

To the Middlebury Select Board,

I am one of the lucky ones, so far. The storefront of my business has not been vandalized. My employees cars have remain intact. I have not been accosted or assaulted. Yet. And other than my time, which has some value, I have not felt the financial burden of our current situation.

I love this town. This should be clear from my commitment to the Better Middlebury Partnership, the Downtown Improvement District Commission, my support of town officials and by virtue of my financial commitments and investments in nearly every capital campaign from nearly every organization or social service agency in Addison County. I think you'd agree, I am invested in this community.

I'm not fearful of the group of campers in state provided tents under the bridge. I'm not afraid of the man sleeping peacefully in the gazebo on Saturday before the market.

I am afraid of a violent and destructive person with no regard for property of others. I don't believe she has physically assaulted anyone. Yet

I am afraid of someone walking into our business during open hours with ill intentions. I have explored some kind of locking mechanism or entry protocol and without totally remodeling my entry, it's 100% cost prohibitive. We have had one occurrence, several years ago, where someone asked to use our bathroom. My office staff allowed them in, they were in there for 20 minutes when we called the police. This was someone known to police, but not to me. It was a frightening but easily resolved situation.

Just last week, I observed a gentleman screaming obscenities while walking up and down the street while potential clients were standing outside my business.

I can deal with random obscenities. I think most people understand that we are dealing with a mental health system in crisis. What we find untenable is the lack of accountability for the harm, fear and destruction caused by anyone, regardless of their housing or mental status. Who is going to pay for the restaurant employee's window that got smashed? Who is going to pay for the hospitality cancellations because guests windows were smashed? Who is going to work late to cover the shift of a 17 year old who is scared to walk to her car after work?

As a community we need to find a way to prevent acts of violence. We also need to figure out how to cover these unexpected costs without further burdening business owners who already operate on slim margins. I hope the town, our elected officials and our community police department, along with business owners and social service agencies can come together on this issue. A directive from our town officials is a good place to start.

Respectfully,

Amey Ryan  
Owner, IPJ Real Estate

Dear Selectboard Members,

Over the past 2 months, the Middlebury community has been forced to experience the realities that so many are facing nationwide. Now is the time for us to demonstrate our commitment to each other.

I want to begin by stating:

1. I fully understand this is a complex issue.
  2. I fully understand there are currently limited options for municipalities to take in response to these issues.
  3. I fully understand and believe that when using the term "our community" it represents all, not just those with means.
- And given this, solutions must consider diverse needs.

With these understandings in place, I'd like to share my current experience with operating a business in downtown Middlebury and calling this community my home.

Over the past 30 days, The Stone Mill has endured the following:

- Guests' car windows smashed during the middle of the evening while parked in an area we told them was appropriate for overnight parking. (As directed by the town)
- Our cash drawer stolen by a man at approximately 11:35 PM, taking the drawer, ripping out the wiring and taking the cash inside.
- Our front door smashed, requiring full replacement.
- Our side window smashed, requiring pane replacement.
- Members of our staff sharing when bringing garbage in the evening hours to our enclosed dumpster area, multiple individuals exiting at once from the porta-potty located there.
- An individual entering our store to use our bathroom, which we make available to the public, and staying in there for 15 minutes, with no response, until asked to leave. When our staff was shown the image of who stole our cash drawer, they confirmed this was the same individual.
- Our side door being vandalized with thrown drinks and hit with sticks during an argument between a known repeat offender in the town and another individual.

We have, each time, contacted the police and each time they have responded in a professional manner, while sharing there is limited, if no, recourse given the types of crimes being committed.

We have, each time, repaired, at our own expense, or made apologies to our customers, in hopes our business will not be further impacted.

We have, each time, reopened our doors to our community.

But enough is enough. We need solutions, not reasons why this is happening.

We need our institutions to step up and act, not point to another entity as the responsible agent.

We need this situation to be treated with urgency, reinforcing the belief that for any community to survive, there must be faith in its members' safety.

Most importantly, we need a recognition that empathy and responsibility can co-exist. I can be empathetic and still expect to operate a business in an environment conducive to successful operation. What we have now, is not.

