



Auburn Selectboard Reviews Single Tax Rate

Police Run Successful Food Drive

BY JANET STOICA
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

According to the Auburn Town Manager's office, the Select Board recently reviewed a request from board member Daniel Carpenter to revisit its March 14, 2022 policy supporting a move toward a single tax rate. Carpenter noted that three current members were not on the Board when the policy was adopted and said that, before proposing criteria for adjusting the tax factor, the Board should reaffirm or reconsider the earlier policy. He stressed that no action was required but felt the current Board should fully understand the policy and the reasoning behind it.

During discussion, vice-chair Todd Kirrane requested that, if the policy is maintained, it should be added to the publicly posted list of Select Board policies, noting it does not currently appear there. Chair Anne Cavanaugh questioned the necessity of having the single-rate goal stated in writing and asked whether last year's vote not to narrow the tax-rate gap due to concerns about residents' ability to pay would have constituted a violation of the 2022 policy. Carpenter responded that he could

not clarify the legal implications, as he had opposed the policy when it was adopted, and reiterated that the 2022 majority had intended it as a binding goal for future boards.

Several members expressed concerns about the applicability and appropriateness of the 2022 policy. Kirrane stated that although he has supported incremental movement toward a single rate in recent years, he opposes any policy that purports to bind future boards or predetermine members' votes. He also questioned whether the policy remains valid, as it explicitly applies to "The Select Board as constituted on March 14, 2022." Select Board member Steve Chambers stated that he does not view the policy as dictating specific votes but agreed that members already consider relevant data and impacts annually without needing a formal policy. Mr. Carpenter noted that the policy includes language directing the Board to "seek to make meaningful moves" toward a single rate, which he believes makes it more binding than advisory.

Cavanaugh requested clarification from Town Manager Dori Vecchio regarding possible consequences if a board does not follow an adopted board policy.

Ms. Vecchio indicated she would obtain a legal opinion, noting that the policy contains dated provisions, including references to the Auburn High School debt exclusion. Cavanaugh then read the full policy into the record for clarity. Members discussed the fact that the high school debt exclusion was retired in FY25 and that last year's classification vote, which made no movement on the rate, already diverged from the policy's stated expectations.

Kirrane suggested that the board either reaffirm or vote down the policy to clarify its status, stating that allowing an outdated and board-specific policy to remain in effect creates confusion for staff, residents, and outside groups. He proposed that, if the board wished to revisit the concept of a policy on tax-rate movement, an updated draft could be developed later. Chambers recommended postponing any action until the full board was present, as Sara Ruffli who was absent from the meeting had participated in the 2022 vote, but also noted that any future revision should update outdated references and focus on impacts to

AUBURN
continued on page 2

Oxford Announces 2026 Senior Tax Work-Off Program

BY JANET STOICA
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According to Justin Leduc, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director, the Oxford Town Manager's Office is now accepting applications for the 2026 Senior Tax Work-Off Program. This program provides property tax relief to residents aged 60 and older while offering valuable assistance to town departments throughout the year. The program offers a maximum annual tax reduction of \$1,500 subject to tax withholdings. Applications can be found on the Town Manager's webpage at the Town of Oxford website or applications may be picked up at the Town Manager's Office at the Oxford Town Hall.

"The Senior Tax Work-Off Program is an administration priority and since reinstating the program, we have saved a total of \$89,538 for 74 residents," stated Town Manager Jennifer Callahan.

A total of 25 positions will be available for 2026, and due to a typically high volume of applicants, a selection lottery is expected after the New Year. Applications will be accepted right up until the selection lottery and may be dropped off at the Town Manager's Office.

The purpose of the Senior Tax Work-Off Program is to assist senior citizens of the town of Oxford with the payment of residential property tax bills, while acknowledging and affirming their skills and abilities and the community's continuing need for their services. This program allows property owners age 60 or older to volunteer services to the town in exchange for a reduction in property tax of up to \$1,500 per fiscal year. This equals 100 volunteer hours at a rate of \$15 per hour. The amount of the tax work-off credit cannot exceed the total tax due for the fiscal year after any other exemptions have

been allowed. Town Meeting voters approved the Program at the May 2017 Annual Town Meeting. General Program Information: • The Senior Tax Work-Off Program runs from January 1st to November 15th of each year. • Credit for volunteer hours will be applied to the tax bill issued in December that is due on April 1, 2026. • The maximum reduction in property tax is \$1,500 per year. The rate of payment is equal to the minimum wage (\$15/hour). • Based upon the \$1,500 cap and the current minimum wage, the maximum amount of volunteer time is 100 hours. • Depending on the position, volunteers may complete their 100 hours in as short of time as one month or may complete the hours over the 10 and a half month program. • If the maximum 100 volunteer hours are not completed, your property tax bill will be reduced by the number of volunteer hours multiplied by the minimum wage. • Program participants must re-apply each year to continue in the program; acceptance is not guaranteed. • Participants are exempt from State taxes, but are not exempt from Federal,

OXFORD

continued on page 3

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3 BR	\$1851	\$55,400

*Rent may be adjusted based on annual income limits provided by HUD.
**Minimum Income Requirement does not apply to households receiving housing assistance such as Section 8 or MRVP.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Must meet all income and background eligibility requirements under the Tenant Selection Plan approved by EOHLIC.
- Minimum 1 person per BR

Maximum Income per Person/People Household Size (2024 limits, provided by Worcester MA, HUD Metro Area)

1 person	2 people	3 people	4 people	5 people	6 people
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AUBURN

continued from page 1

residents. Discussion continued regarding whether to defer action or take a vote immediately; Carpenter and Kirrane expressed preference for voting now to resolve the standing of the 2022 policy.

A motion to reaffirm the tax classification policy goal of a single tax rate failed 0-3-1 with Carpenter, Cavanaugh and Kirrane voting against it. Chambers abstained from the vote.

There followed a discussion on requesting that the Economic Development Committee research and develop objective criteria for adjusting the tax factor at the annual tax classification hearing.

At the Select Board's scheduled December 8 meeting, agenda items included Board Votes to Execute Abandonment of Drainage Easement for Commonwealth Avenue; DPW: Board Vote to Designate Joe Fahey as a Special Municipal Employee per M.G.L. Ch. 268A §20 for the purposes of snow removal; Board Vote on Change of Manager application for Auburn Sportsman's Club, 50 Elm Street, Auburn, MA 01501; Board Vote on a One-Day Beer & Wine License application for Auburn Chamber of Commerce Annual Christmas Party at Pakachoag Church, 203 Pakachoag Street, Auburn, MA 01501; Board Votes to File and Accept Grant Applications: District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Grant Application to the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission

(CMRPC): Development and Permitting Guide; District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Grant Application to the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC): Hazard Mitigation (HMP) Implementation Assistance; MassDevelopment/Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Program (ULI-TAP); Board Vote on Expiration Dates for Licenses Granted on November 24, 2025; Common Victualer License for Sunrise & Subs at 385 Southbridge Street, Auburn, MA 01501; and an Auto Repair License for M.C. LLC d/b/a Jiffy Lube #884 at 746 Southbridge Street, Auburn; as well as additional votes on fines and fee schedules for building, plumbing, gas, and electrical. The Board was also scheduled to open and set a closing date for the town annual meeting warrant.

The Police Department reported a very successful food drive with participation and support of the Auburn Fire Department. There were police officers stationed at Macy's and TJ Maxx as well as cruisers and a fire truck at Park 'n Shop. The drive was to collect toys and food for donation. At the end of the event, there were five cruisers and one bearcat stuffed with toys in addition to a fire engine filled with food and over \$2,300 donated. The Auburn Police Department greatly appreciates every donation and wishes to thank all citizens who kindly donated and gave to those in need.

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OXFORD

continued from page 1

Social Security, or Medicare taxes. Please consult an income tax professional for more information.

Participation in this program will not affect any other property tax exemption or abatement to which you are otherwise entitled. However, the amount of the tax work-off credit cannot exceed the total tax due for the fiscal year after any other exemptions have been allowed.

• Participation in the program may affect your State Circuit Breaker Credit. Eligibility

• Applicant must be at least 60 years of age.
• Applicant must be an Oxford resident.

• Applicant must be the Owner of Record (or spouse of the Owner). If the property is subject to a trust, you must have legal title, i.e., be one of the trustees on the applicable January 1 assessment date, or at the time the work is performed. Applicant must occupy the property for which Oxford taxes are paid.

• Applicant must be willing and able to work in the United States.

• Applicant must agree to, and pass, a CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) check.

able in a given year, the selection of candidates will be by lottery.

• Applicant must meet eligibility requirements.

• Applicant must have appropriate skills for position.



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MassDOT and RMV Recognize Older Drive Awareness

BY JANET STOICA
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

The Mass Dept. of Transportation and the Registry of Motor Vehicles are raising awareness about challenges facing older drivers. This informational campaign promotes a wide range of resources that foster discussions around older driver safety, including changes to vision, reflexes, cognition, and physical fitness, as well as the effects from certain medications or medical conditions on driving.

Interim MassDOT Secretary & MBTA General Manager and CEO Phillip Eng stated that “while we at MassDOT are committed to safety for all road users, it allows all of us to remind ourselves and our loved

ones that some may need a little extra help navigating the roadways or utilizing alternative transportation options. Remember to get regular physicals, eye exams and have open, honest conversations about driving with one another. It can save lives by keeping everyone as safe as possible on our roads. By working together with care and respect, we can support older adults to stay mobile, independent, and connected to the communities and activities they love.”

