

# Hartford Courant



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## Warehouses face mounting opposition

More residents are pressing towns to reject developers' proposals

By Don R. Stacom  
Hartford Courant

Even though nationwide demand is dipping, separate developers are proposing mega-warehouses in Ashford and Middlebury — and hitting opposition.

The prospects of a 750,000-square-foot distribution center in suburban Middle-

bury and a million-square-foot one in rural Ashford aren't going over well with residents in either community.

Instead, following a pattern that's become familiar in Connecticut, homeowners are using social media, online fundraisers and lawn signs to organize opposition.

In both cases, residents say they fear convoys of tractor-trailers, congested side roads and around-the-clock noise. For many of them, it's also a question of whether the downside of large-scale business outweighs the potential for jobs

and new tax revenue.

"We believe our town has reached a critical decision point: what does our future look like? What kind of a town do we want to be?" the Middlebury Small Town Alliance wrote on one of its most recent blog posts.

Halfway across the state, residents in Ashford offer similar opposition to a proposed 1 million-square-foot warehouse. They warn of glaring lights from a stadium-sized parking lot, and

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Signs of opposition to a proposed mega-warehouse dot lawns in Middlebury. **DON ANDREWS/COURTESY**



Jeffrey Stein, a tutor at Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford, works with Ousmane Diarra, of Hartford, during an advanced ESOL class on Thursday. **BELOW:** Literacy student Emanuel "Manny" Chaney, of Hartford, talks about his drive as he worked on his reading skills over the years at Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford. **AARON FLAUM PHOTOS/HARTFORD COURANT**

## 'They teach you how to be a member of society'

"I came (to Literacy Volunteers), just gave it my all. ... All the students help one another. And the staff help each other. So we felt like everybody was equal. ... And we're not going to let the other person fail. So we help each other."

— Emanuel "Manny" Chaney



Group working to boost literacy in Hartford area

By Ed Stannard  
Hartford Courant

When Emanuel "Manny" Chaney enlisted in the Navy, becoming an electrician's mate, third class, he could barely read.

"I had a reading problem when I was in high school," said Chaney, 56, a Hartford resident. "I didn't know how bad it was until I came to the VA. And that's what brought me here."

"Here" was Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford, where Chaney now is in the advanced class of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

When he started, Chaney was one of the 19% of Hartford County residents who read at or below a second-grade level. That's

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## Probe of toddler's killing is ongoing

2-year-old's body found buried in park; no one arrested for homicide

By Taylor Hartz  
Hartford Courant

Two months after 2-year-old Liam Rivera was found dead and buried in a Stamford park, his death and the events that led to it remain under investigation by police, the state Department of Children and Families and the state Office of the Child Advocate.

The boy's mother, Iris Rivera-Santos, was arrested in early February and charged with intentional cruelty to persons, risk of injury to a minor, tampering with evidence and third-degree hindering prosecution, according to court records. Stamford police Capt. Tom Scanlon said Friday that no further charges have been filed against the toddler's father, Edgar Ismalej-Gomez, who was named a person of interest shortly after the discovery of the boy's body and was arrested on an unrelated violation of probation charge that night, records show.

A medical examiner ruled that Rivera died from multiple blunt-force trauma injuries to the head and his death was ruled a homicide. Police have not yet arrested anyone on charges connected to the boy's homicide, but say their investigation is active and ongoing.

At the time of the boy's death, Rivera-Santos had an open case with the state Department of Children and Families, according to

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## Biden: Right to vote under assault in U.S.

President marches across Selma bridge, pans election limits

By Aamer Madhani and Kim Chandler  
Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. — President Joe Biden used the searing memories of Selma's "Bloody Sunday" to recommit to a cornerstone of democracy, lionizing a seminal moment from the civil rights movement at a time when he has been unable to push enhanced voting protections through Congress and a conservative Supreme Court has undermined a landmark voting law.

"Selma is a reckoning. The right to vote ... to have your vote counted is the threshold of democracy and liberty. With it anything's possible," Biden told

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## The Boss is back

Bruce Springsteen is coming to Connecticut this month. Here's a look back at almost 50 years of the Boss rocking throughout the state. **Connecticut, Page 1**

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### Literacy

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better than the national average of 22%.

In high school, "I just did enough to get by," Chaney said. He also was good in math, which he said "was so superior and so easy."

"I was good at electronics and good at math and on a math team and stuff like that," he said. "So I figured out the other half. I never use calculators and all that."

As for English, he would avoid asking questions and had people help him with his homework.

"And then my senior year when I graduated, I felt like I had a piece of paper, a diploma," Chaney said. With a desire to serve his country, he joined the Navy, where they determined he was functionally illiterate and sent him to a reading program.

But he really advanced once he found Literacy Volunteers.

"The VA said, 'Give this a try,'" Chaney said. "I've got nothing to lose."

"So I came here, just gave it my all," he said. "And the energy I got here from inside the building, it was outstanding. All the students help one another. And the staff help each other. So we felt like everybody was equal. ... And we're not going to let the other person fail. So we help each other."

