November comes / And November goes, / With the last red berries / And the first white snows.
~ Elizabeth Coatsworth (1893–1986)

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

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Input needed

By MARJORIE NEEDHAM

Two members of the Middlebury Board of Selectmen (BoS), Brian Shaban and J. Paul Vance, are requesting resident input before agreeing to appoint members to a committee that will study and make recommendations regarding historic preservation of a Judd Hill Road home. They said membership on the committee should be open to anyone in the community, not just those on the list of names Save Historic Middlebury President Nick presented to the BoS. In response, First Selectwoman Jennifer Mahr issued the following statement.

"Over the last several months, the Board of Selectmen has been considering the formation of a Historic Properties Commission. The first step in moving the process forward is the formation of a study committee to consider a specific property. The owners of Hawkeye Farm, 352 Judd Hill Road, want to be the inaugural property for consideration. First Selectwoman Mahr is seeking Middlebury residents interested in being on the study committee. A degree in history, architecture, or preservation would be especially valuable to the study committee. The process and work of the committee is outlined in CT General Statutes § 7-147q.

"Anyone interested in being considered for the study committee should send an email to firstselectman@middleburyct.gov or contact their respective town committees (who will just forward that information to the First Selectwoman's office). The BOS is conducting law firm interviews at its November 2, 2026, meeting, and will consider the appointment of a study committee at its November 16, 2026, meeting.

Anyone interested in providing feedback to the Board of Selectman about whether or not the Town of Middlebury should have a Historic Properties Commission (HPC) that is completely voluntary for individual homeowners to participate in can email their opinion to firstselectman@middleburyct.gov or show up and give public comment at the November 16 meeting. The meeting will also be held on Zoom, and public comment can be given virtually."

Those responding to the first selectwoman's request may wish to copy their emails to Shaban and Vance at bshaban@middleburyct.gov and jpvance@middleburyct.gov, respectively.

Leading up to the current situation, the report, "Proposal to Establish a Historic Properties Commission (HPC) dated August 8, 2026, was presented at a public meeting August 26, 2026, at Shepardson Auditorium. Stuller then presented it to the Middlebury Board of Selectmen at their September 8, 2026, meeting. Appointing this committee is required if the town wishes to form an HPC. Find the report at shmiddlebury.wordpress.com/laws/.

Stuller anticipated the BoS would approve the study committee at their next meeting, on October 5, but that did not happen. Selectman Brian Shaban said he had a few concerns and needed more time for research. Shaban said he would rather vote at the October 19 meeting (which subsequently was rescheduled to October 26).

Selectman J. Paul Vance said a careful and unbiased review was needed and a decision shouldn't be made before a completely objective review was made. He suggested they table the matter, appoint an impartial committee similar to a jury in a court of law to gather facts, review state statutes, seek legal advice and provide the BoS with a written report for review. He said if the BoS approved the report, a public hearing should be held.

He also expressed concerns about tax forgiveness and people buying homes "in a historic district" having to jump through hoops. Mahr responded he had all that information from the September meeting, and while she would schedule a public meeting, it would be redundant to appoint another study committee.

Vance again stated there needed to be an unbiased committee and he didn't want this shoved down the BoS's throats. He said he wanted a total investigation for the benefit of every resident.

Mahr said the BoS knows what is good for the town and they are the ones who need to investigate the matter. Vance said he didn't know the people on the committee or their history or what they represent or what their interest is. Shaban said he would like to open the study committee to residents. (Note: The proposed committee members, Nick Stuller (D), Chris Ambrosio (U), Laurie Burk (U), Sally Romano (D), Kerry Baldwin (D), Bruce Richardson (D), Terry McAuliffe (U) and Kara Collins (R) are all Middlebury residents.)

Mahr motioned to table the matter to the October 19, 2026, meeting. That meeting was canceled, so the matter was on the October 26, 2026, meeting agenda.

At that meeting, Vance and Shaban remained unwilling to move the matter forward. When Mahr made a motion to appoint the committee, neither

See **Committee**... *Page 7*



Top photo: Lisa and Bill Keys sit on their son Will's newly dedicated granite bench in June 2026. The heart-shaped wreath they brought with them and left on the bench sits between them. (Marjorie Needham photo) Bottom photos, l to r: 1) The char mark left when the wreath was burned, 2) the holes in the memorial plaque, 3) the Zold Adirondack bench in the water, and 4) the scorched fishing rules sign. (Brian Veillette photos 1, 2 and 4; photo 3 Thomas Kopecky photo)

Vandalism continues

By MARJORIE NEEDHAM

In April 2026, vandals destroyed a wooden bench overlooking Lake Elise, a bench dedicated to the late Will Keys, a U.S. Naval Corpsman who died in 2011. In June 2026, Will's parents, Lisa and Bill, dedicated a new granite bench, leaving on it a heart-shaped wreath decorated in red, white, and blue. The first weekend in October 2026, all that remained of the wreath was a charred, heart-shaped image burned into the granite. Multiple holes pierced the brass plaque showing the bench was dedicated to Will Keys.

That wasn't all that was destroyed. For his Eagle Scout project, Thomas Zold built an information kiosk and installed two Adirondack style benches in May 2026. Apparently at the same time the wreath was burned, one of the benches Zold installed was torn from its metal anchors, partially destroyed and then tossed into the lake.