“Driving is an important part of everyday life for older adults, and it is important to recognize when changes need to be made to prioritize safety,” said Registrar of Motor Vehicles Colleen Ogilvie. “This year during Older Driver Safety Awareness Week, we’re encouraging older drivers, families, and caregivers to have conversations about driver safety, and to be proactive about identifying changes that may impact driving, such as vision, cognitive, or effects from medications or medical

conditions.”

MassDOT further indicated that decisions about driving ability should never be based on age alone. However, changes in vision, reflexes, physical fitness, and cognitive fitness may cause safety concerns. Most older adults outlive their ability to drive safely by an average of seven to ten years, according to the AAA Traffic Safety Foundation. Being proactive about safe driving skills, learning ways to identify changes early, and intervening as soon as possible can help older drivers maintain safe mobility.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reminds motorists that simply getting older doesn’t mean it’s time to hang up their keys, but they should evaluate how they – or loved ones – drive. Older drivers may begin to experience changes such as reduced strength, flexibility, vision, and cognition, which older drivers, their families, and caregivers should all be aware of. Safe driving ability can also be affected by certain medications or medical conditions. Families and caregivers can also support an older driver by attending medical appointments and by encouraging them to share any driving-related concerns with their healthcare provider.

The RMV offers the following



resources and workshops for older adults and providers:

Visit the RMV’s website for older driver resources and learn more about older driver safety.

Attend one of the RMV’s free Safe Driving workshops, which can be requested by community organizations and associations that cater to older individuals:

Shifting Gears – rules of the road, defensive driving, and safe driving tips.

The Driving Decision – advice for families and providers who are

concerned about a person’s ability to drive safely.

View RMV’s video, Shifting Gears, which highlights how age-related changes can affect a person’s ability to drive and how everyone can support older driver safety and mobility.

Review “Your Health and Driving Safely” to learn about driving evaluation programs, warning signs of unsafe driving, and to identify alternatives to driving.

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The Eaton Family: The Auburn Legacy Behind a Well-Known Street Name

BY HELEN POIRIER, AUBURN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Motorists driving the short stretch of Eaton Avenue between Southbridge and Hampton Streets may not give the narrow road much thought. But behind the name lies one of Auburn’s earliest and most civic-minded families, whose presence in town dates back more than two centuries.

The Eaton family first appeared in town records not long after the establishment of the South Parish of Worcester and the division of the Pakachoag lands. Originally from Reading, Massachusetts, the Eatons made their mark in Auburn beginning around 1790, when Jonas Eaton and his wife, Lydia Nichols, settled on land now part of the North American Martyrs Church.

Jonas, who had marched with his father, Capt. Thomas Eaton, in the Revolutionary War, raised seven children in Auburn. Tragedy struck the young family early; the couple’s first three children died in 1796. However, more

children followed, and the Eaton name became firmly rooted in the community.

Among Jonas’s descendants were several who would leave significant imprints on the town and the nation.

CIVIL WAR SERVICE

Brothers Daniel Temple Eaton and Joseph Pierce Eaton, grandsons of Jonas, enlisted together in Company A of the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry on Jan. 18, 1861.

Daniel re-enlisted in 1864 and was later discharged in 1865 after serving in several key battles, including the Union victory at Roanoke Island, N.C. After returning home, he married Sara Field Stone, raised a daughter, and went on to hold several local offices including school committee member, constable, and selectman, while continuing to work the family farm.

Joseph’s wartime service became the stuff of local legend. According to a story uncovered by former town historian John Hartwell, Joseph impressed his

commanding officer before even reaching camp by calming a runaway team of mules. He was immediately assigned as the company’s wagoner, eventually rising to wagon master for the entire regiment and later for the 1st Brigade of the XVIII Corps.

His service was cut short in 1864 when a wagon accident crushed his leg in the deep Virginia mud. After mustering out, he returned to Auburn, where he married three times, raised two sons, and served the town in numerous roles over the decades: assessor, selectman, overseer of the poor, library trustee, and cemetery commissioner.

His wife Charlotte also contributed to civic life, serving on the school committee in the 1890s.

A TRADITION OF CIVIC DUTY

Another family member, Thomas Stowe Eaton, continued working the original Eaton farm until his death in 1920.

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SPORTS

Remington Ready for One More Run as Oxford's Two-Sport Standout

Long before he became Oxford High's 6-foot-7 senior centerpiece, Nolan Remington was a kid bouncing from one sport to the next. Winter meant basketball, spring meant baseball, and whichever season he was in quickly became his favorite.

Baseball was his first love, the sport where he recognized his talent earliest. "Baseball was always first growing up; I had a solid arm and loved pitching," Remington said. "By around middle school I realized I had the talent to play at the high school level, especially if I worked hard."

That work paid off sooner than expected. As an eighth grader, Remington was called up to the varsity basketball team. Even though he saw limited minutes, the experience proved invaluable. A few months later, nerves didn't stop him from earning a starting role on the varsity baseball team. His first start came at Millis where he allowed just one run over five innings that season.

Entering high school, Remington believed baseball was his future, but basketball had begun to rise right beside it. The young forward understood he'd need to expand his game to keep up. "I knew that if I wanted to play basketball, I was going to have to work more on my post moves and shooting," he said. "I had the ability, but I wanted to become an all-around player."

Last winter, Oxford burst out to a 9-3 start but stumbled late, finishing 11-10. The Pirates won their opening playoff game before falling to Millbury. Now, Remington wants one more shot at playoff basketball in his final season.

"Nolan comes from an athletic family, and as our 6'7" shooting forward, he can do a little bit of everything," Oxford coach David Aldrich said. "For a big man he handles the ball well and has a tremendous work ethic. We're looking for him to lead, score, and anchor our defense."



Despite his size and All-Star recognition in the Southern Worcester County League last season, Remington never viewed

himself as a college basketball player. Baseball felt like home, and that's the sport he'll continue at the next level, committing

to play Division III baseball at Wheaton College in Norton.

He even added a third sport this fall, suiting up for the Pirates' football team in his final year of eligibility.

As basketball season begins, Remington's goals are clear: reach 10 wins, punch a ticket to the State Tournament, and—if things go right—return to the Clark Tournament.

"Making it back to the Clark Tournament would be huge," he said. "We haven't been there in

a while. Last time we made the State Tournament was my freshman year, and we last played in the Clark when I was a sophomore. Oxford is hosting the Clark this year, and it would mean so much more if we could qualify."

For a senior who has always excelled in every uniform he's worn, one final postseason run would be the perfect ending.

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AUBURN

continued from page 4

Like his brothers, Thomas served Auburn in multiple roles: selectman, school committee member, and auditor. His daughters Ida, Charlotte, and Luella also took

leadership positions, particularly within the public library.

Honoring a Local Legacy
Generations of Eatons helped shape Auburn's civic, agricultural, and community institutions. Their contributions are recognized today not only through Eaton Avenue but also by the Eaton Square Memorial, located at the intersec-

tion of Elmwood and Pakachoag Streets.

The Auburn Historical Society & Museum, which preserves stories like the Eatons', is open Tuesdays and Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and can be reached at auburnmuseum@verizon.net, 508-832-6856, or online.



LIVING WITH LUKE

amyleclaire@hotmail.com

He's Only a Dog

A tribute to the small, bright truths a dog carries in his heart

BY AMY LECLAIRE

Throughout my dog-owning years, I've often been questioned for the time and attention I offer my dogs. "Why would you want to bring him along? He's just a dog."

Luke may be just a dog, but he is also the only one who greets me every single day with a devotion untouched by mood or weather. "Hey Momma! I missed you! I love you! Let me go get you a sock so we can celebrate!" He wiggles toward me, a freshly laundered sock dangling from his mouth like an extra tongue.

"You're the best boy, Luke." I massage his ears. "You look so handsome today."

But Luke isn't concerned with praise. He operates with the quiet urgency of creatures who understand, better than we do, that joy is meant for right now. "Let's go get some fresh air!"

He's only a dog, yet he knows instinctively that fresh air and sunlight are medicine—not just for the body, but for the spirit.



whispering, "Life is good."

Recently, I bought him an elevated outdoor cot (hoping to elevate his happiness too). "Look, Luke – Mummy bought you a new bed for outside!" I set it down with the pride of a butler presenting a chair to the guest of honor.

"So comfy!"

He tap-danced around it as if auditioning for his own musical. "Is this a hand-me-down?" He sniffed the edges while I climbed aboard and curled up like a baby, coaxing him to join me. "Luke has a new outdoor bed now!"

But he only hovered above me like a lion regarding his reflection in a clear pond. "You look just like me down there, Momma."

Luke may be only a dog, but he knows how to brighten an entire season—especially Christmas. His tail turns into its own metronome the moment he sniffs the stockings at the hearth.

"Santa's coming!!"

"That's right, Luke. Santa is

coming to bring Luke some new toys!"

He adores Santa and everything attached to December: the pine-scented branches, the glittered bulbs, the glow of lights softening the edges of the dark. He's never tried to disturb a single ornament. Instead, he sits beside me, a gentle retail supervisor, while I separate gold bulbs from their packaging.

"Hey, that one's shaped like a banana!"

He tilts his head — another signature Luke gesture — and smiles with his entire being.