He began to be able to read about the ballerina Misty Copeland with his daughter, who's now a student at the University of Hartford. He's done so well that now "I can just pick up a Hartford Courant and I won't go straight to the sports section and I can read it."

Chaney gets ready for class by arriving an hour early, sitting in his car and



Jeffrey Stein, a tutor at Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford, works with Janette Ortiz, of West Hartford, during an advanced ESOL class on Thursday. **AARON FLAUM/HARTFORD COURANT**

getting "all the negative, everything out of my system because I've got a mission to come here at 6 o'clock and be ready to learn."

Steve Morris, executive director of Literacy Volunteers, said of Chaney, "Here's someone who not only has bettered himself by coming to this point ... He helps with the youth in Hartford and is very much open about saying, I have a reading problem, but it's not going to hold me back. Education is that important. He's just a really good guy."

Morris, executive director for almost a year, has been involved with the program for six and started as a volunteer.

"It's fun to see people succeed," he said. "And this is a population that is routinely kind of overlooked, but such a critical segment of our local population in terms of filling jobs and advancing them."

Morris said a lot of "the things that plague our society," such as incarceration, poor health care, lack of jobs, poverty, "usually starts and

stops with education, literacy being the foundation of that. So that's where we come into play."

Much of society's education focus is on kindergarten through high school, Morris said, "but what about their parents? What about people that fell through the cracks that need some help to move forward in life?"

"We can't really expect Greater Hartford to be the place we want it to be if ... thousands of adults don't have the literacy, the professional skills to move forward

in their own lives or take advantage of opportunities," he said.

Morris said Literacy Volunteers, celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, is "just scratching the surface" with more than 500 students last year and the same number halfway through the current school year. He expects to see 650 by the end of the year.

Besides teaching reading and practical issues like the rules of driving and how to shop for groceries, Literacy Volunteers has a Career

Pathways Training Program.

"That's essentially taking the skills that they're gaining in their literacy classes and turning those into sustainable employment opportunities, livable-wage employment opportunities, help them build resumes," Morris said. "We have connections with local employers."

He said employers will call and ask if Literacy Volunteers has more people like the one they hired "because they're so hard working."

Diane Klingman, development director, said while the students start off illiterate in English, "They have a lot of skills, some of them coming from other countries who are accomplished tailors, or they're teachers or economists or all these different jobs, and they come here and they're starting from zero. And they have so much skill and so much knowledge to share."

Another success story is Ousman Diarra, of Hartford, who immigrated from Mali in 2000 and started at Literacy Volunteers in 2018. He started in the basic literacy class. In 2021, he became a U.S. citizen, taking his classes at Literacy Volunteers.

"A lot of things have changed in my life," Diarra said. "I learn something new every day coming to the class. ... They teach you how to be a member of society."

Morris said Diarra, who drives a truck, "works basically seven days a week, owns an investment property in Hartford, is building his mother a house in Mali. Just the nicest guy you'll ever meet. And it's just a testament to how hard our students work."

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### Biden

from Page 1

a crowd of more than 1,000 people seated on one side of the historic Edmund Pettus Bridge, named for a reputed Ku Klux Klan leader.

"This fundamental right remains under assault. The conservative Supreme Court has gutted the Voting Rights Act over the years. Since the 2020 election, a wave of states and dozens and dozens of anti-voting laws fueled by the 'Big Lie' and the election deniers now elected to office," he said.

As a candidate in 2020, Biden promised to pursue sweeping legislation to bolster protection of voting rights.

Two years ago, his 2021 legislation, named after civil rights leader John Lewis, the late Georgia congressman, included provisions to restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to a campaign finance system that allows wealthy donors to bankroll political causes anonymously.

It passed the then-Democratic-controlled House, but it failed to draw the 60 votes needed to advance in the Senate even under



President Joe Biden prepares to walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., on Sunday to commemorate the 58th anniversary of "Bloody Sunday," a landmark event of the civil rights movement. With Biden is Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Ala., the Rev. Al Sharpton, and the Rev. Jesse Jackson. **PATRICK SEMANSKY/AP**

control of Biden's party. With Republicans now in control of the House, passage of such legislation is unlikely.

"We know we must get the votes in Congress," Biden said, but there seems no viable path right now.

The visit to Selma was a chance for Biden to speak to the current generation of civil rights activists. Many feel let down because of the lack of progress on voting rights, and they are eager to

see his administration keep the issue in the spotlight.

Few moments have had as lasting importance to the civil rights movement as what happened on March 7, 1965, in Selma and in the weeks that followed.

Some 600 peaceful demonstrators led by Lewis and fellow activist Hosea Williams had gathered that day, just weeks after the fatal shooting of a young Black man, Jimmie Lee Jackson, by an Alabama

trooper.

Lewis and the others were beaten by Alabama troopers and sheriff's deputies as they tried to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge at the start of what was supposed to be a 54-mile walk to the state Capitol in Montgomery as part of a larger effort to register Black voters in the South.

