubic yards of cut and 44 cubic yards of fill. Phase 2 has a smaller footprint but is in a more regulated area. A total of 0.67 acres of disturbance is proposed, with 610 cubic yards of cut and 550 cubic yards of fill. The two phases will have a combined total of 1,025 cubic

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Editorial Office:
Email: mbisubmit@gmail.com
Phone: 203-577-6800
Mail: P.O. Box 10, Middlebury, CT 06762

Advertising Sales:
Email: mbiadvertising@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

SATURDAY Dec. 5

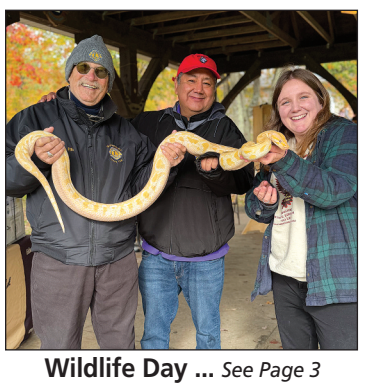
Middlebury Tree Lighting on the Green
What: New this year – Connecticut Yuletide Carolers will join the community caroling around the Green. Also enjoy children's performances, Santa arriving to light the tree, and visits with Santa in Town Hall following the tree lighting. Please enter via the side entrance. Westover's Red Hall will be open 3-6 p.m. Middlebury Congregational Church serves hot chocolate during tree lighting.
When: 4 p.m.
Where: Starts in front of Town Hall.

SATURDAY Dec. 5 – SATURDAY Dec. 12

St. George's Episcopal Church Gingerbread Village
What: Gingerbread Village tour, bazaar, raffle baskets, baked items, gingerbread cookie kits.
When: Saturday, December 5 - 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Sunday, December 6 - 12 to 7 p.m.; Monday through Friday, December 7 to 11, 2 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m.; Saturday, December 12 – 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Where: Free parking and admission (donations welcome). Church is on Tucker Hill Road in Middlebury.

Through MONDAY Dec. 14

Santa's Big Red Mailbox
What: Middlebury children can place their letters to Santa in the mailbox.
When: Starts November 26 and ends Monday, Dec. 14, at 3 p.m.
Where: Shepardson Community Center field near the gazebo.
Info: Santa will answer letters received by the Dec. 14 deadline.



Wildlife Day ... *See Page 3*

Send mail to:
P.O. Box 10, Middlebury, CT 06762
203-577-6800