

# Record-Journal

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Flight instructor Mike DiFiore, of Middletown, fuels up a Piper Warrior at Meriden-Markham Airport in preparation for a return flight to Hartford-Brainard Airport on Wednesday. Meriden-Markham strives to offer low fuel prices. | Dave Zajac / Record-Journal

## DOT gives details of I-84 bridge installation

By Jesse Buchanan  
Record-Journal staff

**SOUTHTONGTON** — State and local officials explained to about two dozen residents Wednesday details of the plan to replace the highway bridge over Marion Avenue, a project that will close Interstate 84 for 56 hours and reroute local traffic.

The state Department of Transportation is building a replacement bridge next to the structure carrying I-84 over Marion Avenue. The new bridge will be wheeled into place and installed from Friday, June 27, at 9 p.m. to Monday, June 30, at 5 a.m.

DOT spokesman Kevin Nursick said the replacement is the first major project in the state to use the new method, called accelerated bridge construction. The replacement is completed over a weekend.

Marion Avenue will be closed as highway traffic is diverted from the highway before the bridge, using the ramps of Exit 30 to return to the highway. Fifteen hundred cars per hour will be detoured around the bridge back onto the highway, according to state officials.

Marion Avenue traffic will be detoured using Diana Road, Prospect Street, West Street and West Main Street, according to police Lt. Michael Baribault.

State officials are hoping to detour highway traffic away from I-84 toward Interstates 691 and 91.

The weekend scheduled for the bridge replacement was moved Tuesday from the weekend of June 21-22 to avoid a conflict with the Travelers Championship golf tournament in Cromwell.

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## Rebranding boosts city's airport

New logo, website unveiled as officials seek more funding

By Dan Brechlin  
Record-Journal staff

**MERIDEN** — Efforts are underway to rebrand Meriden-Markham Airport and to revive the often-forgotten facility. City leaders and airport stakeholders have banded together to help bring additional funds to the airport for large- and small-scale improvements. “For way too long the airport hasn’t received the attention it needs,” City Councilor Cathy Battista said during a meeting at the airport Wednesday night. “What happens here will have an economic impact on what goes on in the city. Not everybody believes that, but it will happen.”

Battista is among those who helped organize a rebranding of the airport, with the unveiling

Wednesday night of a new logo and a new website: [www.meridenmarkham.com](http://www.meridenmarkham.com). It was also announced that the airport will host a fly-in that could bring numerous planes to the municipal airport.

The airport was in poor shape when it was taken over in 2011, said city Purchasing Officer Wilma Petro, who doubles as the city’s administrator for the airport.

“There were illegal oil and fuel tanks where we couldn’t even get fuel so we had to get new pumps,” Petro said. “There were actual holes in the floors ... I’m glad there are renovations being made and there have been investments.”

Some of the airport’s problems involved its former operator, Meriden Aviation Group. The city opted not to renew the company’s contract in 2010 after the operator failed to meet benchmarks, did not pay for snow removal, and left an empty fuel tank. In 2012, the city



The municipal airport’s new logo was unveiled Wednesday.

paid \$72,000 to fill the tank and has since been marketing it as a cheaper alternative to many fueling stations in the region.

The city has seen investment in the airport over the last few years with the help of federal funding. Because funding is often difficult to come by, Battista said, there will be an added effort to raise funds and direct them straight to the airport. Funding was secured for a new hangar and a structure to house snow-removal equipment and other maintenance items. A new fuel station has been installed, along with runway

lights, and the administration building has been aesthetically improved.

The fuel is priced lower than at most other airports in the area and can be purchased with debit or credit cards, which has drawn people from around the Northeast.

“We have seen a lot of people fly in from Long Island,” said Constance Castillo, the airport manager. “Gas is a dollar or two cheaper here than it is in that area, so a lot of the flight schools come up here.”

To raise funds for the airport, the City Council Finance Committee supported a resolution this week that would create an airport reserve fund. Any funds raised for the airport will be put in the fund and only be used for airport-related events and improvements.

