Middlebury Meeting Calendar*

Tuesday, December 1
Parks & Recreation, 7 p.m. ..... Shepardson, Room 7
Wednesday, December 2
Land Preservation & Open Space, 7 p.m. ..... Shepardson, Room 7
Zoning Board of Appeals, 7:30 p.m. ..... Shepardson, Room 26
Thursday, December 3
Planning & Zoning, 7 p.m. ..... Shepardson, Room 26

Monday, December 7
Board of Selectmen,** 5 p.m. .....Town Hall Conf. Room
Tuesday, December 8
Library Board of Trustees, 4:30 p.m. ..... Library Meeting Room
Wednesday, December 9
Board of Finance, 7 p.m. ..... Town Hall Conf. Room
Thursday, November 10
Retirement Planning Committee, 1 p.m. ..... Town Hall Conf. Room

Monday, December 14
Police Commission, 6 p.m. ..... Police Department
Tuesday, December 15
Water Pollution Control Authority, 7:30 p.m. ..... Shepardson, Room 26

**Meeting details sometimes change after our deadline. Please check them and find agendas online at MiddleburyCT.gov*
***The Board of Selectmen will meet once in December.*



From the desk of ...
First Selectwoman Jennifer Mahr

This time of year, I am thankful for many things: sweater weather, cozy nights by the fireplace, Christmas music and decorations before Thanksgiving, and the comfort of holiday routines. For me personally, December 1 marks one year as First Selectwoman, and it is also the beginning of budget season for the FY 2027-28 Budget that begins July 1, 2027.

Chapter VII of the Town Charter prescribes the budget process: Department budgets are due December 1; the Board of Finance meets with Departments starting in January; the Board of Selectmen (BOS) and Board of Finance (BOF) meet no later than the February Board of Finance meeting to discuss recommended changes; the BOF prepares a proposed budget by March 15; a joint BOF/BOS meeting is held at least five weeks prior to the Annual Budget Referendum to vote on the proposed budget to be presented at a public hearing; the public hearing is held at least four weeks prior to the Annual Budget Referendum; the Annual Budget Referendum is held the first Wednesday after the first Monday in May; and the BOF meets to set the mill rate immediately following approval of the annual budget (same night as the Referendum).

All of these meetings are open to the public to attend (most will be held in the Town Hall Conference Room), and there is an opportunity for public comment. If something is on your mind about what the town should or shouldn't be budgeting for, I encourage you to attend a meeting and offer public comment or email your thoughts/concerns to firstselectman@middleburyct.gov.

My concerns for the upcoming budget cycle are for our insurance/medical insurance costs, the impact of two new collective bargaining contracts (police union and clerical union) that expire June 30, 2027, and the capital improvements that we need to make. I'm specifically referring to catching up on our road replacement/main-tenance schedule, addressing aging park facilities (MRA tennis court, Meadowview playground, Ledgewood basketball/ tennis courts, etc.), replacing roofs at the police and fire departments, and finishing the sprinkler project at the fire department. While we already have funds set aside for the roof projects, the recent fuel oil spill during an oil delivery at the fire department (and resulting remediation thereof) revealed a 30-year-old oil storage tank that must be replaced by July 16, 2027. We do not currently have the reserve funds to do all these projects at the same time, so there will have to be a prioritization process, and the BOF and I are going to have to talk about bonding additional funds for capital projects in the next year or so.

I began our process of updating the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) by inviting the Naugatuck Valley Council of Government (NVCOG) planning staff to the November Planning & Zoning meeting. As one of the 19 members of NVCOG, Middlebury has access to staff resources, and we could choose to have NVCOG complete our POCD. Our other choice is to go out to bid for a private company to do the work, but that would delay the start by several months. This is an important decision we need to make soon as Middlebury's POCD expired in late 2025, and by state law, a town has to update its POCD every 10 years. Failure to do so makes us ineligible for discretionary state grants. While I am able to submit a waiver request, we did not get the $150,000 Forestry Grant we applied for, and I'm sure our expired POCD was a contributing factor. Most critically, our Zoning Regulations are also being re-written at the same time, and we should plan first and regulate second if we really want to make significant progress on attracting the kind of economic development that Middlebury residents want.

No matter what your political preferences are, may your holidays be filled with laughter, love, good food, and the joy of the season. I'll see you on Saturday, December 5, at 4 pm at the Tree Lighting Ceremony on the Green!

Crafts ... cont'd from Pg 2

Lastly, Middlebury Land Trust board member Dita Carley has led groups twice in making art installations with found materials. This is one you, and/or your kids can do in your own yard. Gather sticks, moss, rocks or whatever nature has provided and use them to make an original creation on the ground. It could be a dome (a la Andy Goldsworthy, the British sculptor, photographer, and environmentalist), or a star … the possibilities for this, as with all the others, are limited only by your imagination and what you can able to find.