I have heard the arguments that punitive actions do not work, but neither is what we are doing now.

Thank you for listening and for your commitment to our town.

I look forward to seeing your leadership in this area.

Mary Cullinane

Partner, Community Barn Ventures

Co-Owner, The Stone Mill



Mary Cullinane | Co-Founder | Developer  
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**From:** nanciedunn@aol.com  
**Subject:** From Sweet Cecily  
**Date:** October 3, 2023 at 1:43 PM  
**To:** Karen Duguay karen@bettermiddleburypartnership.org



## To The Middlebury Selectboard

As one of the oldest retail businesses in Middlebury you can imagine I have seen many,many changes and disruptions of business in this Town.

The Train Project was challenging and hugely disruptive for sure! I have yet to know of one as concerning and frustrating as the situation the downtown is dealing with, based on the issues surrounding the encampment under the bridge and the illegal and violent behavior of some of the folks who live there.

I am lucky that my Main Street location is lit up and visible and has so far been spared any damage, but to be as proactive as possible we have installed cameras on the front and back of our building, something I had previously never thought necessary.

I am in solidarity with my fellow business owners who have suffered financially and emotionally as we are all trying to understand how we got to this point and what to do now.

For me, I feel like we are being "held hostage" by the fact that the Police as well as mental health organizations and the Justice Department cannot remove one very troubled woman from our midst who has caused thousands of dollars worth of damage, threatens the peace and tranquility of our patrons, and generally wreaks havoc nightly in downtown Middlebury.

We are assuming that many unhoused people suffer degrees of mental illness, from mild to Bi polar, are drug abusers, and suffer from alcoholism, its a sad but frustrating scenario being played out in cities and town all over the country.

I realize there are no easy answers but immediate attention needs to be given to this as a priority with input from all involved before any more damage is done to our town.



Giving Fridge / Everything Nice Impact Statement  
October 2023

Dear Middlebury Selectboard:

As the owner of a downtown Middlebury business (Everything Nice) and non-profit organization (Giving Fridge), as well as a resident of downtown Middlebury, I am writing to provide my feedback on the steady rise in crime within our community and the ways in which the judicial system has continually not only failed to be effective but contributed to the severity and longevity of the issues.

Since 2021, my business/organization and I have been subjected to 5 different instances of breaking and entering, theft, vandalism (multiple times), and criminal threatening & stalking (multiple times) - all of which took place within one block, right downtown Middlebury, all by repeat offenders. These incidents have cost me and my business more than \$5,000 with no chance of recovering those costs, and increasing my insurance premiums & deductibles in the process. Two of the offenders were transient, unhoused individuals, and one of the offenders, a serial criminal, was a downtown Middlebury resident. The common denominator amongst these individuals is mental illness to varying degrees.

The Giving Fridge exists to provide nutritious prepared meal support to anyone in need within Addison County. When seeking zoning approval from the Middlebury DRB in 2021, a DRB member stated that "people who need free food tend to be good for nothings who destroy property", and so it's important for me to note that these crimes have never been committed by any of our meal recipients. On the contrary, our meal recipients have continually volunteered to help beautify our buildings, to deliver meals to others and find ways within their capacity to give back- this is largely attributed to the community of caring and mutual respect that we have cultivated. This is not a blanket statement to take aim at unhoused individuals -the majority that reside in Middlebury cause no harm and the individuals that *have* committed crimes suffer mental illnesses such as bi-polar disorder and paranoid schizophrenia.

With each incident, Middlebury Police have been very helpful and professional and have pursued every action within their jurisdiction to attempt to prevent these folks from continuing to commit crimes. I learned through the process of reporting each incident, that camera footage is a necessary piece of evidence - officers generally "knew" who committed the crime, but needed that footage or other solid evidence to take necessary steps to apprehend them. Business owners and residents need to be made aware of this. Even with that evidence, however, the judicial system has prevented police from being able to keep our residents and their property safe, while failing the victims of mental illnesses which cause actions and outbursts beyond their control.

Moves toward reduced incarceration and increased criminal reform *must* be paired with adequate, effective and humane mental health intervention. Without it, communities are left with their hands tied, unable to protect themselves and their property, the individual suffering mental illness continues to get worse, and the consequences snowball to the decline of the local economy, vibrancy and productivity of our communities.

