

## New London to close Jennings school

Move expected to save district about \$3 million

By **JOHN PENNEY**  
Day Staff Writer

**New London** — After weeks of speculation, the Board of Education voted unanimously Monday to shutter the C.B. Jennings International

Elementary Magnet School as part of a cost-cutting plan expected to save the district about \$3 million annually.

The decision came nearly two months after the board first announced a school closure was being contemplated, and weeks after members sent a 2026-27 budget plan to the city that relied on funding one less elementary school.

Jennings International this year enrolled 338 students — including 308 eligible for free or reduced-cost meals — and 18 out-of-district students. The school has 66 special education students, 149 multi-lingual learners and 314 minority students. The 2026-27 budget called for funding 22.2 full-time positions at the school with a total operations allotment of \$7.5

million.

The closure vote was preceded by budget and building overviews by Superintendent Cynthia Ritchie and her staff during a special board meeting at the district's Welcome Center at Shaw's Cove.

Board President Elaine Maynard-Adams called the decision to close Jennings "regrettable."

"But we have to do something," she said, saying the closure was caused by the chronic underfunding of the city's schools by federal, state and local officials. "I don't see any other way. And this only solves 50% of our problem."

Even with the closure and its

**SEE JENNINGS PAGE A6**

## Mashantuckets break ground for medical facility

All tribal health care to be under one roof

By **LEE HOWARD**  
Day Business Editor

**Mashantucket** — A first-of-its-kind partnership between the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe and Hartford HealthCare will lead to the opening in the summer of 2027 of the Pequot Wellness Center, a 21,000-square-foot medical care facility that will offer services to the community while bringing all tribal health care under one roof.

"This truly is something that this community has been waiting on for literally generations," said Tribal Chairman Rodney Butler during a groundbreaking ceremony Monday attended by about 125 people. "Today's an important milestone for our community, our region and our collective future."

Butler, in an interview after the event, said the new wellness center, whose cost and funding sources were not released, was a 40-year dream of the tribe. Previously, tribal health services had been spread throughout several Mashantucket sites, he said, including at the beginning in converted trailers. Now, the tribal pharmacy, social services and behavioral health will be together in one half of the new building, with the other half dedicated to modern medical services provided by Hartford HealthCare.

"It's good to have everything under one roof," Butler said. "This is just another reason that shows the possibilities that there are when we work together."

Butler said health care was one of the first things the tribe thought of in 1992 when it opened Foxwood Resort Casino and tried to reconstitute the tribe by attracting members who may have moved out of the area. He said back in the late 1970s and early



PHOTOS BY SARAH GORDON/THE DAY

**Above**, speakers and dignitaries toss dirt during a groundbreaking ceremony for the Pequot Wellness Center in Mashantucket on Monday. **Below**, Chairman Rodney Butler, left, greets Hartford HealthCare President and CEO Jeff Flaks.



1980s, tribal members were lucky to live into their 60s and 70s, he said, but now people are living well into their 90s.

The Pequot Wellness Center will be owned by the 1,200-member Mashantuckets, with half the building leased to Hartford HealthCare. It will be, according to Chief Medical Officer Setu Vora, one of the first facilities of its kind where traditional healing arts of an Indigenous tribe will be combined with modern western medical practices.

"The federal level...is finally recognizing that there's value in indigenous traditional healing care and practices," Vora said in an

**SEE MASHANTUCKET PAGE A3**

## Baseball team may have avoided paying East Lyme \$66,000 in fees

For-profit group might have booked fields under nonprofit's name

By **JACK LAKOWSKY**  
Day Staff Writer

**East Lyme** — The town is considering changes to how teams reserve athletic fields after a for-profit baseball team may have booked use under a nonprofit name, helping it avoid paying as much as \$66,000 in fees to the town.

Town policy requires private, for-profit travel teams such as the local CT Shell Shockers to pay \$60 per hour for field use. The town waives the fee for nonprofit leagues like Babe Ruth and Little League, in an effort to promote participation in local sports and use of town fields.

Parks and Recreation Director Jerry Lokken said Monday that reservations are made on the honor system. If a Babe Ruth team reserves a field, the town does not verify that it is in fact the team that is playing and not the Shell Shockers.

Lokken disagreed the system is open to abuse.

Shell Shockers owner Todd Donovan, a member of the Parks and Recreation Commission, which oversees field use, declined to comment. Another commissioner, Benjamin Armstrong, is also associated with the Shell Shockers.