Remember!



Please recycle your newspapers.

Don't let the holidays go up in smoke

By BRIAN PROULX



It is that time of year again. Time to dig through those dusty boxes buried in storage, rediscover decorations you forgot you owned, and wonder why you saved a strand of lights that only lights half the string. As the holiday season approaches and homes begin glowing with lights, candles, and decorated trees, there are a few important things to keep in mind to keep the season festive, safe, and fire-free.

LED lighting has become an excellent solution for holiday decorating. LEDs generate very little heat, come in a variety of colors, and use significantly less electricity. If you are still using older incandescent bulbs, it may be time for a trip to the local hardware store. Not only are LED lights more energy efficient, but they also reduce the risk associated with excessive heat.

As tempting as online bargains can be, be cautious when purchasing electrical decorations from unfamiliar retail sources. Products sold through reputable retailers are required to meet established safety standards, while some imported products may not.

Then there are scented candles. Nothing says the holidays quite like the scent of apple pie, cinnamon spice, or fresh pine filling the house. Unfortunately, all candles remain a significant cause of home fires. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), fire departments nationwide respond to nearly 5,900 home fires started by candles every year. More than half of those fires occur when something that can burn is placed too close to the candle.

While the candle itself is not usually the problem, where and how it is used often is. The metal disk that holds the wick conducts heat, and as the candle burns lower, that metal becomes increasingly hot. You may vaguely remember from eighth-grade science class that glass is good at transferring heat. Placing a burning candle directly on a combustible surface such as a doily, tablecloth, or wooden furniture can create a fire hazard. Unattended candles also can be knocked over by curious pets, energetic children, or even a curtain moving in a draft. A good rule of thumb is simple: if you are leaving the room, blow out the candle.

For those choosing a live Christmas tree, one of the worst mistakes is being stingy with water. A freshly cut tree can last three to four weeks when properly cared for, but it should receive a fresh cut at the base before being placed in the stand. This allows the tree to absorb water more effectively. During the first week, your tree can consume a surprising amount of water, so check the stand daily. If the water level drops below the base of the trunk, the cut can seal over, making it much harder for the tree to absorb moisture and causing it to dry out quickly.

A dry tree can ignite rapidly from a small spark, an electrical malfunction, or heat generated from an incandescent bulb. Although Christmas tree fires are relatively uncommon, they can be devastating when they occur. National fire statistics show that electrical distribution and lighting equipment are involved in more than 40 percent of Christmas tree fires. Avoid overloading outlets, extension cords, or power strips, and inspect all holiday lights for damaged wiring before use. Remember, just because an outlet has room for one more plug doesn't mean something should be plugged into it.

On behalf of our volunteer firefighters and the Middlebury Fire Marshal's Office, we wish everyone a wonderful, cheerful, and safe holiday season. By taking a few simple precautions now before the holidays are in full swing, you can help ensure that your holiday memories are filled with family, friends, and celebration and that the only lights flashing outside your home this season are the ones you hung yourself.

Fire Marshal Brian Proulx is a Middlebury Volunteer Fire Department member.

Pension accounts are healthy

By NANCY DZIJA VAUGHAN

SOUTHBURY – Jennifer Castelhano, a principal and consulting actuary with Milliman, provided the Board of Finance information on the health of the town's two pension accounts November 16.

The health of the funds remains good, with the non-police account funded at slightly over 100%, and the town's police account funded at about 88%. Castelhano said a funding rate above 80% is considered good.

The town's non-police account provides pensions for municipal workers who are part of the pension program. The town no longer offers a pension, so the account is considered a closed account, or one which is no longer accepting new members. Castelhano said 73 members are retired and receiving pensions, 19 current town employees are eligible to receive pensions when they retire, and 33 former employees are eligible to receive pensions but are currently working elsewhere and have not yet retired.

Castelhano said at some point it may be in the town's best interest to annuitize the account, but not right now,. Annuities provide less interest than the town is currently receiving. She advised the town to wait until it has funded 110% to 120% of its liability. When the lower interest rate is applied, the account would still be funded at 100% with the annuity, she said.

The town's contribution to this account is decreasing each year, while its contribution to the police account is increasing. The police account is open, with new members hired by the department qualifying for the pension when they reach the minimum number of years on the job.

Chairman John Michaels asked about the cost and advisability of bifurcating reports on the two accounts. Castelhano said it would initially cost about $2,000 to $3,000 to create separate reports and an additional 20% more per year over the current $3,000 annual cost. She said having separate reports would be useful when the town does move forward with purchasing an annuity for the non-police account. She also pointed out that the town could purchase annuities for portions of the account, such as the number of current retirees.

The board approved separating the two pension reports.

