Alt-Hampshire Gazette

Read Globally, Act Locally

Volume 2, Number 2 | **ANTI-ZIONIST NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR 2026** | Wednesday, November 4, 2026

SPECIAL EDITION

Five College Administrators: Austerity Overlords vs. The People



Children of Gaza's Sumud School proudly display their work, September 2026.

EDITORIAL

In recent weeks, high school and university students have rocked the streets of European cities demanding an end to years of austerity measures that have gutted their schools and linking those measures to the racist militarism underlying their governments' support for the ongoing Israeli-U.S. genocide in Gaza.

Here in the Connecticut River Valley of western MA, our own austerity overlords tell the people they can't have nice (necessary) things:

» **Hampshire College** trustees have shuttered the school, including its Early Learning Center, precipitously throwing faculty and staff out of work, students out of class, and depriving families of childcare.

» **UMass Amherst** announced its final decision to close its Four-Skilled Arabic Language Program at a time when proficiency in Arabic studies is needed more urgently than ever before.

» **Smith College** decreed that the beloved 100-year-old Early Childhood Education Center at Fort Hill in Northampton would close in the spring of 2027. This decision would have ended the childcare of 80 families and thrown recently unionized (UAW Local 2322) teachers out of work.

UPDATE: On October 30, after a week of public outcry over this decision, including a march and rally of 250 families, teachers, union members, and community folk from Pulaski Park to the Smith campus on October 28, President Sarah Willie Le-Breton changed course, announcing that Fort Hill would not close until the summer of 2029. Friends of Fort Hill celebrated this victory, asserting that they will continue the union bargaining process, support for Fort Hill's teachers, the fight to increase childcare access for families, and the struggle to keep the Center open permanently.

In this special edition of the *Alt-Hampshire Gazette*, we depart from our usual focus on Palestine and West Asia to provide coverage and opinion regarding the above developments at three of the Five Colleges. Will Chaney, a graduate worker in the UMass Economics Department, proposes the paradigm of the commons in his discussion of a future for Hampshire College. Michael Stein, Ward 4 Member of the Northampton School Committee, examines local reaction to the announcement of the closing of Fort Hill, urging that it be placed in the broader landscape of attacks on childcare across the economic spectrum. And we provide news of the struggle (supported by over 1,000 petition signers) to preserve the Four-Skilled Arabic Language Program at UMass, and the unanimous decision to divest from Israeli apartheid by Easthampton's City Council on October 21.

At the 250-strong march and rally to "SAVE FORT HILL," Smith students passed out their paper, *The Sophian*. Its front-page article stated, "Northampton is part of a childcare desert. Facility options are severely limited; existing centers often have years-long waitlists or slim availability, especially for infant care. Fort Hill is one of the only institutions in Northampton that takes infants." (https://tinyurl.com/pachuyvs)

Smith graduate Mayor Sciarra issued a hand-wringing statement full of sorrow about the pending Fort Hill closure but promising to work on childcare alternatives rather than demanding that Smith reverse its draconian, anti-family, anti-women workers, anti-union decision. Kaila Goldstein, Fort Hill teacher and union leader, spoke at the October 28 rally on Seelye Lawn, and linked Smith's surprise announcement of Fort Hill's closure to its refusal to divest from L3Harris, the neighborhood, genocide-complicit, weapons manufacturer.

As we go to press with this special edition, we continue to support the struggle for the liberation of Gaza's youngest, for all Gaza's students, not from union-busting and austerity but from the terror of genocide. Many of our readers throughout western MA have donated to the Sumud School in Gaza City, as it struggles against seemingly insurmountable odds to keep its doors open to 200 children. Those children face the beginning of a fourth year of bombardment and starvation among mountains of rubble. We will never abandon their struggle for safety, for liberation, and for a future of hope and beauty. As we fight the austerity overlords at the Five Colleges, we call on our neighbors to fight for the future of EVERY child in western MA, and for their Palestinian sisters and brothers.