His Christmas cheer lasts until the very morning of December 25th. He sits at the edge of the couch, a giant teddy bear begging for sugarplums, and waits with patient wonder.

"Is there a present for me?"

Of course there is. I help him unwrap the first of a generous stack, and his eyes bloom at the sight of a new frisbee. Paws up on the couch, he can barely contain himself.

"This frisbee is Kelly Green!"

Quicker than a Saint Nick elf, I remove the plastic ties and hand him a gift that cost under ten dollars. Yet Luke's gratitude is boundless. He radiates a joy so pure it could light a small village.

And in moments like this, I think to myself:

He may be only a dog, but he carries the clearest truths — the ones we most often forget — right there in his heart.

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Follow Luke on IG @livingwith-lukevalentino

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The backyard deck has become his small kingdom, an oasis where he studies the world with reverence: a squirrel flattening itself against a tree trunk; children spilling off the school bus with ribbons of color streaming behind them; a Chihuahua in a pink sweater skittering across the sidewalk. Luke watches it all with that tender, signature smile, as though absorbing the day and

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Family-friendly things to do during holiday vacations, and beyond

With the holidays come school vacations and sometimes work vacations, and Massachusetts has lots to do in the winter months. Here are some cool (literally) things you could do over the holidays and beyond. Some require a longer drive (sometimes kids fall asleep on the way home), and some require snow but some do not. Regardless, you're sure to find a few cool ways to enjoy your winter vacation!

Ice Skating

Oval Ice Skating Rink at Worcester Common, the 12,000 square foot ice skating rink in the heart of downtown Worcester is larger than the rink at New York City's Rockefeller Center. Check the website for special skating events (some on school vacations) www.worcesterma.gov/worcester-common-oval/ice-skating

Boston Common Frog

Pond is iconic for a winter skate.

Skiing, snow tubing, snowboarding

Nashoba Valley Ski Area in Westford is great for families, and they have tubing lanes too.

Wachusett Mountain in Princeton

Ski Ward in Shrewsbury is well-designed and perfect for beginners looking to learn and experts seeking a challenge

Weston Ski Track offers cross-country skiing or snowshoeing

Winter Hiking & Walks

Ashland State Park, Ashland

Hopkinton State Park, Hopkinton

Broad Meadow Brook Conservation Center, Worcester

Wachusett Mountain Reservation, Princeton

Leominster State Forest,

Leominster

Mount Greylock State Reservation, Lanesborough

Great Brook Farm in Carlisle has groomed trails for cross-country skiing plus educational tours.

Salem Witch Trials Memorial in Salem. You're sure to miss the crowds if you visit during the winter months.

Indoor Winter Escapes

Tower Hill Botanic Garden in Boylston has greenhouses that are warm and full of plants

Apex Entertainment in Marlborough has an arcade, bowling, bumper cars, go karting, laser tag, pool, ropes, and sports simulators.

Roller Kingdom in Hudson, the ultimate roller-skating destination.

LEGO Discovery Center Boston in Somerville is Boston's ultimate kid's indoor playground.

Sky Zone Indoor Trampoline Park in Providence is perfect for burning energy on a cold day.

Colonial Theatre in Pittsfield is a historic theater with a variety of shows.

Festivals & Seasonal Events

Clafin Hill's Holiday Pops Show in Milford, Dec. 13 only. www.clafinhill.org/symphony-series

Southwick's Zoo's Winter Wonderland in Mendon. Four million holiday lights, larger-than-life displays, enchanting polar bear displays, and much more. Through Dec. 28. <https://southwickzoo.com/winter-wonderland/>

La Salette Christmas Festival of Lights in Attleboro, more than one million lights through Jan. 4, 2026. lasalette-attleboroshrine.org/

Drumlin Farm in Lincoln

offers maple sugaring programs in Feb. and March but be sure to register today.

Lowell Winterfest is a fun carnival-style winter festival with tubing, wagon rides, and seasonal treats. Save the date: Feb. 2026 <https://www.facebook.com/LowellWinterFest/>

Staycation Family Time

Outside: Build a snow fort, have a snow day scavenger hunt, go sledding

Inside: Board games, books, build a blanket fort, hide and seek, themed eye-spies, decorate windows with special markers.

Don't forget your local public library could have both indoor and outdoor games you could borrow.

Finally, remember to be kind and patient with yourself and others, which add to the holiday fun.

Make the season smarter, how to use AI during the holidays

The holidays bring joy, tradition, and togetherness — but also gift shopping, travel stress, meal planning, and a calendar full of events. This year, artificial intelligence (AI) tools can help house-

holds save time, reduce stress, and spark creativity. From writing holiday cards to organizing travel plans, AI is becoming a surprisingly useful seasonal helper.

Smarter gift-giving

AI tools can suggest meaningful presents, help manage shopping lists, and even assist with writing card messages. Try it for:

- Personalized gift recommen-

dations

- Budget tracking or gift spreadsheets
- Craft or DIY gift instructions
- Short, heartfelt card messages or poems

For example: Ask an AI tool: "Suggest gift ideas under \$30 for a grandfather who has everything and doesn't need anything." Answers will include: "Homemade 'What I Love About Grandpa' fill-in journal; 'Best Grandpa Ever' mug or t-shirt" and more.

Meal prep

Planning any meal can be daunting but large meals can be especially overwhelming. AI can help with menus, dietary restrictions, and kitchen organization. Try it for:

- Holiday menu planning
- Recipe conversions for different serving sizes
- Grocery lists generated from a meal plan
- Leftover recipe ideas after the big meal

For example: Ask an AI tool: "Suggest a Christmas dinner that would appeal to a vegetarian." Answers will include: "Butternut squash and spinach lasagna or holiday stuffed acorn squash; herb stuffing or pear, walnut & cranberry salad; dinner rolls;

apple crisp or chocolate peppermint mouse" and more.

Cards, letters, and family newsletters

For many, the annual holiday letter is a cherished tradition. AI can help with friendly, polished writing while keeping a personal touch. Try it for:

- First drafts of holiday letters
- Funny or pun-filled greeting card lines
- Designing digital or printable card layouts

Parties and gatherings
If you're hosting, AI can serve as a virtual event planner. Try it for:

- Shopping lists and preparation timelines
- Decorating ideas including tablescapes
- Party themes, playlists, and game ideas
- Seating charts and invitation wording
- Conversation starters for mixed groups

Finally, AI isn't here to replace the human warmth of the holidays — only to lighten the load. It's a helpful tool but remember it is an evolving technology and can sometimes make mistakes so be sure to critique results (especially related to travel itineraries, etc.).



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Ways to help your community during the holidays

The holidays can be a time of joy for many, but they can be a time of struggle for some making the holidays the perfect time to give back or pay it forward. Here are some ways to help your community during the holidays.

1. Food pantries. Food pantries welcome donations year-round but there is an increased need at the holidays, especially this year. Reach out to a local food pantry to learn their needs, they often have a wish list on their website. Top needs are usually canned goods, grocery gift cards, baby formula, and hygiene products.

2. Winter clothing. Many food pantries, churches, and businesses hold coat drives and collect other winter-wear to help ensure everyone stays warm during the coldest months.

3. Nursing homes/senior living. Older adults in nursing homes or living alone often cherish connection during the holidays. Contact your local senior center to see how you can help. Often communities have greeting card projects, deliver meals, or simply spend time in conversation. A one-on-one visit or a caroling

group (of children or adults) can bring holiday cheer.

4. Toy/book drives. Toy and book drives remain a beloved tradition, helping ensure every child wakes up to something special. Contact local churches, youth centers, or a school Outreach Coordinator to see what needs your community might have.

5. Shelters. Contact a soup kitchen or shelter to see if they have a need. Often, they are overwhelmed with volunteers at the holidays; if that's the case, consider signing up to help in January instead.

6. Animal shelters. Animal shelters often see an influx of pets during winter months and appreciate donations of food, blankets, and supplies. Volunteers can help with dog walking or cat socialization, and can also foster a pet. Fostering a pet can help a community member in crisis who has a short-term need for pet care.

7. Be neighborly. You might not have to go far to find someone in need. Someone in your immediate neighborhood might need help shoveling or running errands at this time of year. Ask your friends

and neighbors, ask the senior center, or post on your town's Facebook page, you're sure to find someone in need (and likely get some additional volunteers to help you). You might learn of someone who doesn't want company at the holidays but would appreciate having a meal or baked goods dropped off.

8. Small businesses. A great way to support your community year-round is to shop at local businesses. Gift cards to local establishments is a great way to support your community (and local economy).

Practical tips for the holidays: Deadlines, budgeting, scam protection and more

As joyful as the holiday season can be, it can also bring a long list of things to do, busy stores, full airports, and plenty of pressure. A little planning can go a long way toward keeping spirits bright. Here are practical tips to help make shopping, celebrations, and travel go more smoothly this year.

Shipping and mailing

- Shipping deadlines vary, but this is a good guideline. In general, the closer to the holiday you ship a package, the longer it will take.

- Use tracking numbers, request secure delivery instructions, and order online gifts early to avoid backorders and porch theft.

- Ground shipping: usually needs to go out 1-2 weeks before the holiday

- Priority / 2-Day: typically the week before

- Overnight services: often 2-3 days before (but faster means more expensive)

- International shipping: send 3-4 weeks early when possible

- Order early online to avoid sold-out items and backorders

- Use package tracking and delivery instructions (porch pirates often increase around the holidays)

Holiday budgeting made easier

- Set a total seasonal budget and divide it into categories such as gifts, food, and travel.