In other business, Police Chief Chris Grillo provided information on two grants his department will be seeking, a Bulletproof Vest Partnership grant in the amount of $7,800 and the state DOT's Highway Safety Office grant in the amount of $25,000. The department benefited from both grants last year and is seeking to reapply this year, Chief Grillo said. The bulletproof vest grant reimburses the town 50% of the cost for replacement vests for officers, while the highway safety grant provides funding for overtime and equipment associated with DUI enforcement activities.

First Selectman Tim O'Neil reported the town is still working to develop new plans and estimates to renovate the parking lots at Settlers Park. He said the town is now focused on paving the two lots to address ongoing flooding issues that cause the lots to turn into mud. He said he hopes to have estimates available for the board to review at its December meeting.

Board of Finance meets

By MARJORIE NEEDHAM

Middlebury Chief Financial Officer Seth Bernstein reported to the Board of Finance at the November 12, 2026, meeting that auditors had been on site for two days the first week in November. He said the 2025-2026 fiscal year audit was going well and a final report may be available at the December 9, 2026, meeting.

Reporting on revenue, Bernstein said investment income was $37,000 at an interest rate of 4%. The tax collector report shows more overdue taxpayers have begun paying and the collection service, TaxServ, is easing pressure on the tax office staff. The company collected about $100 for a 2012 motor vehicle tax, and November collections had reached about $4,000 as of November 9 or 10. Scrap metal revenue was about $6,400. The town receives a fee for recyclable metal collected at the transfer station. The town has joined a tire recycling program so no longer has to pay to dispose of old tires at the transfer station.

Expenses were said to be in good shape with salaries and wages at about 67% and total spending at 61% . The town has ordered 2,000 tons of road salt, but expects to need 1,000 tons. Actual spending will depend on the winter weather. The costs for Northwest Dispatching are expected to be slightly below budget, but the town has not yet paid for CodeRED. It is moving to a less expensive system.

Legal costs were lower for October, but legal work will soon begin with negotiations for the police and clerical union contracts. The first police union contract negotiation session will be at the end of December. The judge dismissed former Registrar of Voters Fran Barton's small claims case, and no settlement payment was made.

The Senior Center got a grant for a new mini bus, although it will take about 10 months to build it. The old backup bus was sold through a government auction for $5,150. When the new bus arrives, the current bus will remain as a backup.

The town received a $25,000 e-ticket grant reimbursement and the Parks and Rec department received a $5,000 micro-transit grant.

New copiers were due to arrive and be set up on November 20, except for the Jamex machine, which will go to the library. It is on back order. We believe the copiers did arrive as scheduled. DPW completed a bike rack pad at the library, two memorial bench pads, road work, and repainted crosswalks.

The fire department roof is leaking, so the town is preparing an RFP for bids on the project. The police department roof is listed as an upcoming project.

An oil spill at the fire department was traced to a third party oil company contractor. Soil beneath the tank is believed to be contaminated, so the tank must be removed and the soil remediated. The tank has expired and needs to be replaced. Work will resume in the spring. The tank issue triggered discussion about switching to propane, but at this time no changes are planned.

Naugatuck has approached the town about regionalizing animal control and the dog pound as well as the police call center. However, nothing has been agreed to, and no decisions have been made. The town is reviewing local animal control numbers and its current arrangement with Brass City Rescue Alliance, which keeps the town's costs low through its staff and volunteers.

Moving into budget season, the Board of Finance discussed holding meetings at different town locations, such as public works and the fire and police department so board members could better understand the various departments' operations and budgets.

They also discussed recording or streaming their meetings. Online meetings and in-person meetings were discussed, but they did not decide to change anything. A public open house at town departments also was discussed.

The next Board of Finance meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 9, 2026 at 7 p.m. in the Town Hall Conference Room.

Middlebury Bee-Intelligencer Pickup Locations

NAUGATUCK
Great China
Hunan Wok
Public Library
Senior Center
Town Hall

OXFORD
Fritz Snack Bar
Public Library
The Bronx Deli

SOUTHBURY
Costcutters
Heritage Deli
Laurel Diner
Oriental Gourmet
Pomperaug Woods
Public Library
ShopRite
Southbury Car Care
Southbury Parks & Rec
Southbury Senior Cntr.
Southbury Town Hall

WATERBURY
Ami's Bagels
Mary's Diner
New Moon
Public Library

WATERTOWN
Adams Grocery
Chubba's
Gayle's Depot Square, #101
Imperial China
Jimmy's Restaurant
LaBonne's
Public Library
Watertown Meat Cntr.
Wells Fargo Bank

WOODBURY
Big Daddy's
Dottie's Diner
John's Restaurant
LaBonne's
New Morning
Ovens of France
Public Library
Senior Center
Woodbury Deli
Woodbury Diner