

\$15M in evaluations of audits missing

Office of Health Strategy could not provide evidence of evaluations for 4 of 5 contracts reviewed by state auditors

By Bill Cummings
STAFF WRITER

The Connecticut Office of Health Strategy could not provide evidence that it completed evaluations for four of the five contracts reviewed by state audi-

tors that totaled more than \$15.46 million and also could not locate monthly project reports for a \$7.74 million contract.

Both issues were among a series of concerns flagged in a new report compiled by state auditors. “Without timely contractor

evaluations, the office may be renewing agreements with nonperforming or underperforming contractors,” auditors said.

The audit, covering the fiscal years 2022 and 2023, found a handful of concerns, including the lack of performance evalua-

tions, as well instances where proper documentation was not available for purchase card transactions. There was also an issue flagged regarding medical leave for employees who were out of work for an extended period of time.

Similar issued had been previously reported in audits covering fiscal years 2018 through 2021.

Kimberly Martone, OHS chief of staff, said the agency is making

changes to satisfy concerns raised by auditors.

“We have implemented changes to our business office and succession practices to address key findings identified by the audit,” Martone said.

“We have also enhanced our annual training curriculum to include more intensive training on procurement and staff and supervisor responsibilities relat-

Missing continues on A4



H John Voorhees III/The News-Times

Consultants recently recommended to the Newtown Board of Education that Newtown Middle School at 11 Queen St. be rebuilt.

‘Cost of doing nothing isn’t zero’

Newtown Middle School rebuild urged amid \$40M repair needs

By Michael Gagne
STAFF WRITER

NEWTOWN — The town should consider fully rebuilding Newtown Middle School, a consultant recently told the Board of Education.

Consultant Patrick Gallagher of MP Planning Group said the middle school building is the Newtown Public Schools’ facility with the most capital needs based on his firm’s analysis. The aging and sprawling

structure is both educationally inefficient and in need of nearly \$40 million in maintenance and repairs, Gallagher said.

Gallagher’s recommendation came with local leaders preparing to launch an in-depth study of Newtown’s public school buildings in the coming months. A facilities master planning committee that will include school district leaders, school board members, parents and educators, as well as other town leaders, will be

asked to carry out that task.

The middle school is among the buildings they’ll look at.

“How do you best address the capital needs at Newtown Middle School and some of those educational and organizational challenges of the building?” Gallagher asked during the board’s Nov. 18 meeting.

“I don’t want to propose adding another addition to that building. I think there’s been enough. Another

Repair continues on A4

State budget chief exits with a bow

Beckham leaves amid strong finances, and a warning

It’s always a good day on the job when your presentation to a powerful audience starts with a standing ovation in your honor.

For Jeffrey Beckham, that day was Thursday, his last one on the job as Gov. Ned Lamont’s budget and policy chief.

The audience: members of the state legislature’s two committees that control taxing, spending and borrowing.

The event: the annual report on the state of the state’s financial picture, looking at trends and forecasts by the Office of Policy and Management, aka OPM, controlled by the governor;

Haar continues on A7



Dan Haar

COMMENTARY

BROOKFIELD

Brazilian church seeks ‘significant damages’ from civil rights lawsuit

By Rob Ryser
STAFF WRITER

BROOKFIELD – A Brazilian church that was barred by the town for 21 months from worshipping in the former Fox Hill Inn where the church had a purchase agreement has filed a federal lawsuit, claiming its First Amendment religious freedom rights were violated.

“Brookfield implemented land use regulations that ... substan-

Church continues on A4

Bethlehem post office makes holidays special with iconic stamps

By Christian Metzger
STAFF WRITER

BETHLEHEM — It may be a town with just over 3,000 residents, but thousands of holiday cards come flooding into the unassuming post office on East Street every year for one reason: stamps.

The Biblical account of Jesus’ birth has remained central to the Christmas holiday, with the child of Mary being born in a manger in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem. Thousands of cards are sent through the Bethlehem post office in Connecticut so postmarks get

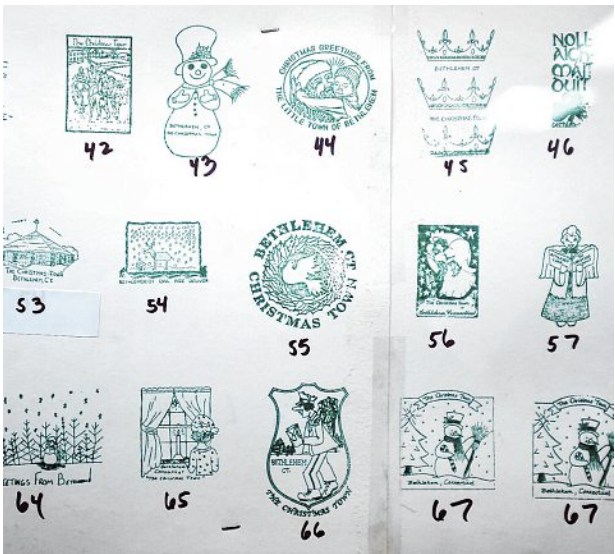


Arnold Gold/Hearst Connecticut Media

The Post Office in Bethlehem seen here on Dec. 17, 2024.

stamped with the iconic name. The tradition was

started in the town in 1938 by former Postmaster Earl S. Johnson. Those



A selection of Christmas and Hanukkah stamp designs are displayed on the wall.

who walk through the door can sign a name in the town’s guest book and choose from 91 different stamps to press into their cards, which is completely free through Jan. 1.

Decorated for the season, the entire post office is themed around the holiday to get visitors in a festive mood. Last year, Postmaster Richard Kelly told CT Insider that during particularly busy days over the holidays, post office staffers add postmarks to as many as 10,000 pieces of mail.

A preview of several of the town’s available stamps can be found on the town’s website.