Middlebury is not alone in these challenges, Vermont is not alone in these challenges, but a local, personalized, grassroots approach may be most effective in addressing these challenges. We have no shortage of organizations whose missions are to support individuals needing mental health intervention. What's lacking are resources, support and clear, effective strategy.

When a young, able-bodied, unemployed man can repeatedly burglarize, vandalize, terrorize, threaten the safety of and cause physical harm to individuals in a small town over the course of a year plus, without any action to prevent him from continuing this dangerous behavior, there is something seriously broken within the judicial system. Allowing that individual to continue to possess weapons and fire arms until a plea was made by a victim of his behavior, shows just how inherently flawed the system is.



The business community in Middlebury is coming together to ask for urgent attention to these matters and welcome dialogue around the strategies and approaches that we can take together with the full support of our town officials.

Thank you, Bethanie Farrell

Karen,

Over the past few years, the population of homeless individuals camping under/on the riverbank of the bridge, has been increasing. As owners of Mr. Ups Restaurant, the businesses adjacent to this camp, many customers and staff have expressed their concern for their safety, as well as the intimidation they feel when they exit their vehicles.

Some of the following impacts and concerns on our business and the town of Middlebury are becoming alarming and quite disturbing, and in all honestly unjust.

- **SAFETY ISSUES.** / For our staff and customers/ Staff have been harassed at the end of the night for cigarettes and or \$
- **SAFETY ISSUES.** / With residents in the area, along with everyone who uses the parking lot. / Car windows and buildings have been vandalized. We were broke into just this spring. This included a smashed window and brand-new deck curtains cut.
- **THE DEVALUATION OF BUSINESS AND PROPERTY.** / This encampment and what comes with it, is surely making the business we have built over 25 years less valuable.
- **TRESPASSING.** / These residents of the encampment come into my restaurant begging for food and loiter on my property. There have been multiple mornings with them sitting by my electrical outlets charging their phones.
- **OPEN FIRES/**, earlier this summer I went out to our deck during dinner. The deck was completely full of guests, and I smelled smoke. I went into the kitchen to make sure something was not wrong with our hood fan. The cooks informed me that everything was working fine. I then proceeded to go out front and noticed a man walking across the parking lot with a bundle of wood. He went under the bridge with it. I then peaked around the corner, and sure enough, they had a campfire under there. The wind was blowing the smoke straight across my deck! I WAS IN DISBELIEF.
- **HARASSMENT.** / Customers and town folks alike. One of many examples. I had a father and 10-year-old son come in for dinner one night. When I greeted them, they were visibly shaken. The father asked what was going on outside with all the tents. He told me that when he exited his car, which he parked in front of the tents, they were met with extreme vulgarity and threatening language. A mail camper cursed at them. Telling them to get the F--- away and out of his space. This is a 10-year-old boy!!!
- **URINATION/DEFECATION AND NUDITY.** / They go to the bathroom in public, including on my property. I have literally cleaned up toilet paper and feces numerous times. I have witnessed them urinate within 20 feet of a dining table. I know someone whose office is facing the back parking lot of the library. She was in a meeting and a man walks up to her window and pulls his pants down to urinate all over her windowsill. She and her colleague were fully exposed to the view. How nice.
- **OPEN DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE.** / It is very common to pick up beer and liquor cans/bottles on my property and under the bridge. These people have piles of trash lying by their camp. It is very common to have the smell of pot wafting over the deck with customers eating dinner.

These are just a few of the stories and concerns that I have.

Thanks, Rick Buck, Mr. Ups Restaurant.



Dear Middlebury Select Board,

Per the advice of the Better Middlebury Partnership and the Middlebury Police Department, I would like to forward this impact statement regarding recent town vandalism on behalf of our business and our 45 employees.

