

“I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story.”
SYLVIA PLATH

City imposes parking ban, closes public schools amid storm — again

BY SABRINA THALER
STAFF REPORTER

New Haven is experiencing another round of parking bans, snow clearing and emergency response measures as a major snowstorm strikes the area for the second time in a month.

The National Weather Service issued a blizzard warning for southern Connecticut and southeast New York from Sunday afternoon through Monday evening, forecasting between 17 and 24 inches of snow accumulation and winds of up to 60 miles per hour. A coastal flood warning was also issued for early Monday morning.

Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont SOM '80 declared a state of emergency on Sunday.

At a Saturday afternoon press briefing ahead of the storm, Mayor Justin Elicker announced a parking ban across New Haven that took effect at noon on Sunday. On downtown streets and along some emergency routes, parking is completely banned. In residential areas of the city, cars are permitted to park only on the side of streets with even-numbered homes.

Elicker also announced that New Haven Public Schools would be closed Monday and that trash and recycling services scheduled for Monday would be delayed by one day. The New Haven Free Public Library will close all its locations on Monday.

During last month's storm — which blanketed parts of New Haven County in up to 17 inches of

snow — the city towed more than 500 cars in violation of its parking ban, Elicker said.

“We don’t want to tow people. We don’t want to ticket people. Just move your cars,” Elicker advised residents at Saturday’s briefing, adding that police officers would announce the parking ban from their cars via loudspeaker on Sunday.

Director of Public Works Michael Siciliano said at the briefing that the city would deploy 37 plow trucks to clear snow from the streets, which amount to more than 230 miles of roadways. Outside contractors are tasked with clearing major corridors, the mayor said.

Elicker explained that the Public Works Department would prioritize making streets passable for emergency vehicles before returning to “push back” and eventually remove the snow. The city will also ticket residents who do not shovel the sidewalks in front of their homes to allow for at least three feet of passageway, Elicker said.

Following last month’s snowstorm, New Haven residents and commuters told the News that the city’s slow-paced snow clearance impacted their travel into and around the city. In a Feb. 6 phone call, Elicker attributed the weeks-long removal process to the “more complex challenge” presented by that storm.

“City crews are going to be working ’round the clock to clear the roads and keep the city moving, but this is going to



ALEX HONG / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

New Haven’s emergency management director warned Saturday that the coming blizzard could be “even more significant” than last month’s snowstorm. Gov. Ned Lamont has declared a state of emergency.

be a significant weather event, potentially even more significant than we just saw last month,” Kayla Bland, the city’s emergency management director, said about Sunday and Monday’s snowstorm at Saturday’s press conference.

Representatives from the police, fire and public works departments, among other city agencies involved in the response effort, will be stationed

in the Emergency Operations Center at 200 Orange St. for the duration of the storm, Bland said.

To accommodate homeless residents, five warming centers across New Haven, including a recently opened site at 1570 Chapel St., would open their doors for 24-hour service until Wednesday morning, Elicker said. The city’s other warming centers are at Varick

Memorial AME Zion Church, the 180 Center in Wooster Square and two centers on Grand Avenue operated by Upon This Rock Ministries.

CTtransit, the state’s public bus service, suspended operations on Sunday at 2 p.m ahead of the storm.

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Hamden nears demolition of contaminated abandoned middle school

BY MICHELLE SO
STAFF REPORTER

For over 25 years, an abandoned middle school has been a source of ire for Hamden residents, who have reported witnessing drug deals, arson and vandalism at the site.

The former site of Whelan Middle School, just north of New Haven, contains asbestos and other toxic materials, according to the Hamden Economic Development Corporation.

Now, nearly three years after receiving project funding, Hamden may be moving forward with demolishing the building. At a Thursday meeting hosted by the Hamden Newhall Neighborhood Association, a few dozen residents attended a community meeting to receive project updates and ask about the next steps.

“This is a voluntary program,” Carol Hazen, Hamden’s grants and capital projects director, said to the

audience. “You decide whether to participate. You review and approve the proposed work on your home before anything starts, and project oversight will include resident representatives from this neighborhood to make sure your voices are part of the decision making at every stage.”

Michael J. Whelan Middle School was built atop an industrial waste landfill, which was used by the Winchester Repeating Arms Company as a waste disposal site, according to the New Haven Environmental History Project.

In the late 1990s, Connecticut’s Department of Energy and Environmental Protection began testing the school and neighborhood. A report from the department detailed the findings from the contaminated waste site, including batteries, ammunition shells, ash, slag, coal waste and more.

The middle school site was

officially decommissioned in 2002, with the 1,000 students relocated.

In 2023, Hamden received a grant award from the state to demolish the site.

Hamden Town Engineer Stephen White explained at Thursday’s meeting that the project planning phase for the middle school demolition was nearing completion.

“Those full demolition plans are 95 percent complete,” White said at the meeting. “Those plans have been kind of waiting on a whole bunch of different decisions to be made, and I feel like we finally have the clarity on decisions for my project team. So we’re very excited to get started on it.”