Donovan runs "The Clubhouse," a Shell Shockers indoor practice facility on Industrial Park Road.

"It's true that Babe Ruth is suffering from dwindling numbers," Lokken said, "and they've kind of entered into a cooperative agreement, and they form their teams with the Shell Shockers."

"Babe Ruth is not Shell Shockers, and Shell Shockers is not Babe Ruth, and Shell Shockers is not a not-for-profit. But when those teams are participating as Babe Ruth, we've allowed them to do that without charge," he explained.

First Selectman Dan Cunningham said last week the town became aware a few months ago that the Babe Ruth League was booking the field for free, but it was being used by the Shell Shockers.

Cunningham said he's questioning if the town was not paid up to \$66,000 in field use fees, according to a report from a town-contracted attorney. The report said in 2024 and 2025

**SEE EAST LYME PAGE A3**

## Nonprofit founder, citing Taftville food desert, seeks to open mini-mart

By **DANIEL DRAINVILLE**  
Day Staff Writer

**Norwich** — The founder of a nonprofit tackling food insecurity and homelessness has requested a special permit to convert the first floor of a two-story multi-family home at 324 Norwich Ave. in Taftville into a small grocery store.

Since the closure years ago of the StarrWood Market at 20 Norwich Ave., the Taftville section of the city has been devoid of a grocery store, and therefore considered a food desert.

Jehu Leconte, founder and CEO of

the Boston-based nonprofit EDEN, submitted the special permit application last month. The Commission on the City Plan was initially scheduled to hold a hearing on the application Tuesday, but the hearing has now been tabled until May.

EDEN, founded in 2020, works to help families escape homelessness.

"We serve over 300 families, and provide them with food basket and job trainings," Leconte said.

Leconte, who lives in Old Lyme, described his proposal as a "convenience store" or "mini-mart."

Plans for the 1,368-square-foot store show rows of shelving, fridges and freezers, a produce section, and counter for hot food service.

Leconte purchased the 0.32-acre property for \$305,000 in August 2025. He said he's been in communication with city building and zoning officials since last August, and has already invested a lot of resources into the plan, including contracting local firm CLA Engineers, which is helping design the store.

Leconte said he hopes to open the store in June or July. He said the

renovation process will feature demolition work, which mostly will be done by volunteers.

One of the things that led Leconte to propose the store in Taftville was how far residents said they had to walk to get groceries. Without a grocery store, residents have to shop at gas stations or small convenience stores, without little access to fresh produce.

Last summer the organization and a group of interns — students from

**SEE TAFTVILLE PAGE A3**

### WEATHER

Today, mostly sunny and cool. High 49. Wednesday, mostly cloudy, chance of showers. High 49. **A6**

### INDEX

Classified/**B4** Police logs/**A5**  
Comics/**B6** Public notices/**B4**  
Editorials/**A4** Puzzles/**B5**  
Nation/**A2** Sports/**B1**  
Obituaries/**A5** World/**A2**



## NAVY TO COMMISSION ITS NEWEST SUB, THE IDAHO, ON SATURDAY

**Groton** — The Navy announced Monday that it will commission the Electric Boat-built submarine Idaho (SSN-799) during a ceremony on Saturday at 11 a.m. at the Naval Submarine Base.

Electric Boat delivered the Idaho, the 26th Virginia-class submarine, to the Navy in December. Chad Guillerault of Chester is its commanding officer, and it has a crew of 134.

The director of the naval nuclear propulsion program, Adm. William Houston, is scheduled to deliver the keynote remarks at the ceremony.

"[Saturday's commissioning] will also be a strong reaffirmation at the Groton Sub Base, America's oldest submarine base, that the men and women who work at Electric Boat have once again demonstrated to our nation and the world that

Groton is still and always will be the Submarine Capital of the World," U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, said in a statement Monday.

During comments on the House floor Monday, Courtney, the ranking member of the Seapower Subcommittee on the House Armed Services Committee, reported that the Electric-Boat built Arkansas (SSN-800) and Utah (SSN-801), the 27th and 28th Virginia-class submarines, would be delivered to the Navy as soon as the end of the year.

Courtney also said the first of 12 Columbia-class nuclear ballistic-missile submarines, the District of Columbia (SSBN-826), is in the final stage of production and assembly by Electric Boat, and its delivery to the Navy has been moved up from 2029 to 2028.

## Clash of the titans



ANUPAM NATH/AP PHOTO

A pair of elephants fight during the Suori tribal festival in Boko, west of Guwahati, India, on Monday.