On Wednesday evening, September 20, 2023, two of our employees, upon leaving work, discovered that their cars had been severely vandalized. Both cars had their windshields smashed in, wipers broken off and more. However, the physical damage done, which is several thousands of dollars, is outweighed by the emotional damage this has inflicted on our entire team. While we compassionately appreciate that there are some mental health issues behind this and other recent acts of violence, our team has nonetheless been left with fear for their physical safety and mental well-being. Our business relies on many of our dinner and late-night staff working past midnight and now some of them are questioning whether they are comfortable doing so, which severely handicaps our business and their livelihoods. If this vandalistic pattern of behavior and violence continues, we will lose employees which will require us to reduce our hours and days of operation. This will begin to hinder our ability to keep our doors open and could possibly lead to us closing our business. While this may sound dramatic, it is a very real possibility as evidenced in other communities. If our staff refuses to work out of fear for their safety, we will have no other choice.

With respect to civil rights, something must be done. Destroying physical property and the ensuing fear for public safety that it causes will create (and is creating) an environment that fosters fear and apprehension among those who live here and those who ordinarily might want to travel here. This is obviously an extremely delicate matter that deserves careful attention as those responsible for this violence are members of our community in need of help that is not being provided for a wide array of reasons. But there does need to be some accountability for those responsible for this damage. Simply put, I think we can all agree, if those responsible for this uncivil behavior are not held to account, this vandalism will persist and likely get worse. We welcome opportunities to be a part of a healthy and civil solution to this serious problem.

Sincerely,

Holmes Jacobs  
General Manager/Owner  
Two Brothers Tavern

October 10, 2023

Dear Middlebury Selectboard –

On July 26, the front door to Mad Taco was smashed. Police were notified and we absorbed the cost of replacing the glass in the door.

On September 18, just past 11:30pm a man came into The Stone Mill Public Market and stole the cash drawer. He walked out with the drawer and the cash inside. Video captured him committing this crime (picture attached) and he interacted, in the same outfit, with Middlebury Police on Mill Street that evening, creating additional video footage. Since then, I regularly see him around town when I walk to local stores and restaurants. I understand he is known to the police and lives in the encampment by Mr. Ups, however, I do not believe any action has been taken against him. The Market is now operating on a credit card only basis so as not to have cash on the premises as we employ several high school and college students and want to take steps to ensure their safety.

At some point in the overnight from Friday, September 22<sup>nd</sup> into Saturday morning, September 23<sup>rd</sup> the Public Market front door was smashed (for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in a few months), along with a window facing Mill Street. (pictures attached) Once again, we will absorb the cost of repairs to the door and window. Two guests of The Rooms at The Stone Mill (both visiting parents of Middlebury College students) reported their windshields smashed in the same timeframe. (text and picture attached) The Public Market is operating, in the busiest time of the year, with tape around the front door so customers don't cut their hand walking into the store.

This is a pattern, an escalation of activity, not by a single person, that is making it harder to run a business in Middlebury. You've heard similar instances from The Giving Fridge, Haymaker, Vermont Book Shop and Middleton. In our case, this comes on the heels of \$30K+ in damage from heavy rains this summer and is immediately preceded by the receipt of a \$30K+ tax bill from the town.

I would like to thank Middlebury Police for responding quickly and thoughtfully to our calls. I'd like to thank the Town of Middlebury for removing the PortaPotty on Mill Street after it had become an indoor gathering place for non-toileting activity by folks who repeatedly made our staff feel unsafe when using the nearby dumpster. I'd like to thank the Middlebury Selectboard for hosting this conversation and look forward to the town addressing this community issue in partnership with local health and human service organizations and law enforcement officials in the coming weeks.

I have great empathy for anyone struggling with mental health challenges, housing insecurity, addiction, or a combination thereof. One of our long-standing clients at Community Barn is a Sober Home that we have supported from before its opening, continuing through today. We did a year long, pro bono engagement with WomenSafe when we first started. These experiences have taught me a lot, further increased my understanding of today's issues and made it clear that a solution is not simple and will not come quickly. However, as a community we also need to make it clear that vandalism and theft are



unacceptable, that we won't simply shrug at people who need help or at business owners who are seeing their investment in this community diminished by repeated criminal activity.

Further, instances of vandalism and theft should not be put aside or hidden. The damage is real and has been unrelenting. Let us shine a light on this part of the problem alongside the need for additional mental health support, housing and recovery. Hard questions need to be asked and new solutions considered by the collective.

