BEE·INTELLIGENCER

in•tel•li•gen•cer: n. One who conveys news or information
The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th ed.

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Submit press releases in person, by mail or email.
The Bee-Intelligencer welcomes news, press releases and advertising from all surrounding communities.

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January issue deadlines

Submit all ads and press releases by Wed., Dec. 16.
Send ads to **mbiadvertising@gmail.com**
Send press releases to **beeintelligencer@gmail.com**

Editorial

Voices leaves a void

The November 4, 2026, front page article, "Today Marks the End of an Era" shocked "Voices" readers. Holding the newspaper in their hands, they were shocked to learn it was the last printed "Voices" to be delivered to their homes.

We were shocked, too. We passionately believe in the importance of delivering local news to readers, and we see the loss of any community newspaper as a tragedy.

We hope to fill the void this loss has created. It's not something we can do overnight, but it is our goal, a goal many would say is impossible to achieve, but we have to try.

At times like this, we think of a book from our childhood memories, "The Little Engine That Could" by Walter Piper. In it, a small train engine is determined to pull a heavy load of children's toys and food over a steep mountain. As it strives to do this, it chants, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can." And it succeeds!

We think we can, too, but it's not going to happen overnight. And we can't do it without support from readers like you who believe a local newspaper is worth having. To succeed, we need advertisers to provide revenue, and we need readers who give their business to those advertisers.

As a start, while we continue to mail copies to Middlebury addresses, we will increase the number of copies distributed to all the abutting towns. For now, readers there will need to pick up a copy while running their errands, but there will be more copies available for pick-up. Is mailing copies to their homes a future possibility? We can't yet say it is.

We also are updating our list of pickup locations. If you know of a high-traffic location in your town that would allow copies to be left there, please use the contact information listed below to tell us about it. You can find the current list of locations on page 6 of this issue.

As we launch this new endeavor, we are grateful for our long-time advertisers, some of whom have been with us for more than 20 years. We also are grateful to those advertising with us for the first time in the December 2026 issue.

On the editorial side, we are grateful that Nancy Djzija Vaughan has joined us and will continue to report on Southbury board and commission meetings. We'd love to chat with other folks with newspaper experience who are interested in helping us move forward.

Now for some helpful information:

Submit press releases for the January 2027 issue to beeintelligencer@gmail.com by Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2026.

Submit ads for the January 2027 issue to mbiadvertising@gmail.com by Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2026.

We welcome letters to the editor, which also need to be submitted by Dec. 16, 2026. Our guidelines are: Letters run as space permits. Please limit letters to 500 words, avoid personal attacks and understand letters will be edited minimally. For verification purposes, please include your name, address, and daytime telephone number. Only names and towns will be published. Anonymous letters will not be printed.

The fee for running an obituary is $100 for the first 150 or fewer words and $50 for each additional 100 or fewer words. The fee includes the photo and both print and digital publication.

Contact us by phone at 203-577-6800. Our mailing address is Middlebury Bee-Intelligencer, P. O. Box 10, Middlebury, CT 06762. Email us at beeintelligencer@gmail.com.

The road ahead may be rocky at times, but if we work with each other and help each other, how can we fail? Probably in many ways, but we prefer to focus on ways we can succeed. We hope to be "the little newspaper that could" and we'll keep saying, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can" until we do so.

If you are interested in learning more about challenges small town newspapers can face, you may enjoy watching the following documentaries:

On Peacock, "Kill. Bury. Print." The title refers to what newspapers can do with an article. They can kill it, or not run it at all. They can bury it, or place it so it will be easily overlooked. Or they can print it for all to read.

"Seized," on Prime Video, is an American documentary film directed by Sharon Liese. It investigates the 2023 police raid on the Marion County Record newspaper in Marion, Kansas, and the subsequent death of its 98-year-old co-owner, journalist Joan Meyer.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor may be emailed to **mbisubmit@gmail.com** or mailed to **Middlebury Bee-Intelligencer, P.O. Box 10, Middlebury, CT 06762.**

Letters to the editor run as space permits. Please limit letters to 500 words, avoid personal attacks and understand letters will be edited. For verification purposes, please include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Only names and towns will be published. Anonymous letters will not be printed.