Also, about a week earlier, a sign explaining the fishing rules was scorched with some some sort of blow torch and bird houses were ripped off trees. In addition, a propane tank with a camp stove burner attached was found floating in the lake. Perhaps it was used to burn the sign.

Members of the Middlebury Land Trust, owner of the property, first learned of the most recent vandalism on October 3, 2026, when a Waterbury resident sent them an email saying when he went for a walk around the lake, he noticed the wooden bench submerged in the water and, farther along the trail, he came upon the bird houses on the ground. He sent them a photo of the partially submerged bench.

Sal Sena, chair of the MLT Preserve Management Committee, with the help of Kent Sullivan-Wiley, pulled the bench out of the lake. He then reported the incident to the Middlebury Police Department.

Sena said previous vandalism at Lake Elise was relatively minor – things like people leaving litter around the lake or carving their initials into wood. Before 2026, no one destroyed items.

Sena said it was important for people to know the land trust is a 100% volunteer organization. Readers have likely seen MLT announcements for trail work volunteers to help keep the hiking trails open by removing fallen trees and branches and also work on controlling invasive plant species on MLT properties. When vandalism like this occurs, volunteers are the ones who have to deal with the damage.

Middlebury Police Chief Patrick Deely said the department had not apprehended the vandals as of October 26, 2026. Anyone with information on these incidents is encouraged to contact the police department.

Sena said the MLT is taking steps to protect their property. They also have ordered a new plaque and new fishing rules sign and are working to remove the char marks on the granite benches.

Sena posted on Facebook on behalf of the Middlebury Land Trust, thanking everyone who has offered to contribute toward the cost of replacing the destroyed wood Adirondack bench and commemorative metal plaque on the granite Keys memorial bench, or the cost of installing surveillance cameras. Noting that replacing and repairing these items costs money, he said donations can be made electronically on the MLT website at www.middleburylandtrust.org/donation/index.shtml. Checks can be mailed to Middlebury Land Trust, P.O. Box 193, Middlebury, CT 06762.

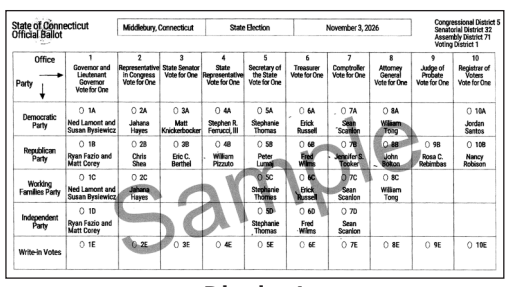
Vote on November 3

By MARJORIE NEEDHAM

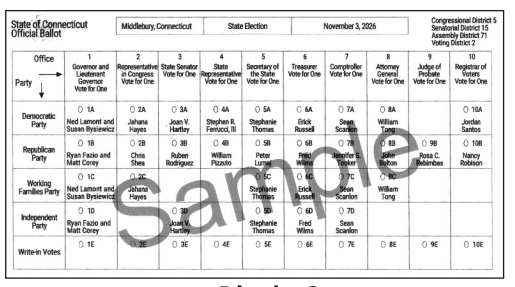
Midterm elections will be Tuesday, November 3, 2026. The polls will be open from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. at Shepardson Community Center at 1172 Whittemore Road in Middlebury. District 1 will vote downstairs in Room 5; District 2 will vote upstairs in the auditorium. The only difference between the ballots will be the state senator position. One local position will be on the ballot – registrar of voters.

Middlebury voters will find 10 columns on their ballots. Their choices will be:

1. Governor and Lieutenant Governor – Ned Lamont and Susan Bysiewicz (D) or Ryan Fazio and Matt Corey (R)
2. Representative, U.S. Congress, District 5 – Jahana Hayes (D) or Chris Shea (R)
3. State Senator, Middlebury District 1, State District 32 – Matt Knickerbocker (D) or Eric C. Berthel (R)
4. State Senator, Middlebury District 2, State District 15 – Joan V. Hartley (D) or Ruben Rodriguez (R)
5. State Representative, District 71 – Stephen R. Ferrucci III (D) or William Pizzuto (R)
6. Secretary of the State – Stephanie Thomas (D) or Peter Lumaj (R)
7. Treasurer – Erick Russell (D) or Fred Wilms (R)
8. Comptroller – Sean Scanlon (D) or Jennifer S. Tooker (R)
9. Attorney General – William Tong (D) or John Bolton (R)
10. Judge of Probate – Rosa C. Rebimbas (R)
11. Registrar of Voters – Jordan Santos (D) or Nancy Robison (R)



District 1



District 2



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Upcoming Events

TUESDAY, November 3
Municipal Election
What: In person voting for Middlebury, state and federal officials
When: 6 a.m to 8 p.m.
Where: Shepardson Community Center, 1172 Whittemore Road, Middlebury

TUESDAY, November 24
Middlebury Community Thanksgiving Service
What: Nondenominational Thanksgiving service
When: 7 p.m.
Where: Middlebury Congregational Church, 1242 Whittemore Road, Middlebury
Info: This service is sponsored by St. George's Episcopal Church and the Middlebury Congregational Church. All are welcome.

THURSDAY & FRIDAY, November 26 & 27
Thanksgiving Holidays
All town offices, the Senior Center, Middlebury Public Library and the transfer station are closed both days. The U.S. Postal Service, federal offices and banks are closed Thursday, open on Friday.



MLT Trails ... *See Page 2*

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