- Track spending with a notes app or spreadsheet to avoid surprises.

- Try a family gift exchange or adopt the four-gift guideline for kids: want, need, wear, read.

- Homemade gifts—cookies, ornaments, framed photos—can be thoughtful and affordable.

- DIY or low-cost gift ideas: baked goods, framed photos, ornaments, playlists, acts of service coupons.

- Shop sales smartly: compare prices, avoid impulse buys, stick to your list.

- Consumable gifts are great for the person who has everything (or really does not want another thing)

Online safety and scam prevention

- Beware of fake shipping texts/emails—check tracking only through official carrier sites.

- Use secure websites (look for "https" in the URL).

- Avoid deals that seem too good to be true from unknown sellers. (Remember the old adage: If it seems too good to be true, it probably is, and don't risk it).

- Enable package delivery instructions or lockboxes when possible.

Hosting without stress

- Plan menus ahead to avoid ingredient shortages and high last-minute prices.

- Invite guests to contribute a dish or dessert to ease your workload (most people are eager to

help in some way)

- Prep and freeze ahead items like soups, casseroles, cookie dough.

- Stock the basics (toilet paper, paper towels, hot cocoa, tea).

- Have activities for all ages like puzzles, board games, craft table, kids' corner.

- And don't forget the music which will help set the mood and will also make any awkward silences less...silent.

Gift-giving & wrapping

- Keep a running gift list to avoid duplicates and overspending.

- Be sure to store the gifts in a place you'll remember (or keep a list in your notes app).

- Buy extra small gifts like gift cards, candles, chocolates for surprise needs. Be sure to add a tag so you're ready to go (make sure you indicate to yourself what's inside).

- Use recycled or reusable wrapping: kraft paper, bags, tea towels, newspaper with twine. If the kraft paper or backside of other paper is blank, have children (or adults) personalize it with holiday scenes.

- Perhaps most important: Always label as you wrap so you don't forget what's inside!

Pets & Plants

- Keep chocolate, poinsettias, and certain decorations away from pets.

- Secure trees and breakable ornaments if you have curious animals or toddlers.

- Have a safe space for pets

during gatherings.

Travel tips

- Book early and travel mid-week to avoid the peak rush (Tuesdays often offer the best rates).

- Arrive at the airport earlier than normal as lines will be longer and weather delays are more common, and other issues may arise.

- Pack essentials in carry-ons (medications, chargers, a change of clothes, snacks) in case of lost luggage or delays.

- Check road conditions and weather forecasts before driving; keep a winter emergency kit in the car (blanket, shovel, scraper,

flashlight, water, backup phone charger).

- Consider digital luggage trackers for luggage, backpacks, strollers, etc.

- Download entertainment ahead of time for kids (and adults!) in case of limited Wi-Fi.

Holiday self-care

- Schedule downtime the way you schedule events.

- Share responsibilities for cooking, planning, and shopping.

- Embrace "good enough" instead of perfection.

- Stay hydrated, rest well, and get outside when possible.

- Do what you need to do to enjoy this time of year!

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Holiday Happenings

Friday, December 5

• Olde Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, 2-8 p.m. Christmas by Candlelight, tickets required. Experience the history of Christmas festivities, relish old traditions and create new ones. Also Saturday Dec. 6, Sunday, Dec. 7; 12-14; 19-23; and 27-30 www.osv.org/event/christmas-by-candlelight

• Vaillancourt Folk Art's Blaxton Hall Theatre, Sutton "A Christmas Carol" with Gerald Charles Dickens – Nov. 28 2-4 p.m. and 6-8 p.m. Nov. 30 1-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. This performance by Charles Dickens' great-great-grandson gives life to the beloved holiday ghost story. performance of The Christmas Carol. The two-hour performance includes intermission. This one-man tour-de-force includes Dickens portraying 26 different characters using different gestures, vocal changes and mannerisms. Due to length, the show is not recommended for children under the age of 8 years old. Valfa.com/calendar

• Holiday Tree Lighting, 6 p.m. at the Auburn Fire Station Headquarters, 47 Auburn Street. Special appearance by Santa Claus. Cookies (sponsored by Central one), the Dance Dazzlers, AHS Marching Band & Chorus/SWIS Honor Choir/AHS Chamber Singers/ Boy & Girl Scouts/ hot cocoa, coffee and cookies baked by Bay Path Culinary Arts students

• Exsultet! A Celebration of Voices - 7:30 p.m. at the Christ Lutheran Church, 113 Union St., Natick. Tickets are \$20 for general admission, \$15 for students and seniors, and free for children aged 12 and under. Visit www.exsultet.us for more information.

• Festival of Lights at the Worcester Common. The municipality's annual Festival of Lights event will take place on Friday, Dec. 5, 2025 from 4:30 - 9 p.m. on the Worcester Common Oval and adjacent streets. This free, family-friendly event will host a number of lighting features, ice skating, food vendors, community organizations, and performances. A highlight for Festival of Lights visitors is the lighting of

the tree, which will take place at 6 p.m.

Saturday, December 6

• 4th Annual Oxford Holiday Extravaganza with 70 vendors, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. The Student Council will also host its Breakfast with Santa from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. in the cafeteria. Cost is \$5 per person, including breakfast and a photo with Santa and Mrs. Claus. Also, a raffle table set up with vendor-donated items, \$1 per ticket or 15 for \$10. Cash only for raffle and breakfast. The Holiday Lights Parade starts at the North Oxford Fire Station at 5 p.m. and concludes with the tree lighting at the Joslin Park Bandstand. Hot cocoa and treats for all.

• Waters Farm Preservation, Sutton. Breakfast with Santa, 9:30 a.m., sponsored by Sen. Ryan Fattman and Stephanie Fattman. Breakfast, photos, crafts. Free, but reservations are required. <https://bit.ly/breakfastwithsantatickets>

• Sutton Chain of Lights from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., in various locations, Sutton. Celebrate Christmas in historic Sutton with businesses, churches and organizations in town for the annual Christmas and holiday season celebration. Hop on a free trolley for rides to more than three dozen locations to do shopping, enjoy delicious food, kids' activities and animals. The Sutton High School Band plays traditional carols and Christmas tunes at 5 p.m. on the Town Common and Santa Claus comes by to light the Town Christmas tree. Live performance by Sam James of the Kelly Clarkson Show and The Voice at Vaillancourt Folk Art from 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

• Christmas Fair at First Congregational Church of Dudley, 135 Center Road 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Santa Claus, live entertainment, vendors, LBS gift shop, cookie corner, basket raffles, quilt raffle. Live auction starts at 1:30 p.m.

• Uxbridge First Holiday Night Parade and Celebration. The parade starts at 4:30 p.m. It begins at Rivulet Street and ends at the Town Common on Route 16. Local businesses, community groups,

three high school marching bands, fire dancing, ice sculpture and the arrival of Santa & Mrs. Claus.

• St. Blaise Parish Island of Misfit Toys Fair, at St. Blaise Church, 1158 S. Main St., Bellingham, will take place on December 6, from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. The fair features a Country Store, with baubles and other unique crafts created by the Holy Crafters, St. Blaise parishioners, who, like Santa's elves, work throughout the year to create items to sell at the annual event. This holiday bazaar will also feature a craft table with handmade Christmas decor, tree ornaments, and water bottle holders, to name a few. There will be games for adults and kids, great food from the Cafe which will be open 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and homemade sweet treats from the Country Bake Shop. There will be several raffles going on throughout the day.

• Annual Jolly Holly Fair! This longtime tradition of more than 70 years is sure to help you find the right gift for anyone on your list! We have many local artisans and vendors, needlework, Silent Auction, crafts, food, and much more! We also have Pictures with Santa, and face painting! We hope to see you there! 9am-2pm Millis Church of Christ, 142 Exchange St. Millis.

• Hopedale Winter Stroll & Shop Hop: 12-7 p.m. The 14th Annual Hopedale Winter Stroll and Shop Hop takes place at many stops along Hopedale Street and Dutcher Street including many historic buildings such as the Draper Gym, Hopedale Community House, Bancroft Memorial Library, Hopedale Unitarian Church, Union Evangelical Church and the Little Red Shop Museum. Grab a drink from the mobile Irish pub and a meal from one of our food trucks or Hopedale restaurants and then shop multiple vendor locations that will showcase work from local vintage vendors, hand makers, artisans, food vendors and mobile shops. Many businesses across Hopedale will take part in the Stroll and Shop Hop with special offers for customers. Hop on the shuttle bus and visit them! All of this ending in the long standing and

popular town tradition of the tree lighting and Santa visit at the Hopedale Community House. Check out our website for more information and to see pictures of previous years! <https://friendsofhistorichopedale.com/winter-stroll>

• United Parish Holiday Bazaar: 1-3 p.m. 1 Church Street, Upton

• Hopkinton Holiday Stroll: 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.: It will be a great way to get all of your shopping done and have a fantastic time doing it. Go from store to store by foot or cover much more mileage by using your own vehicle. Take a ride on a horse drawn carriage around the Common, watch the ice sculpture creation and stay for the annual Tree lighting on the Hopkinton Town Common that evening.