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide or experiencing a mental health or substance abuse crisis, 988 provides a connection to confidential support 24/7. There is hope: Just call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org #988Lifeline

Not experiencing a crisis, but still want information, resources and support? Call 1-800-950-6264 Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

ZBA denies appeal

By NANCY DZIJA VAUGHAN

SOUTHBURY – The Zoning Board of Appeals, following a November 4, 2026, public hearing, voted to deny a Glen Lane couple's appeal of the Zoning Enforcement Officer's decision against the placement of what they call an ornamental well on their property. ZEO Deandra Nevin said the structure is too large to be an ornamental well, and members ultimately agreed, though somewhat reluctantly.

The ZBA first considered this particular structure in 2025 after the homeowners built what they termed a "shade structure" and placed it close to the pavement in their cul-de-sac. Children from the neighborhood, including their own, used the covered space to wait for the school bus every morning and to play together in the afternoon or on weekends. It also became a place where neighborhood residents gathered for barbecues and block parties. Its location near the pavement allowed elderly neighbors or those with disabilities to esily join in. Unfortunately, the town's regulations do not allow a structure to be located within the setback, and Nevin cited them and told them it had to be removed.

The couple appealed to the ZBA, and the ZBA heard their appeal on November 5, 2025. At that time, Brian Catlin of 92 Glen Lane argued the community had built the structure and no complaints about its existence had been received since it was built in early 2023. He said the area's uneven terrain and other factors made it difficult to supervise children playing in the cul-de-sac or waiting for the school bus.

To meet the definition of temporary, someone added wheels to the structure so it could be moved if necessary or periodically moved to maintain its status as temporary. After town counsel Thomas Kaelin advised the ZBA that you cannot turn a structure into something that is not a structure simply by adding wheels to it, members voted 4-2 to deny the appeal.

When the homeowners added the ornamental well feature this summer, Nevin again cited the couple for a structure in the setback. Catlin and Katrina Sweezea of 92 Glen Lane argued nothing in the town's regulations limits the size of an ornamental well. They said the structure in question includes a stone wall feature, a roof, a rope, a pulley, and a bucket and is ornamental only. They once again filed an appeal of the ZEO's decision.

During the start of the September public hearing on this latest appeal, Catlin argued the structure was consistent with historical well houses found both in Europe and in old New England. He pointed out the town's regulations do not give specifications for ornamental wells, which are listed as being exempt as structures.

In September, Sweezea asked ZBA Chairman Mark Kane if he could honestly say he had an open mind and could consider both sides equally during his deliberations. Kane responded that, given her question, he felt he should recuse himself. He then left the meeting room, bringing the hearing to a halt because the ZBA no longer had a quorum.

Vice Chairman Len LaBonia was seated as chairman for the November 4, 2026, hearing on whether or not Nevin was correct in ruling the structure was not an ornamental well.

Catlin said his understanding was that the board had to "apply the regulations that exist today." He noted the regulations, as written, define a structure and specifically state that a structure 'shall not include a flagpole or ornamental well.' "The regulations do not provide criteria for determining the size of an ornamental well," he said. Nevin said that, during a recent visit to Glen Lane, it appeared to her that the structure was still being used as a gathering place for the local community. She observed chairs and pumpkins around the structure. Sweezea said the interior of the structure had been blocked off.

After closing the hearing, Commissioner Kathryn Smith made a motion to deny the appeal, with Commissioner Jennifer Wysocki seconding it. Wysocki said that, while she was in favor of the structure in the past, she did not believe it fit the definition of an ornamental well. Commissioner Christopher Smudin noted the applicants have tried numerous times to get this passed, and he found himself asking, "Where does the line stand?" Smith said that while she appreciates what the applicants are trying to do, she felt the structure did not qualify as an ornamental well. LaBonia agreed. The motion passed unanimously.

