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## **MIDDLETOWN SETS LEGISLATIVE GOALS**

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (DECEMBER 5, 2023) – The Town of Middletown is looking to keep the General Assembly busy this upcoming session.

During a sit-down with legislators Monday night in Town Hall, the Town Council and town staff outlined a list of proposals they'd like to see addressed upstate starting in January.

Several dealt with increases the town would like to see with monetary reimbursements from the state. Those included upping the amounts the state covers for “high-cost” special education services, multilingual learners, new library construction and other areas.

The council also suggested legislators introduce new bills that would allow Middletown to assess an additional local tax on area hotels to use for school infrastructure improvements.

“Our legislators in the General Assembly have done an excellent job hearing us and working closely to address Middletown’s needs,” Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said. “We were really busy during the last session with the reimbursements for the school bond and they definitely helped us throughout that process.”

Before the General Assembly goes back into session in early January, the Town Council likes to meet with the local delegation to lay out its priorities for the next year.

Historically, this list includes ways to grow the amount of state funding and support coming to Middletown. This was also the time where council members and local leaders discuss the prospect of bond requests anticipated on the upcoming ballot as well as upcoming projects that need General Assembly support.

The legislators in attendance Monday night included State Senator Louis P. DiPalma and State Representatives Terri Cortvriend and Alex Finkelman.



Specifically, the proposed bills town officials requested were:

**New legislation:**

1. Introduce legislation to allow the town to assess an additional local Hotel Tax used to fund infrastructure improvements for school facilities.

2. Introduce legislation to expand the definition of properties eligible for the State Payment In Lieu Of Taxes (PILOT) program money to include Department of Defense military installations — excluding military housing.
3. Introduce legislation expanding the School Housing Aid program:
  - a. Increase the base reimbursement amount from 35% to 40%
  - b. Introduce an increased reimbursement for net zero and other energy efficient construction – align reimbursement with the state’s ‘Act on Climate’ law.
4. Library:
  - a. Support updating the reimbursement rate allowed for library construction projects. The current rate was set around 2016/2017.
  - b. Introduce enabling legislation allowing for a referendum to construct a new library at Middletown Center.

**Support prior legislation:**

1. Support funding to study the creation and planning for a Burma Road Transportation Improvement District.
2. Establishing an ongoing funding stream for the Learn 365 program.
3. Changing the School Educational Aid formula to increase funding for high-cost special education services, and multilingual learners.

Council President Paul M. Rodrigues said everything legislators did for Middletown was appreciated, especially boosting the amount of money coming into the community.

“The idea is to generate revenue for several reasons,” Rodrigues said. “We have infrastructure and quality of water issues, we have educational funding issues...With special education, Middletown was regionalized and now we’re on our own and I’m pretty confident we’re not able to provide the services we need.”

Like Brown and Rodrigues, Councilor Christopher Logan thanked the trio for their efforts and encouraged them to do all possible for Middletown.

“We care. We care about Middletown,” Logan said. “(The legislative idea list) is just scratching the surface. When you think about some of the key topics that we’re dealing with. Broadband. Affordable housing development. We’re doing a lot of work up here. A lot of hours are spent trying to figure out how we solve these problems for Middletown and with



Middletown's input. We need your help pushing the ball forward for us. I can't stress that enough. We just need you to be the voice for Middletown at the State House."

DiPalma, Cortvriend and Finkelman told the council their messages were received.

"I know the one thing I've seen in my 15 years at the General Assembly, it's about building coalitions with folks about why it's important," DiPalma said. "Always focus on the why. Forget about the who, what, where, when and how...It's not just Lou wanting that thing for Middletown. We hear that all the time. We might hear they need it in North Kingstown, Burriville is thinking about it. Westerly is thinking about it. There's more to this than just Middletown."

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