• Holiday & Vendor Craft Fair at Bellingham High. BHS Operation Graduation 2026, which plans an all-night safe party for BHS graduates, will hold a Holiday & Vendor Craft Fair at Bellingham High School on December 6th, from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., 60 Blackstone St., Bellingham.

For more information on BHS Operation Graduation, email bhsmaopgrad@gmail.com.

• Luminary Night, Norwood Town Common, 4-6 p.m. The Norwood Circle of Hope Foundation invites you to help light up the Circle of Hope by purchasing a luminary to be lit on the Town Common. Continuing a Norwood tradition that began 23 years ago, the luminaries are considered a symbol of Life, Hope, the Season, and Remembrance of others. Luminaries can be purchased for \$5 each by sending your payment to COH, PO BOX 421, Norwood, MA 02062, or by stopping by Murph's Place Restaurant at 58 Broadway, Norwood. You may include a brief message of life, hope, the season or remembrance to be written on the luminary. You will also find an order form on the Circle of Hope website, NORWOODCOH.ORG.

• Annual Christmas Fair - 9 am to 2 pm. The fair has a wide variety of fresh balsam wreaths, cemetery baskets, gift and bake tables and raffles. Free admission! Come

and enjoy! St. Gabriel's Church, 151 Mendon Street, Upton

Sunday, December 7

• Exsultet! A Celebration of Voices. 2 p.m. at the First Congregational Church, 725 Washington St., Holliston. Tickets are \$20 for general admission, \$15 for students and seniors, and free for children aged 12 and under. Visit www.exsultet.us for more information.

• During Grafton Celebrates the Holidays, the Unitarian Universalist Society of Grafton and Upton will hold a Holiday Faire at 3 Grafton Common. Join us between 11:30 AM and 3:30 PM for food, artisan gifts, vintage holiday decorations, seasonal music, and crafts for children. At 2 PM, enjoy a performance by the the Hand Bell Choir and a reading of "'Twas the Night before Christmas."

• Annual Christmas Bazaar, St. Joseph's Parish Center, 68 Central Street, Auburn, from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. Come enjoy an old-fashioned Christmas Bazaar and check out the collectibles, attic treasures, jewelry, plants, knit goods, holiday décor, toys, candy, baked items and so much more! Take a chance on one of our many raffles. There is something for everyone! Free Admission. Plenty of parking available. Handicap accessible.

• Grafton Celebrates the Holidays. Start the day with a Pancake Breakfast at North Grafton Elementary School 46 Waterville Street with crafts, a book fair, and holiday photos from 8 - 11 a.m. Then visit designated Frosty Stops around town, 12-4 p.m. A trolley service will be available to help with transportation between key locations. Craft & Vendor Fair, 10 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. at Grafton High School, 24 Providence Rd., Grafton. Over 75 vendors featuring baked goods, home décor, jewelry, woodworking, activities and more. Enter to win a special giveaway.

• Tea at the Museum: The Grafton Historical Society will host a holiday tea from 2-4 p.m. at 71 Main St., Grafton.

• Community Strum: Apple Tree Arts will host a community strum-along or sing-along to holiday songs starting at 2 p.m.

Events on the Common:
3:30-4:30 p.m. Boy Scout Troop 2019 will give away homemade holiday treats.
3:45-3:55 p.m. Beatz Dance Studio performs a holiday dance routine
3:55-4:10 p.m. Join the Grafton Girl Scouts in singing winter and holiday tunes.
4:10-4:15 p.m. Join Rabbi Rachel as she shares a few words about Hanukkah. The event culminates on Grafton Common with Santa's arrival at 4:15 p.m., followed by the official tree-lighting ceremony.

For more information, visit GraftonRec.com.



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HAPPENINGS

continued on page 5

HAPPENINGS

continued from page 4

com

• The 25th Annual Millbury Chain of Lights, a town-wide event to celebrate the holidays with local food, shopping and entertainment! From 10:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., various locations around town.. Enjoy nearly 40 stops in town for live music, holiday shopping, holiday figures like Buddy the Elf and the Grinch, raffles and food. Old-fashioned trolleys provide free transportation throughout the day. The event is sponsored by local businesses and concludes with a tree lighting and appearance by Santa Claus at the Millbury bandstand. www.facebook.com/millburychainoflights/

• The Unitarian Church at 3 Grafton Common is having a traditional Church Faire and Musical Program from 11:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Enjoy lunch with holiday music and shop local artisans for unique gifts not available anywhere else, fresh holiday greens, vintage Christmas decorations and jewelry extravaganza. Take a photo of your family in our Winter Wonderland photo booth. Free kids' crafts. Stay and enjoy a free performance by our church Hand Bell Choir at 2 p.m.

• Webster Dudley Business Alliance Holiday Stroll on Main Street, Webster from 3-6 p.m. Local shops stay open late with treats, raffles, and festive displays. Great for holiday shopping and meeting Santa before the tree lighting. Webster Holiday Parade and Tree Lighting. Parade steps off from Town Hall at 5 p.m., followed by the tree lighting at 6 p.m. Scout troops, floats, and Santa along with live music, hot cocoa and caroling.

• Auburn High School to City Hall, Auburn. Lighted Santa Parade & Tree Lighting. Live music begins at 4 p.m. at City Hall, parade begins at 4:30 p.m. After parade ends, at City Hall there will be a tree lighting, a visit from Santa, and live music. bit.ly/AuburnSantaParadeTreeLighting2024

Friday, December 12

• 10 am-4 pm: Rutland's Festival of Trees: stroll through the festival to enjoy decorated trees, wreaths, and ginger-breads.

• 1 pm: Felted snowman ornament workshop. All materials provided. Registration begins Nov. 17 until full. Each participant must register with \$20 cash. Holden Senior Center.

• 6:30-8:30 pm: Rutland's Festival of Trees Concert at Lilac Hedge Farm, music by Stomp n' Holler, food by Fired Up Pizza and Savage Wraps. \$5 per person for concert entry.

Saturday, December 13

• Franklin's 2nd Annual "A-Wreath-of-Franklin." 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Get ready to experience the magic of the holidays with Franklin's newest seasonal tradition—A Wreath of Franklin! Presented by the Franklin Cultural Council, the Franklin Cul-

tural District Committee, Franklin Downtown Partnership and the Department of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy, and our incredible community partners. Celebrate local talent, small businesses, and the joyful spirit of the season. Shop small and local from a beautifully curated selection of handcrafted goods from local artists, makers, and small businesses.

Enjoy a Community Wreath Display created by artists, families, schools, and organizations showcasing the theme of "Franklin Welcomes the World," to reflect the upcoming international soccer games to be held at nearby Gillette Stadium next summer. Visit <https://franklinartsculture.my.canva.site/wreath25-program-site>

• Auburn Recreation and Culture Holiday Arts & Craft Fair at Auburn High School, 99 Auburn Street, Auburn. With 192 vendors, artisans, awareness groups and food trucks. 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. 508-832-7736.

• Manchaug Stroll. The historic Village of Manchaug will transform into a traditional winter wonderland for the 2025 Manchaug Stroll from 4-8 p.m. Hosted by Vaillancourt Folk Art and District V House in partnership with the Sutton Fire Department, this free outdoor event celebrates the evolution of Christmas in a historic 1800s mill village. Perfect for families and friends, the Stroll offers a festive way to embrace the holiday spirit while enjoying history, music, and holiday treats.

Event Highlights: Live Music by Heartland Radio — Soak in the joyful sounds of Christmas as Heartland Radio performs live at Vaillancourt. Expect a lively mix of Christmas classics at District V!

Traditional Food and Drinks: Savor authentic baked goods by Fraulein's Bakery, Chimney Cakes (a fragrant, spiral-shaped Bulgarian pastry), and Christmas sausages for dinner at Vaillancourt along with a cash Christmas bar offering gourmet hot chocolate, glühwein imported from Nürnberg, Germany, and a selection of festive beers and wines. Meanwhile, District V will host the 20 Hudson Street Beverage Trailer and Kith and Kin Food Truck ensuring holiday spirit flows through the night.

Special Appearances by St. Nicholas and Krampus, Holiday Shopping and Historic Strolling, Historic Experiences-

Douglas Winter Stroll, Douglas from 3-6 p.m. Do some holiday shopping, listen to carolers, explore the Museum and take part in special events, and treats at the Library (special guest appearances, too!), visit the Orchard, get your trees and wreaths, grab an app or meal...best of all, take in the holiday lights on Main Street up to the Common. For more information, email allyssamanyak@gmail.com.

• Santapalooza 13: Concert for A Claus: This event to support the Marines' Toys for Tots foundation will take place at the Highfields Golf & Country Club, 42 Magill Drive, Grafton.

Sunday, December 14

• HOLIDAY POPS with THE BVCC! The Blackstone Valley Community Chorus and Orchestra will present HERE WE COME A'CAROLING, A Holiday Pops Concert, on Sunday, December 14, 2025 at 4:00pm. The concert will take place at Valley Chapel

at 14 Hunter Road in Uxbridge. Admission is free, though donations are accepted and appreciated!