The fly-in event is scheduled for Oct. 18 to show off the airport and help raise funds. Pi-

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## No council vote, but at least dialogue

Discussion of capital project spending is seen as positive start

By Eric Vo  
Record-Journal staff

**WALLINGFORD** — The Town Council ultimately did not vote on the Board of Education’s request for an additional \$280,000 for capital projects after the mayor pointed out that councilors could not act without his recommendation. Then, the council opted not to create a joint committee to improve planning for long-range capital projects, as had been discussed prior to Tuesday’s council meeting.

Still, town and school officials said Wednesday they were pleased to have at least started a dialogue on the issue.

School Superintendent Sal-

vatore Menzo and school board Chairwoman Roxane McKay appeared before the council Tuesday to discuss a possible appropriation of \$279,411 to the Board of Education. The money had been cut from the 2013-14 education budget when state aid to the town was expected to be lower than expected. While the reduction in aid did not occur, the money was never restored. Menzo and McKay had hoped it could be used in the next budget to replenish the school system’s unused fund balance, but only on one-time capital purchases like new computers and lighting upgrades. Any remaining money would be put toward improvements to the Lyman Hall High School athletic complex.

Action by the council was expected, but Mayor William W. Dickinson Jr. said any financial appropriation would first re-

quire his recommendation and the resolution did not move forward. McKay said she found the confusion over how the board should have proceeded frustrating and Menzo called it disappointing.

The council also opted not to act on the creation of the joint committee because councilors said the school board was better off dealing directly with the town’s Finance Department.

By next school year, the Board of Education will face nearly \$8 million in unfunded capital improvement projects that were deferred over the years. Typically, maintenance projects are pushed to the next year by the board if another budget item is identified as a higher priority. Menzo told the Town Council that in the past certain capital improvement projects have been postponed unless the town is at risk of a violation or

it creates a safety concern.

“It was a very interesting conversation,” Menzo said in an interview Wednesday. “... The conversation was very meaningful, but it wasn’t completed — like all the conversations last night regarding the Board of Education.”

Menzo said he and McKay will submit documents to Town Comptroller James Bowes that detail the capital improvement projects slated for the next three school years. The documents will be sent by June 4, Menzo said, adding “it will be in (Bowes’) hands to get back to me on how he’d like to proceed based on (Tuesday) night’s meeting.” Bowes could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

During a budget workshop earlier this month, Town

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## Oscar winner, authors to join reading event

By Molly Callahan  
Record-Journal staff

**MERIDEN** — The third annual Celebration of Readers promises to be bigger than ever, with an Academy Award-winning actress and authors coming to celebrate elementary and middle school students who have read one million words or more during the school year.

The June 16 event is the culmination of the Accelerated Reading program. Octavia Spencer, Toni DiTerlizzi, Marilyn Nelson, and Nora Raleigh Baskin will speak and sign books.

Spencer won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress for her role in “The Help” and authored “The Case of the Time-Capsule Bandit,” a book geared for middle school students.

“We’re so excited to have her here,” said David Salafia, family-school liaison director.

Salafia said last year’s event drew 500 students and family members.

“This year I expect we’ll have about 125 kids each from Washington and Lincoln, and

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Spencer



Mostly sunny morning, partly sunny afternoon. Highs near 70, lows near 45. Forecast, Page D3.

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### Here's the plan, and some breakfast

► The Early Childhood Collaborative of Southington will unveil a community plan this morning during a breakfast with community leaders, administrators, business representatives and local politicians. Page A3.

### Heartbreaker

► Amity beat Cheshire on a two-run single by Teresa Marchitto in the bottom of the seventh inning in the SCC softball tournament quarterfinal. Page B1.



### Two projects in neighborhood

► Reconstruction of Meriden’s Gravel Street — an \$8.7 million project — is finally getting underway. Page C1.



### Maya Angelou dies

► Maya Angelou, whose landmark 1969 book, “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,” was among the first autobiographies by a 20th-century black woman to reach a wide general readership, died Wednesday. She was 86. Page C2.



### Drones look into hurricanes

► The point where the rolling ocean meets the fury of a hurricane’s winds may hold the key to improving storm intensity forecasts — but it’s nearly impossible for scientists to see. Page D1.