

# TOWNSHIP OF MIDDLETOWN

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## Middletown Township Signs Sister City Pact with Ofakim, Israel

*First Sister City Pact in Township's History*

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MIDDLETOWN, NJ – On the morning of January 6, 2025, Middletown Township Mayor Tony Perry and Ofakim, Israel Mayor Itzik Danino signed a sister city pact to symbolically unite the two cities they govern. This is Middletown Township's first sister city agreement in its 361 years of history.

The day began with the Middletown Township Police Department (MTPD) escorting Mayor Danino to Town Hall where he was welcomed by the Middletown Township Committee and the MTPD and Monmouth County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) Honor Guards. Mayor Danino arrived with members of the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ, the nonprofit that helped organize his visit to the United States of America.

Before the 11:00 AM ceremony, there was a private breakfast in the Mayor's Conference Room that was attended by legislators and community leaders. A key moment during the breakfast was when Duvi Honig, founder and CEO of the Jewish Chamber of Commerce, presented Mayor Perry with a unique mezuzah crafted from the Iron Dome scrap metal that intercepted missiles targeting Ofakim civilians. Then, as a symbol of the spiritual and cultural connection between Middletown and Ofakim, Rabbi Shmaya Galperin of the Chabad Jewish Center of Holmdel affixed a mezuzah to the door of the Mayor's Office.

Mayor Perry's bond with Mayor Danino first began in January 2024 when he visited Ofakim following the aftermath of October 7, 2023 and its heartbreaking loss of 48 residents. Middletown lost 37 residents on September 11, 2001 and continues to feel the impacts from that fateful day. As a result of their communities' experiences with terrorism and grief, Mayor Perry and Mayor Danino quickly built a friendship rooted in resilience and remembrance.

This sister city pact represents the two cities' commitment to fostering cultural, educational, and economic bonds. "This ceremonial joining of our two towns is only the beginning of the work we plan to do together," said Mayor Tony Perry. "This alliance is a testament to our common aspirations to stand together to denounce terrorism, deepen economic connections, share best practices to enhance public safety, and build bridges through education that promote cultural enrichment and understanding."

The public signing ceremony took place in the courtroom at Town Hall and began with both countries' national anthems and the Honor Guards presenting the Colors of the Nation of Israel and the United States. Rabbi Rob Tobin of B'nai Shalom in West Orange conducted the Invocation.

Both Mayor Perry and Mayor Danino, who was accompanied by a translator, then addressed the packed room to provide some background about how and why they formed an immediate kinship and their shared hope for a better tomorrow. The mayors then officially signed and swapped their respective sister city pacts.

"The partnership with Middletown is a moving expression of solidarity and friendship," said Mayor Danino. "Mayor Perry chose to visit Ofakim amidst the pain and destruction which demonstrated what true friendship between cities, and people, look like. The sister-city signing event was both emotional and dignified, and I am confident that it will continue to bear fruit for both our communities in the future."

After the signing, both mayors presented keys to each other's cities as they embark on this new chapter together. New Jersey State Senator Bob Singer and Monmouth County Commissioner Director Tom Arnone presented proclamations to congratulate both cities on this historic moment.

As part of the sister city pact, Middletown and Ofakim will form a committee of representatives from both cities to uphold the principles of their agreement. The committee will meet on an annual basis to review their progress and discuss technology, agriculture, and sustainable development practices, encourage business partnerships, share first responder training tips, and promote research opportunities and educational innovations throughout the year. The Middletown-Ofakim Sister City Pact is a pledge between the two cities to not only rebuild upon their foundations but also thrive, despite the challenges they have endured.

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