Tuesday, December 16

• 7-8 pm: The Fright Before Christmas with Jeff Belanger. Remember the famous Christmas song, "There'll be scary ghost stories and tales of the glories of Christmases long, long ago...?" Belanger brings the spooky to life with this eerie multimedia journey of this haunting holiday. This program is not suitable for young children. Registration: Tinyurl.com/RMLFright

Friday, December 19

An 18th-Century Yuletide Celebration by Candlelight with acclaimed Boston area chamber ensemble, Musicians of the Old Post Road. 7:30 – 9 p.m. Enjoy a concert steeped in the seasonal spirit and soundscape of the Baroque and early Classical eras illuminated by hundreds of candles. This festive program transports audi-

ences across time and continent, from the frost-laced hills of Ireland and the pastoral chapels of Germany to the colonial meet- inghouses of New England.

Performed on period instruments and with historically informed interpretations in Blaxton Hall, Vaillancourt Folk Art. Tickets are \$60 or \$150.

Saturday, December 20

• Auburn Fire Rescue Department's traditional Santa Claus Tour by fire truck to visit kids and adults throughout town. Route begins at the Drury Square Fire Station. Please be patient as route completion depends upon traffic, weather and emergencies. Santa Tour: from 11 a.m. – 7 p.m. The Auburn Fire Rescue Department is expected to continue its traditional Santa tour by fire truck on Saturday, December

HAPPENINGS

continued on page 6



TOPOGRAPH

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# of bedrooms	Rent*	Minimum Income Requirement**
1 BR	\$1602	\$48,000
2 BR	\$1728	\$51,800
3 BR	\$1851	\$55,400

*Rent may be adjusted based on annual income limits provided by HUD.
**Minimum Income Requirement does not apply to households receiving housing assistance such as Section 8 or MRVP.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Must meet all income and background eligibility requirements under the Tenant Selection Plan approved by EOHLIC.
- Minimum 1 person per BR

Maximum Income per Person/People Household Size (2024 limits, provided by Worcester MA, HUD Metro Area)

1 person	2 people	3 people	4 people	5 people	6 people
\$68,500	\$78,250	\$88,050	\$97,800	\$105,650	\$113,450





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HAPPENINGS

continued from page 5

20, 2025. The route begins at the Drury Square Fire Station around 11 a.m. Note that times are approximate and depend on traffic, weather, and emergencies.

• Celebrate the Winter Solstice with Christmas in New England, hosted by the Grass Roots Coffeehouse and the Rockdale Congregational Church. The concert will take place in sanctuary of the Rockdale Congregational Church at 42 Fowler Road

in Northbridge. Prior to the show, come have a bowl of soup or chili, and at intermission have dessert. Proceeds go to the Church. Also we'll have our Cookie Walk at intermission. Buy a box for \$15 (or if you are a return customer with your box from last year \$10) and fill it up with cookies baked by the congregation. Admission to the show is \$20 at the door only. Doors will be open at 6:30. Seating for the 7:30 show is at a first come/first serve basis.

Sunday, December 21

• The Diverse Holliston Choir will pres-

ent a Winter Solstice Concert on Saturday, December 21st at Holliston Town Hall. The program will include:

"Crowded Table," "I Wish You Peace," "Brighter Days," "Candlelight Canon," "Here Comes the Sun," "Seasons of Love," "Stand by Me," "Dona Nobis Pacem," and "This Little Light of Mine." If interested in joining the choir, email sarastalnak@gmail.com.

Thursday, December 25

• Parishioners and volunteers from the Blackstone Valley United Methodist Church would like to cordially invite everyone to

our Free Community Christmas Dinner, including the usual holiday meal favorites, roast turkey, potatoes, vegetables, squash, stuffing, cranberry sauce and dessert. The dinner is free of charge. The meal will be served from 12 – 2 p.m. in the Faith Hall, 61 Linwood Avenue, Whitinsville. Parking is available behind the church, accessible from Church Street. For more information, call the church office, 508-234-2275.

• Christmas Dinner at St. Mary Parish, 77 Mendon Street, Uxbridge. Free for neighbors, friends and anyone who might otherwise be alone on Christmas Day,

enjoy music, caroling and a holiday feast from 5- 7 p.m.

Wednesday, December 31

• The Friends of Natick Trails is planning the fifth Cochituate Rail Trail on New Year's Eve event on Wednesday, Dec. 31 from 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Activities will include entertainment, fire pits, a photo booth, festive lighting, food and beverages, and other attractions.



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REAL ESTATE

New home inspection law in Massachusetts, what is it?

What home buyers and sellers need to know

Massachusetts has implemented a new law that significantly changes how home inspections are handled in real estate transactions. The law takes effect October 15, 2025 and applies to transactions entered into on or after October 15, 2025.

There are two very significant changes that this law brings moving forward: First, buyers are given the right to conduct a home inspection if they choose.

However, once under agreement, the buyer may choose not to conduct a home inspection. Second, sellers (and their agent) are required to provide buyers with a new disclosure form which details the rights and obligations of each party.

This law, part of the Affordable Homes Act, a statute passed in August 2024, aims to protect buyers' rights to conduct home inspections and introduces specific restrictions on how offers involving inspection waivers can be made and not made. The law is intended to prevent the seller or their agent from putting pressure on buyers to waive an inspection as part of the home purchase process. After several delays in late 2024 and early 2025, the final regulations were published by Governor Healey's Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities in June 2025. The regulations (760 CMR 74) provide the details on how the law will operate.

The law applies to purchase agreements dated after October 15, 2025, and only on the sale of residential buildings with one to four units, condominium units, and co-op shares tied to residential occupancy. First, sellers or their agent cannot state that they will only accept offers from buyers who agree to waive, limit, or forego a home inspection. As an example, this means that a seller cannot counter a buyer's offer with a provision that would remove the buyer's contractual right to conduct a home inspection. Second, sellers cannot accept an offer that waives the home inspection. During negotiations, a buyer (and their agent) should not convey any intent to waive a home inspection. As a consequence of limitation being placed on sellers, buyers can

no longer make their offer more attractive by indicating their intent to waive an inspection in advance of acceptance. Third, there is a new disclosure form requirement. Sellers or their agents will be required to provide the disclosure form to buyers and the form must be signed by the buyer and seller on or before the date of signing the first written purchase agreement. For most of Massachusetts, the first purchase agreement is the "Offer to Purchase" or "Contract to Purchase", although in some parts of the state, the first purchase agreement is the "Purchase and Sale Agreement." Regardless of what agreement is used, the new disclosure form must be signed at or prior to signing the purchase agreement.

The form confirms several things: seller represents and warrants that the purchase agreement is not contingent on the waiver or limitation of the buyer's choice to have a home inspection. A seller's acknowledgement that the buyer may have the property inspected by a licensed home inspector of the buyer's choice. A notice that the seller will provide the buyer with a "reasonable" period after entering into the purchase agreement to decide whether to proceed with the transaction.

What About Negotiations? The regulations state that the parties cannot include a provision in the purchase agreement that would "Render a Home Inspection Meaningless." This means that the parties cannot agree on an unreasonable limit on the buyer's ability to schedule, receive, or review a home inspection. It also means that the agreement cannot prevent the buyer from choosing not to proceed with the deal if the buyer is unsatisfied with the results of the home inspection. As an example, the parties cannot agree that the buyer has just 12 hours from signing the purchase agreement to complete a home inspection and review the results. This provision would likely "render a home inspection meaningless" because it's highly unlikely the buyer could schedule a home inspection in that time frame and review the results.

But the regulations do allow for negotiations around two specific areas: First, it is permissible to agree to limit a buyer's choice not to proceed with the transaction if the aggregate estimated cost of repairs exceeds a reasonable threshold to be negotiated by the parties. Second, the parties can agree to reasonably limit a buyer's deposit refund if the

buyer chooses not to proceed after the home inspection. While these areas are negotiable, they call for the agreement to be "reasonable." There is no single definition of "reasonable." It is used as a flexible standard and dependent on the totality of the facts and circumstances in the transaction.

There are however exemptions. For this complete list, reach out to a member of the Marzeotti Group or your trusted real estate professional.

Penalties for Non-Compliance. Failure to comply comes with harsh penalties. For sellers, a violation may be used as evidence of an intent to misrepresent or conceal a material fact about the home. For agents, a violation may be considered an unfair or deceptive business practice under Massachusetts consumer protection laws (Chapter 93A).

This law is designed to create a more level playing field for home buyers by ensuring all buyers have a fair opportunity to inspect a property. However, it removes the ability of the buyer and seller to negotiate around certain areas and introduces significant changes to how offers are

structured and what can be communicated before acceptance.

For more information on this topic, please reach out to the Mar-

zeotti Group or your trusted real estate professional.



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

THE CAR DOCTOR

jpaul@aanortheast.com

Honda and Toyota Have Earned their Reputations for Reliability

Q. Why would anyone buy anything other than a Toyota or possibly a Honda since, in my opinion, they are the most reliable cars? I see people driving Dodges and wonder what must have convinced them to get that thing.

A. People buy vehicles that appeal to their lifestyle, budget, and needs. Years ago, I purchased a used Dodge Caravan, it was cheap and quite useful. Was it perfect, no at all at 120,000 miles I replaced the transmission and at 150,000 miles it

needed cylinder head gaskets, so I rebuilt the engine. Are Toyota and Honda vehicles perfect? Recently the owner of a 2018 Toyota Tacoma told me experiences about how his truck frame was rusting away. Honda has had their share of engine and transmission issues over

the years. Still Toyota and Honda have earned their reputation for being one of the most reliable car brands in the world.