According to White, Hamden has a total of \$6,425,000 in funding for the project: \$5.4 million from the state’s Department of Economic and Community Development, \$825,000 of local funds and \$200,000 from

Community Development Block Grants, which are administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

A consultant from Haley & Alrich, an environmental consulting company leading the foundation repairs front, detailed their survey process at the meeting. Surveys were sent to 305 property owners via mail and door-to-door outreach, with 188 questionnaires returned. Of those, 158 properties requested and received a property consultation. Ultimately, 75 properties were eligible for repairs.

“We know there are properties that we haven’t been in touch with out there that have issues based on information we have,” Chris Harriman, the consultant, said. “So we know that in reality, there’s actually more than 75 properties in the neighborhood. We just haven’t been able to be in touch with those owners.”

At this time, Haley & Alrich is no longer conducting outreach to find eligible properties.

As for the middle school demolition, 7 Summits Construction will be overseeing the project, which will last five to six months, according to representatives at the meeting. Active demolition is slated to begin mid-2026.

“At the old middle school, we’re removing the buildings, and we’re putting back grass, and in some cases, like some of the pavement that are existing,” Sam Haydock, one of the construction leads for the project, said. “ Nothing’s planned at the middle school site right now.”

Michael J. Whelan Middle School is located at 550 Newhall St.

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Davenport dining hall worker’s business serves up desserts

BY CHUER CINDY ZHONG
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A Davenport dining hall worker is baking in the big leagues.

Jelani Williams and his family started their home bakery, Sweets by J & Jelly, five years ago. They started by selling cheesecakes and have now branched out to selling brownies, cookies and other

pastries. Williams graduated from Lincoln Culinary School in 2009 and has been working as a dining hall staff member in Davenport residential college for several years, he said.

Cooking and baking has long been a part of his and his family’s life.

“I’ve been cooking and baking since I was the age of six,” Williams said in an interview.

“My grandfather was a chef. He worked as a chef during World War II, and also, after he got out of the war, he was a chef at various country clubs. So I learned a lot of stuff from him as well as my grandmother, just helping them out in the kitchen.”

Going to culinary school was a pivotal experience for Williams, he said. One of the chefs from his alma mater, Richard Agamie, taught him and his graduating class the cheesecake recipe for which Sweets by J & Jelly is known.

After graduating from culinary school, Williams continued baking on occasion, typically for family celebrations, he said.

“During COVID, I ended up making some desserts for some family members, and they loved it,” Williams said. “So they ended up posting it on social media and we got a lot of other requests.”

“It was like overnight,” Joselyn Williams, his wife, said. “We had a conversation one night; by the next day, we had a page up, and we had pictures, the website.”

Jelani and Joselyn Williams said they decided to name their business after the nicknames of their two daughters.

“J for my daughter Jayla,” Jelani Williams said. “And Jelly for Jelise.”

As their business matured, Joselyn Williams said they learned

not only how to improve their desserts but also how to elevate presentation and advertising. They run all of their social media accounts and their website themselves and also designed their own business cards and stickers.

“We have pictures from the beginning, like the desserts that I started doing from the beginning and looking back, looking up to now,” Jelani Williams said. “We’ve gotten way better with presentation — with everything — and sometimes we look back and just say, wow, this is what it used to look like.”

“Some people that order from us say they didn’t like cheesecake until they tried ours,” Jayla Williams said.

Jelani Williams said that he believes part of the reason people are so drawn to his family’s desserts is because of their cultural relationship with food.

“I am of Jamaican heritage, my wife is of Puerto Rican heritage, and both of our cultures are known for cooking, food and putting love into what we do,” he said.

Currently, the owners of Sweets by J & Jelly don’t have plans to open a storefront.

“For the time being, we’re just getting our name out there because, as our motto says, if you have the best desserts and no one knows them, it doesn’t really

matter,” Jelani Williams said.

For Williams, juggling his responsibilities as a Davenport dining hall worker and a business owner is busy, but manageable.

“I used to work a 6 to 2:30 shift, and that would give me ample time to do things business-related,” he said. Now, his shift is from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

“While it’s not the hugest of differences, that hour did help at times,” Williams said about the change in his hours.

His connection to Davenport has also opened the doors for some business opportunities, including catering a Davenport fellows dinner in early February, Williams said. Shaffrona Phillip-Christie, Davenport’s assistant director of operations, reached out to order several desserts for the dinner from Sweets by J & Jelly, he said.

“We did four cakes: a pineapple coconut cake, an Italian fruit cake, an Oreo explosion cake and a Biscoff cookie cake,” Williams said. “The reception that we received from everybody was raving.”

Phillip-Christie did not respond to the News’ request for comment.

Sweets by J & Jelly is based in East Haven.

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CHUER CINDY ZHONG / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

After a relative posted one of their cakes online and orders started flooding in, Jelani Williams, a Davenport residential college dining hall worker, and his family started Sweets by J & Jelly.