"On this bridge, blood was given to help redeem the soul of America," Biden said.

The images of the police violence sparked outrage across the country.

Days later, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. led what became known as the "Turnaround Tuesday" march, in which marchers approached a wall of police at the bridge and prayed before turning back.

President Lyndon B. Johnson introduced the Voting Rights Act of 1965 eight days after "Bloody Sunday," calling Selma one those rare moments in American history where "history and fate meet at a single time."

On March 21, King began a third march, under federal protection, that grew by thousands by the time they arrived at the state Capitol. Five months later, Johnson signed the bill into law.

This year's commemoration came as the historic city of roughly 18,000 was still digging out from the aftermath of a January tornado that destroyed or damaged thousands of properties in and around Selma. The scars of that storm were still evident Sunday.

Blocks from the stage where Biden spoke, houses sat crumbled or without roofs.

"We remain Selma strong," Mayor James Perkins said, adding that

"we will build back better."

He thanked Biden for approving a disaster declaration that helped the small city with the cost of debris cleanup and removal.

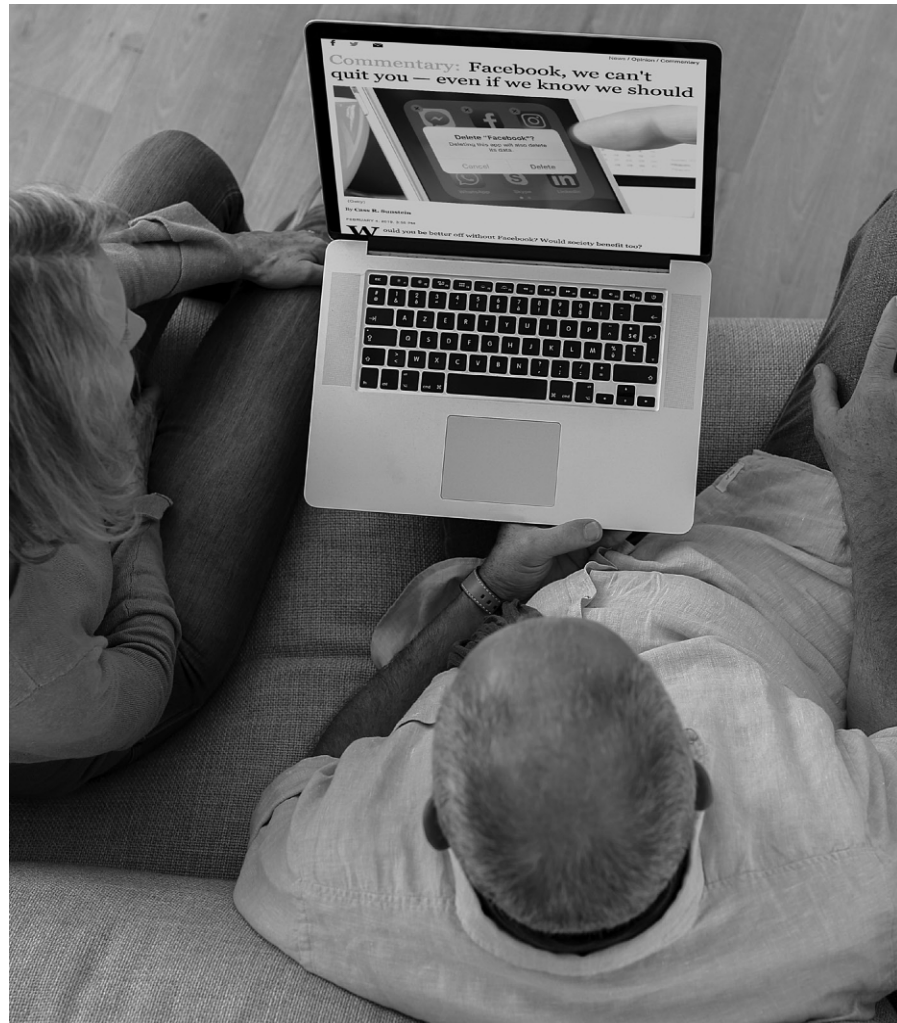
Before Biden's visit, the Rev. William Barber II, a co-chair of Poor People's Campaign, and six other activists wrote Biden and members of Congress to express their frustration with the lack of progress on voting rights legislation. They urged Washington politicians visiting Selma not to sully the memories of Lewis and Williams and other civil rights activists with empty platitudes.

"We're saying to President Biden, let's frame this to America as a moral issue, and let's show how it affects everybody," Barber said in an interview.

Among those sharing the stage with Biden before the march across the bridge were Barber, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Martin Luther King III and the Rev. Al Sharpton.

Delores Gresham, 65, a retired health care worker from Birmingham, arrived four hours early, grabbing a front-row spot so her grandchildren could hear the president and see the commemoration.

"I want them to know what happened here," she said.



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