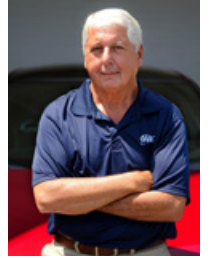
Q. Back in 1978, I had VW Beetle while in school. One day I decided to change the spark plugs, but I screwed one in wrong, and the spark plug just would not get seated properly. It was stuck, and yet the car ran. How could that have been possible?

A. The cylinder heads on the air-cooled engines have sort of an odd angle for the spark plugs. You likely cross threaded the spark plug and although it did not seat properly it did seal and work. The next person would have been in for an unpleasant surprise when tuning up your old car. They will need to remove the spark plug (or perhaps the cylinder head) and use a HELICOIL repair kit to fix the damaged threads in the cylinder head.

Q. I have a 2024 Subaru, and my wife just got a 2025 Honda, and I like to keep my cars in showroom looking condition. What would be your recommendation for that glossy finish? I have also tried top brand tire black, and nothing seems to keep the tires looking at their best longer than a few days. It has been six weeks since we picked up her car, and the tires look almost like the day we drove off the lot. Would you have an inside tip as to what dealers use?

A. You are correct that most tire shine products last only a few weeks. I have found that Meguiar's Endurance tire gel is quite good. Also Bling Sauce products make a tire product, but the finish is clean/mat look not shiny. I know some reconditioning shops use Lanes Tire Shine Super Blue. As for the car's paint, I have always been a fan of Meguiar's products, but in the last year or so

have had very good luck with Bling Sauce products. Bling Sauce products are easy to use and have lasting results. Perhaps the dealer will share what they use or even sell you some of their products.



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. Recently I bought a used tire for my 2024 Lexus NX 350 from a tire shop. They told me that these tires come off cars that were in collisions. I paid 75.00 instead of \$300 for a new tire. The tire that I replaced had been repaired twice but I thought it would be better to replace the tire. What is your opinion on used tires? I will be keeping the car until next summer and the replaced tire looks brand new.

A. Used tires can be a good economical alternative. That being said, it is always good to look at the date code on a used tire to see what the actual age of the tire is. If the tires are relatively new, not damaged, they can be a good choice. Although depending on the mileage of your other three tires, it is best to replace tires in matching pairs. Having one odd tire can cause issues with noise and even wet weather traction.

Q. My daughter has a 2019 Hyundai, she told me her oil light was flashing so I checked the oil in the car. The dip stick showed no oil. I was surprised so I added a quart and still no reading on the dip stick. I put a total of four quarts, and it just hit the low line on the dip stick. How can a car run on what appears to be one quart of oil and where did the oil go? There are no oil stains under the car.

CAR DOCTOR
continued on page 17



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TIPS ON FINANCIAL PLANNING

dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com

New Year's financial resolutions: Making them stick

As the calendar flips to a new year, millions of Americans pledge to improve their financial lives. But without a concrete plan, those well-intentioned resolutions often fade quickly.

Financial goals consistently top the list of New Year's resolutions. A 2025 CFP Board study shows that financial resolutions are prominent, with saving more money (45%) and reducing debt (32%) ranking among the top three goals.

Unfortunately, most resolutions don't last. A 2023 Forbes Health poll found that over half

of people give up on resolutions by the four-month mark and only 1% make it the full year.

The challenge isn't a lack of desire for change. People may set the same resolution year after year, revealing a disconnect between intentions and action. Or it may be that they try to tackle too many goals at once, or aim higher than is realistic, setting themselves up for disappointment.

Set smart financial goals. Before crafting your action plan, consider which financial priorities matter most to you. If you need ideas, here are some areas where you may want focus in 2026:

- Regularly review your financial goals and track progress toward meeting them
- Increase your 401(k) contributions or max out your IRA

and/or HSA contributions

- Pay down debt strategically and negotiate lower interest payments
- Build an emergency savings fund of six to 12 months
- Save more consistently

Be specific. Vague resolutions like "save more money" rarely succeed. Instead, it can help to make goals specific and measurable. For example, rather than making a resolution to "start an emergency fund," commit to a specific goal, such as, "I will put \$100 a month into an emergency fund."

This shift from general to specific transforms wishful thinking into actionable steps. When goals are attainable, it's easier to track progress and stay motivated.

Find an accountability part-

ner. Don't go it alone. Having someone to check in with can help you stay on track. This could be a spouse, friend or family member who shares similar goals.

Consider working with a financial advisor who can help you create a realistic plan, monitor your progress and adjust strategies as needed. A professional can provide expertise and accountability, making it easier to stay on track throughout the year.

Start small and build momentum. Rather than overhauling your entire financial life all at once, focus on one or two priority areas. Identify where the largest gap exists between your current situation and where you want to be, then concentrate your energy there.

Breaking larger goals into smaller, manageable actions

makes them less overwhelming and more achievable. Each small win builds confidence and momentum for tackling the next challenge.

The new year offers a fresh start and renewed motivation to improve your financial health. With specific goals, a solid action plan and the right support system, this could be the year your financial resolutions finally stick.

Dennis Antonopoulos
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THIS ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN BY EDWARD JONES FOR USE BY YOUR LOCAL EDWARD JONES FINANCIAL ADVISOR

EDWARD JONES, MEMBER SIPC



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

CAR DOCTOR
continued from page 16

The oil light came on because the oil pressure was dangerously low. Unfortunately, not all cars have oil level warning. At this point if it were my car, I would change the oil (she is lucky the engine did not seize). Once there is fresh oil and a new filter I would check the oil every 500-1000 miles. Some Hyundai models have had issues with oil consumption. The oil disappeared because it was burned during normal combustion. My first question would be when was the last oil change?

Free Youth Admission at Samuel Slater Experience

Dec. 26-28 & Jan. 2-4 Kids up to age 17 receive free admission with a paying adult at the Samuel Slater Experience in Webster. The museum features immersive video, interactive exhibits, scents, and motion effects that explore the American Industrial Revolution, mill village life, immigration, and 19th-century technological change.


Museum hours are Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Sundays from 12 - 4 p.m. (last admission 3 p.m.). Tickets may be purchased online or at the box office.

The museum is located at 31 Ray Street, Webster. For more information, visit samuel Slater Experience.org.

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Cheers to a new year!

May you have a happy, prosperous and healthy new year!

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NOTE: Community bulletin board-type items are welcome for inclusion in the *Happenings!* section of the Xpress newspapers. Please allow enough lead time for publication. Email your calendar or event notice to news@theyankeeexpress.com.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19

- An 18th-Century Yuletide Celebration by Candlelight with acclaimed Boston area chamber ensemble, Musicians of the Old Post Road. 7:30 – 9 p.m. Enjoy a concert steeped in the seasonal spirit and soundscape of the Baroque and early Classical eras illuminated by hundreds of candles. This festive program transports audiences across time and continent, from the frost-laced hills of Ireland and the pastoral chapels of Germany to the colonial meetinghouses of New England. Performed on period instruments and with historically informed interpretations in Blaxton Hall, Vaillancourt Folk Art. Tickets are \$60 or \$150.
- The United Church of Christ Federated is pleased to invite all community members to its annual free, fun-filled Christmas Celebration on Saturday, December 6, from 1 to 3pm. The event aims to bring together families and friends to celebrate the joy of the holiday season. This year's festivities will feature a variety of activities for all ages, including

activities such as cookie decorating, crafts, face painting, games with free prizes (everybody is a winner!), a scavenger hunt, Christmas pinatas, and more! Refreshments will be available. Santa Claus and his elves will be attending and will give gifts to all the children present! "We look forward to opening our doors and hearts to our neighbors, sharing the warmth of the season, and remembering the hope that is at the heart of Christmas", said Pastor Sabina Terrades. The United Church of Christ is located at 4 Church St., Webster, across from Town Hall, 508-943-0061.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20

- Auburn Fire Rescue Department's traditional Santa Claus Tour by fire truck to visit kids and adults throughout town. Route begins at the Drury Square Fire Station. Please be patient as route completion depends upon traffic, weather and emergencies. Santa Tour: from 11 a.m. – 7 p.m. The Auburn Fire Rescue Department is expected to continue its traditional Santa tour by fire truck on Saturday, December 20, 2025. The route begins at the Drury Square Fire Station around 11 a.m. Note that times are approximate and depend on traffic, weather, and emergencies.
- Christmas concert at the Grass Roots Coffeehouse. Celebrate the winter solstice with Christmas in New England at the Rockdale Congregational Church, 42 Fowler Road, Northbridge. Christmas in New England has been performing over 20 years at RCC. Karen Wilber, Amy Gallatin, Roger Williams, JD Williams, Dave Orlososke, Krissy and Bob Dick with present a night of traditional, contemporary, original Christmas and holiday season

songs. Admission to the show is \$20 at the door only. Doors will open at 6:30 p.m. The show starts at 7:30 p.m. Seating is first come, first served. Soup and chili served prior to the show and cookie boxes are available for sale for \$15.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22

- Storyteller and musician John Porcino will spin a patchwork quilt of joyful tales and songs to warm up a chilly winter day. Together we'll enter a world where woolen mittens burst into laughter, snowbanks melt to reveal a blooming heart, and holiday lights from around the world brighten the shortest days of the year. Playful stories, easy-to-join songs, and plenty of giggles for young children and their families. From 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. This program is made possible by a grant from the Sutton Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency. No registration required.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25