In other action, a public hearing on an application submitted by Susan Potz of 375 Peter Road was continued to December 2, 2026. The application seeks a variance to install a prefabricated 12' x 24' single car garage within the street and side yard setbacks.

Letters to the Editor

Litter is a problem

To the Editor:

Driving around Watertown and Oakville, it is very disheartening to see litter on the streets and roads. I cannot believe that the people in this town are so disrespectful and just leave bottles, cans, McDonald's and Burger King, etc. litter all over.

It is so simple to put a litter bag in your vehicle and and empty it when you get home. The town is not your dump. I just hope whoever is doing this will stop and think before throwing garbage out of your vehicle.

Let's start by stopping litter and start being nice to each other. A smile goes a long way and helping others is priceless.

Denise Russ
Watertown, CT

Clearing up confusion

To the Editor:

The last two months of Board of Selectmen (BOS) meetings have illuminated an unsettling trend in how our local government functions, and I'd like to clear up some unnecessary confusion. As your first selectwoman, I'll first reassure any group of residents that if you have an idea, research it, and present it to the BOS, I will take you seriously no matter who you are, where you happen to live in town, or what your political affiliation is. Whether you're advocating for a dog park, amenities at the MRA, a walkable downtown, turf fields for our kids, the library opening on Saturdays in the summer, or whatever else you're passionate about, I will never dismiss an idea simply because of who had the idea.

Second, I say what I mean and mean what I say. If you ask me a question, I always do the research to answer it as correctly as possible. I know when I don't know the answer to a question, and I know how to find out who does know the answer. I respect other people's time and I don't waste it by playing games with information.

It is true that political discourse is not meant to be harmonious 100% of the time. The value of different perspectives is that a 360-degree view of a problem or new idea increases the opportunity for that problem to be solved or the idea moved closer to functioning reality, and sometimes disagreement is part of that process. Disagreement as disruption, however, is not helpful. I'm here to solve problems and move new ideas forward: a dedicated school resource officer for Middlebury schools, e-bike safety training for our middle schoolers, and winter maintenance of the Greenway stand as proof of my commitment to good ideas that benefit our residents.

The reason I support a Historic Properties Commission (HPC) has nothing to do with the people who suggested it, what those people may or may not be doing elsewhere, or the location of the first property under consideration. To quote President Lincoln, "The legitimate object of government, is to do for a community of people, whatever they need to have done, but can not do, at all, or can not, so well do, for themselves – in their separate, and individual capacities." This is why the town purchased Fenn's Farm (or Brookdale Farm) for $1.6M in 2006 and pays yearly to maintain the property, is it not?

The historic look and size of this property for our town identity was worth preserving for all time, and it took all of us together to make that commitment possible. For a town proud of its Revolutionary War history, fear of preserving our historic buildings, and especially our town-owned buildings, is irrational, and it unnecessarily costs taxpayers access to preservation grants for much needed maintenance and repairs.

I don't support the creation of a Historic District Commission (HDC) as first selectwoman for the same reason I don't care for the politics of homeowner associations (HOA): it would be one thing if rules were fairly created, equally applied, and always enforced, but we all know that's never the case. HOA rules in particular can degrade to being about keeping undesirable elements out, instead of inviting community-building elements in. A Historic Properties Commission (HPC), by contrast, is process-oriented – the mechanism by which a property can voluntarily be legally designated in order to become a permanent part of the town's living character. The difference between the two commissions, in my opinion, is the amount of control and input a HPC gives the property owner from start to finish. If a HPC was created and only accepted town-owned buildings, it would be more than worth it given just the buildings we own and maintain on Whittemore Road. I see no legitimate reason to deny willing homeowners access to the same process.

Jennifer Mahr
First Selectwoman
Middlebury, CT

Commission

... *cont'd from* ***Pg 1***

yards of fill and 2,570 cubic yards of cut.

The landscaping plan will leave a large portion of the site untouched, specifically the forested area. The applicant proposes to revegetate the disturbed area with 10 trees, 118 shrubs and bushes, and 13 perennial native grasses that will spread.