Sincerely,

Stacey Rainey  
Partner, Community Barn Ventures  
The Stone Mill Public Market, Rooms at The Stone Mill  
Co-owner, 3 Mill Street, Middlebury





The Stone Mill, 3 Mill Street, Middlebury VT 05753 [stonemillvt.com](http://stonemillvt.com)

Saturday, September 23

Hi! We stayed at Stone Mill last night and we parked by Otter Creek as you suggested in your email and just to let you know our car was vandalized over night. Our **windshield** was smashed. We called to police and filed a report. The officer said it had happened before. Another car's window next to us

[View all](#)



MMS 10:04 AM





10 October 2023

To the Middlebury Selectboard:

Like Amey Ryan, I feel like one of the lucky ones. Today. Though my storefront *was* vandalized on the same night as many others'—by gunfire, no less—I don't believe the perpetrator was the same person. I am prepared, however, because of the pattern that has so distressingly been set, to arrive at my business one of these days to discover *our* windows smashed, our planter destroyed, or who-knows-what-else. Furthermore, I am concerned for my personal safety and that of my employees in ways that I have not been before in Middlebury.

It is my understanding that the primary perpetrator of the recent spate of property destruction suffers from psychosis, either inherent or drug-induced (or both) and has been arrested sixty times since June. She has violently smashed cars and buildings, verbally threatened employees of Haymaker, and stripped to her underwear and bathed in the fountain during this past Saturday's market. This is not a person who should be continually released into the community, let alone the circumstances of her own life. It is only a matter of time before her behavior escalates into a *person* being hurt, be it an innocent bystander or herself. I am worried and anxious and am losing precious time I would otherwise be devoting to my business. To this.

I am fully aware that the problem runs deeper than this one individual and her behaviors. Our country is in the midst of a major epidemic of drug addiction and homelessness, the impacts of which were once seen mainly in cities now playing out in our small towns. I don't expect the Middlebury Selectboard to be able to effect change in any substantive way, but I do expect you to *address* the issue: to work with MPD to increase police presence downtown; to put pressure on the state's attorney to prosecute or commit this person; and to commit resources to increasing the availability of housing and social services so that our downtown doesn't turn into Burlington or Brattleboro.

It only takes a brief trip out of state, to just about anywhere in the US, to be reminded of what a treasure we inhabit. It is on us, all of us, but especially you as elected officials, to preserve it.

Respectfully,

Becky Dayton



October 3, 2023

Dear Middlebury Select Board,

I am writing in regards to the recent incidents of vandalism in downtown Middlebury. Though, as a business, we have not yet been directly impacted by the recent incidents as other businesses have, we share deep concern for those who have had to deal with such occurrences — including broken shop windows and property, threats to employees, and destruction of employee's car windows and windshields. It has become apparent that there is one individual who is causing undue physical damage to small businesses and their team's property, inspiring fear in the simple act of coming to, and leaving, their place of work.

Each morning, when we drive to our shop, we do so with a tinge of fear that we could have been vandalized as well. This is only our second year open, but the first time we've experienced this type of continuous issue within Middlebury. We also believe that it is particularly unfortunate that one individual seems to be sullying the reputation of other unhoused individuals in our community. We have had multiple unhoused customers over our two years who would spend their evenings sleeping outside — and they have been respectful and kind individuals.

It is our hope that the this person causing strife to many in our community, and their actions, are taken seriously — and that this type of behavior, with seemingly lack of consequences, does not set a precedent for additional incidents to be tolerated in the future. Middlebury's small businesses are depending on accountability toward individuals who have demonstrated ill-will toward what they've built, time after time, in order to continue growing for years to come.

We thank you for taking this important issue to heart.

Sincerely,

Maggie Keith and Anthony Gerakos  
Owners, little seed COFFEE ROASTERS



October 10, 2023`

Dear Middlebury Selectboard,

My name is Beth Bluestein, owner of Sparrow Art Supply on Main Street. I'm a newcomer to Middlebury and Vermont in general, and I could not be more in love with my new hometown. I have been so grateful for our town's support to open a retail business with the help of Kickstart Middlebury. I dream of my business being a flourishing artist community in Middlebury for years to come, and I hope I can realize that dream with the continued support of our town through good times and difficult situations.