- Parishioners and volunteers from the Blackstone Valley United Methodist Church would like to cordially invite everyone to our Free Community Christmas Dinner, including the usual holiday meal favorites, roast turkey, potatoes, vegetables, squash, stuffing, cranberry sauce and dessert. This year's meal will be served on Thursday, Dec. 25, from 12 noon to 2 p.m. in the Blackstone Valley United Methodist Faith Hall at, 61 Linwood Ave. Whitinsville, MA. Parking is available behind the church accessible from Church Street. The dinner is open to everyone free of charge. Please come join us for a joyous Christmas celebration that will include holiday fun,

food, and fellowship with many from the community. For more information, call the church office at 508-234-2275.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28

- Enjoy the Winter Skating Exhibition at 1:30 p.m. at Horgan Arena, 403 Oxford Street N, Auburn. Admission is free. Watch as members of the FMC Ice Sports programs and the FMC Skating Club dazzle with their slick moves.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 29

- Alice in Wonderland Tea & Chocolate Pairing at the Millbury Public Library. A whimsical "Alice in Wonderland" themed tea and chocolate pairing event will be held at 11:30 a.m. Chocolatier Kim Larkin will lead participants through a tasting experience inspired by Lewis Carroll's beloved characters. The program includes themed trivia, sweets, and a Queen of Hearts soldier craft.
- Learn to draw "Impossible Animals" at 11 a.m. with cartoonist Rick Stronoski. For ages 7-14 in the Auburn Public Library.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30

- Medieval Block Printing Workshop at the Millbury Public Library from 5-7:30 p.m. Castle Nitor staff will host a medieval block printing workshop. Participants will learn historical printing techniques, try replica period blocks, and create their own potato-block designs. The program is open to teens and adults, and everyone will take home a handmade print.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 4

- The New England Country Music Club will hold dances with live, classic country

music Jan. 4 with the "South County Line" band and Sun. Jan. 18 at the Uxbridge Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., Uxbridge. Doors open at 12:30 p.m., music 1-5 p.m. Admission charge, cash bar, snacks are allowed.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 8

- A Women's Bible Study Group called "Coffee Break" will open its winter/spring season from 9:30 – 11 a.m. at Fairlawn Church, 305 Goldthwaite Road, Whitinsville. The group will address the Book of Acts. Coffee Break is free and open to anyone in the community. Women can read and discuss the Bible, share questions and concerns and develop new friendships. Each lesson is independent, so if you can't attend one week, you won't feel lost. Study guides and Bibles are provided free of charge. Refreshments will be served and child care is available for infants through pre-school age. Call Ginette at 508-234-4806 for more information.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21

The Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce will host Coffee & Rich Davey, the CEO of Massport, from 7:30 -9 a.m. at the BV Hub at Hebert Hall, 670 Linwood Street, Whitinsville .

SATURDAY, JANUARY 24

Join Family Board Game Night with Grafton Rec. Tons of different board games to enjoy from 3-6 p.m. in the Municipal Center Gymnasium. Free. Concessions available for purchase. Sensory friendly space available in the Arts and Crafts Room. Registration required. Good for all ages.

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For reservations, event tickets, and more information, visit www.samuelslaters.com.

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TALES FROM BEYOND

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The Ghosts of Cominicut Shoal Light

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

In 1868, the Cominicut light was established to warn mariners of the dangerous shoal extending from the west side of Cominicut Point in Warwick, RI near the entrance of the Providence River. In 1883, the present light, a cast iron spark plug style, was built and has remained on the small rocky atoll ever since. The light gives off a white flash every 2.6 seconds and stands at 58 feet high with a focal plane height of 55 feet. Its fog horn emits two blasts every 30 seconds.

In 1874, a five room abode was built at the light for the keepers to stay at instead of having to make the dangerous one mile rowboat trip out to the light from the offshore station. Horace Arnold was the first keeper to stay at the light. His young son allegedly died at the light when he fell from the tower. In 1922, Ellsworth J. Smith was given the position as keeper. He and his wife of six years, Nellie and their two young children, Russell, two years old and Robert aged five, would live at the light

and together maintain the buildings and grounds. This became a curse for the young Nellie who so wanted to socialize with the women on the mainland.

Nellie contentiously asked for her husband to take her to shore but he, being hard headed and insistent, constantly reminded her of their duties as keepers and the importance of seeing them through. She became depressed and even threatened suicide, but her husband shrugged it off and stoutly refused her wishes. One possibility of his refusal was likely that she was 26 years his junior and the issue was more a matter of jealousy. Her being still young and beautiful made her a certain target for suitors along the shore where he could not keep his eye on her.

It soon became too much for young Nellie and she made plans to put an end to her torment of loneliness and depression. In the medicine cabinet was a bottle of mercury bichloride pills, a very potent and deadly drug. It was commonly used in those days if very heavily diluted to treat various illnesses. On the morning

of June 9, 1922, Smith rowed to the Cominicut Village to procure some supplies. As soon as Ellsworth was out of sight, Nellie went to the medicine cabinet and took the bottle. She told five year old Robert that she was bringing Russell to bed. She put the toddler on her lap and gave him a tablet, telling Robert that it was candy. One tablet would have been lethal to such a small human. She then brought Russell upstairs, telling Robert she had some for him when she came back down. She returned and gave Robert two tablets and then took two herself. After trying to swallow the pills, Robert spit them out as he watched his mother fall into an unconscious state. He had ingested enough to make him very sick.

About 4 pm, keeper Smith moored his rowboat full of supplies at the light. He called out to his wife but received no answer. He entered the house with a load of groceries and saw his wife and Robert at the table. Robert was pale and too ill to move and his wife was deceased. He franti-

cally searched the house for little Russell who he found upstairs in his bed, also deceased. He rushed Robert ashore where a doctor was able to administer an antidote in time to save him. The light stayed dark that night as the authorities were notified to make sure navigators of the shoal knew this. Keeper Ellsworth could not bear to return to the light where tragedy took his family. Nellie and Russell were buried quietly in a grave near East Greenwich, RI.

By now, three people had lost their lives at the Coninicut Light, but their spirits never left. Keepers would report hearing a

woman crying on dark nights and sometimes hear a child playing. Items would be moved about the lighthouse and a tool needed would suddenly appear as if taken from the boat by an unseen force. By the 1970s, there were no longer keepers living in the lighthouse and the ghosts of the Cominicut Light had all but been forgotten, but on a clear night, anyone sitting on Cominicut Point Beach, may spy a ghostly figure who appears to be working on the light, perhaps the ghost of Keeper Arnold's son, and the sound of a young child laughing followed by a woman crying.

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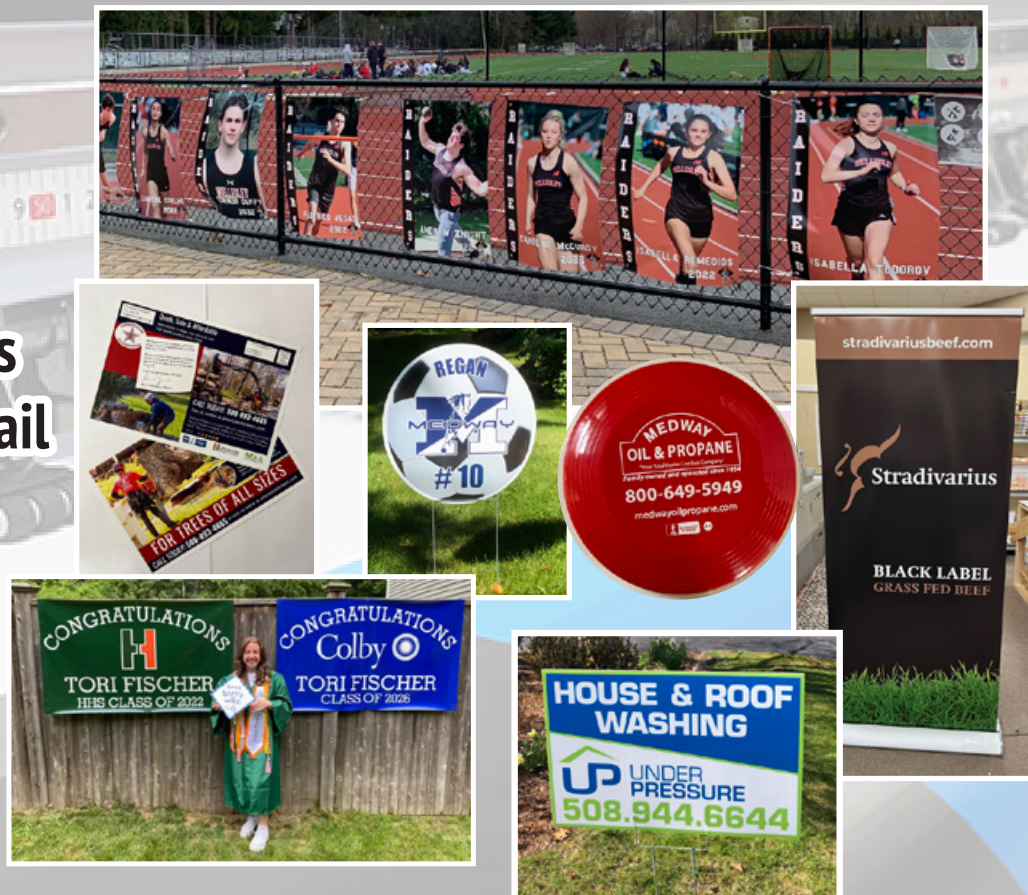
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