Chairman Terry Smith asked whether the home on the property would be torn down for the Phase 2 building. The applicant replied the plan is to renovate the home and use it as a rental. The primary focus is currently Buildings 1 and 2.

Phase 2 will come later and the house may be demolished at a later time, depending on the rental's success. Terry Smith asked whether the applicant was willing to hold the public hearing in December despite the chairman's absence. The applicant replied yes.

Zoning Enforcement Officer Curtis Bosco confirmed the applicant submitted the review fee for the Town Planner on the day of the meeting.

A motion by Paul Anderson to accept the applications and set the hearing date was seconded by Joseph Mancini. It will be on the agenda for the December 3, 2026 Planning and Zoning Commission meeting, which will be held at 7 p.m. in Shepardson Community Center Room 26. The motion passed unanimously.

Middlebury Senior Center/Social Services

The Elderly & Social Services office is open Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Shepardson Community Center at 1172 Whittemore Road. Phone: 203-577-4166.

Holidays – The Senior Center/Social Services office will be closed Friday, December 25, 2026, for the Christmas Day.

Annual Christmas Party – The Middlebury Senior Center annual Christmas party will be Thursday, December 10, 2026. The fee is $20 per person. Call 203-577-4166 for more information.

Shopping – The Senior Center minibus will travel to ShopRite in Southbury Mondays, December 7 and 21, and to Walmart in Naugatuck Thursday, December 17, leaving the Senior Center at 9:30 a.m.

Thursday lunches – Senior Nutrition Services offers lunches every Thursday as eat-in or take out for a $3.50 donation. Each meal includes an entree, vegetable, fruit, bread and milk. There will be no lunch Thursday, December 24. For the menu, call 203-577-4166.

Blood Drive – A blood drive will be held Wednesday, December 23, from 12 to 5 p.m. Register online at RedCrossBlood.org or call 800-733-2767 for an appointment and get a $10 Amazon Gift Card.

Blood Pressure Check – The visiting nurse can check your blood pressure every Tuesday between 10 a.m. and noon.

Karate Class – The class meets Thursdays, from 9 to 10:30 a.m. For more information, call 203-758-2420.

Cooking Class – Wednesday, December 16, at noon, seniors are invited to a free cooking class. Learn simple budget-friendly recipes, share a few laughs, and enjoy the joy of cooking together and meeting new friends. Call to reserve your spot, 203-577-4166.

Volunteers needed – The IRS-sponsored Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) programs have offered free tax preparation and financial education to millions of taxpayers since 1969. They provide free tax return preparation for low-to-moderate income and elderly taxpayers, and they are looking for volunteers.

To volunteer or get more information, call 800-906-9887. Learn how to make a difference in your community by volunteering or learn how to become a VITA/TCE program partner.

Computers – Sean Howard leads an Ancestry workshop every Tuesday and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Call Sean at 203-577-4166, ext. 4, for more information.

Book Club – The book club meets the last Wednesday of the month, December 30. If you love to read, call 203-577-4166 for more information.

Generation Power Assistance – This program began September 1, 2026. Applications will be accepted only during the following dates: December 1 to 15, 2026, and March 1 to 15, 2027. Call 203-577-4166 for more information.

Connecticut CEAP Energy Assistance – Applications are being accepted for December deliveries. Call 203-577-4166 for an appointment.

AARP Driving Class – The next class will be Monday, March 8, 2027, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Refresh your driving skills and knowledge of the rules of the road. Learn techniques for handling left turns, right-of-way and roundabouts. Take the course and you might save money on your auto insurance! The fee is $20 for members and $25 for non-members, payable by checks made out to AARP. Registration is required at 203-577-4166.

The Food Bank is open to is open to Middlebury residents by appointment, and the office can assist those applying for SNAP benefits. If you need the food bank and can't get there during regular hours, call 203-577-4166 to see if arrangements can be made for you to pick up food.

Call 203-577-4166, or email JoAnn Cappelletti at jcappelletti@middlebury-ct.org if you need assistance. Find them on Facebook @MiddleburyCTsrCTR.