The current environment in the downtown area is complex, and my fellow business owners and I desperately need the town's help to resolve it for the wellbeing and livelihood of all the parties involved. As a transplant from New York City, even I have been astonished to hear of the volume of incidents happening in recent weeks. There seems to be a few troubled people who are terrorizing our community. After discussions with Chief Covey, I learned that the Police Department's ability to enforce any effective repercussions, and more importantly, to get them the help they need to overcome their mental health challenges is limited. It sounds like the only two outcomes are that they move to a warmer climate when winter comes or they injure herself or others. Neither are solutions to this deep issue. How can there be such limited options to help these people, and get justice for impacted businesses?

As of now, my business has mostly been indirectly touched by all of this, but we haven't been unaffected. Given the slew of erratic behaviors, I'm on edge for my team and physical store. In retail, we never know who will walk through our doors. We have to be ready and equipped to assist or deal with whoever shows up. We invite visitors from all walks of life to come to our store and gallery, but hearing of the destruction and harassment, I am nervous about who will come through today, tomorrow, or the next for me or my team to encounter. Even yesterday, my 19 year old employee was closing at the end of the day and was harassed by a man in Frog Hollow Alley, making her so uncomfortable she didn't complete her tasks. I advised my team to change their parking habits and be on the alert, and reminded them of our so-far-unused pepper spray at our register. Right now given the current circumstances, I feel like it's a matter of when not if something more serious happens or I'll find our door smashed with damages inside.

In the long term, I'm scared for the reputation of the downtown scene. Yes, scared. It is an unbelievably difficult time to be a business owner. Every sale matters. What happens when this continues and downtown Middlebury is known to be an unsafe place to visit for locals and beyond? We will lose customers and sales, and then there won't be a Sparrow Art Supply nor a vibrant downtown Middlebury.

I acknowledge the nationwide systems to help those experiencing mental health crises, addiction, and housing insecurity are broken, and the criminal justice system is imperfect. But we have to work towards a resolution. There must be a way for the entire Middlebury community to live amicably and all members to co-exist in our town. This group is not the first, nor is it the last, to make this sort of impression on our community. I echo the sentiments of my fellow business owners; please don't let this fall on our shoulders alone to deal with. Help us address this now before it's too late. I look forward to working together, along with MPD, CSAC, and any other organizations we can involve to work towards a resolution.

Sincerely,

Beth Bluestein



**Non-profit Thrift Boutique –**  
**60 Main Street, Middlebury, VT 05753**

**buyagainalley@gmail.com**  
**802-989-9458**

**President:**  
**David Pistilli**

On Saturday morning, September 23, I arrived at our Main Street shop to find our outside planters vandalized. All plants had been destroyed, uprooted and thrown over the sidewalk. Ours was not the only business to suffer damage that night. This was heartbreaking for many reasons, not the least of which is the effort and cost all of the small businesses in Middlebury take on to create an inviting community space for all.

**Vice President:**  
**Jutta Miska**

**Secretary:**  
**Damian Tollens**

**Treasurer:**  
**Ann Perreault**

**Board Member:**  
**Johannah Schneider**

But the economic reality is, as a non-profit small business, we just manage to cover our overhead each year. The expense of flowers for sidewalk decoration is an extravagance that, for us, cannot be repeated. And this is the impact we are feeling from this recent spate of vandalism in our downtown-the inability to replace those things that create a vibrant downtown. And having a vibrant downtown has been a struggle through these past years. With the long term construction that created a lack of parking for customers, through COVID when there were no customers- our downtown businesses are just looking for support as we navigate this upturn in vandalism that is affecting us.

**Executive Director:**  
**Jeanette Gyukeri**

You are receiving impact statements from many local businesses this evening. While mine may not be as eloquent as the others, please know that I am joined with them in asking you, our selectboard, to hear our concerns and come up with actionable solutions. We will all be at our places of business tomorrow, open and welcoming to those who walk through our doors. Please help us to keep those doors open.

Jeanette Gyukeri