(Written by River Valley for Palestine member Jennifer Scarlott)

Take Action:

1. Sign the Fort Hill Teachers Association petition to permanently preserve the Early Childhood Education Center – https://tinyurl.com/yccj5fm8

2. Please donate, or better, become a monthly sustaining contributor to the Sumud School in Gaza via the QR code below.

OPINION: Smith College's Attempted Closure of Fort Hill Early Childhood Center Invites Reflection

By Michael Stein

Smith's attempt to close Fort Hill in the spring of next year -- and its October 30 announcement that it would do so in the summer of 2029 instead -- is yet another blow to our local childcare ecosystem, one that directly impacts workers (who recently unionized), and families and caregivers who rely on the school for childcare. As a former Sunnyside parent, I know all too well what it is like when Smith chooses to end support for high-quality local childcare. I hope Smith will abandon their "voucher"- style replacement plan and maintain the Fort Hill Early Education Center permanently.

I also hope this threatened closure and the activism around it provide many with the opportunity to reflect on what it means when institutions choose not to support the needs of children despite having the money to do so. While I deeply feel for the workers and families who may still be impacted by this proposed closure if it goes forward in 2029, the organizing around saving it has stood out to me for a number of reasons. Fort Hill is largely accessible to those with cultural and financial capital. It is largely for the children of those with means. It is interesting to see that the same demographic, many of whom have supported Mayor Sciarra's austerity budget, quickly called for action because their families were personally affected. It was a moment where some of the "my kids are fine" crowd learned that their kids can be affected by similar choices.

I raise this issue not to shame these new activists, but rather to raise their current plight as an invitation for reflection. Many advocates seem unaware that Head Start serves numerous infants in our community, claiming online that Fort Hill is the only option. This is another blind spot of privilege and explains why they haven't organized rallies to oppose the cuts and regulation changes the Trump administration is implementing to the Head Start program. Put simply, those cuts and regulation changes are catastrophic. More troubling, many have turned a deaf ear to the pleas of caregivers to some of the most marginalized kids in Northampton's public schools. They have defended the austerity of the current Mayor despite the DESE (MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) findings and ongoing Justice Department investigation and justified this austerity in terms not dissimilar from Smith President Sarah Willie-LeBreton's April 30, 2024 op-ed in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*.

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On October 28, more than 250 families, teachers, union members, and community folk marched from Northampton's Pulaski Park to Smith College to protest Smith's announcement that it would close the 100-year-old Fort Hill Early Childhood Education Center in the spring of 2027. (Photo: Mike Denno)

OPINION: Hampshire College and the Ideology of Inevitability — Democratize Hampshire Commons!

By Will Chaney

Here's a FACT we keep hearing: Hampshire College must close, because of money mismanagement. Who wants us to accept that FACT and move on, without making too much of a fuss?

One group of self-interested people pushing this FACT are the Hampshire College ruling class (the "Board of Trustees"), who made the decision to close the campus in secrecy. Another group is the capitalist land developers who want to profit off the land, slicing it up into 20 or 30 different parcels and squeezing it for value. Perhaps another group is all those people and institutions who have always felt threatened by Hampshire College's revolutionary, avant garde pedagogy — too many critical thoughts and questions, too many new ways of doing things that call fundamental parts of our society into question. Their message to us is simple: "If you don't accept that the closure of Hampshire College is inevitable, then you are naive and need to retake Economics 101!"

In my graduate education in Economics at UMass and experiences trying to change society (what is called "activism"), I've learned that the only FACT about society is that nothing is inevitable. These technical problems — about managing money, debt obligations, property rights, building maintenance schedules, and so on — are just ideological tools used by the ruling class to conceal the real causes of change. To keep their positions in society's hierarchies, they need to cut off our imagination of a different world and have us thinking, "it just has to be this way."

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NEWSBRIEF: Students Oppose UMass Decision to Terminate Four-Skilled Arabic Language Program

Despite a petition with over 1,000 signers calling for the preservation of the Four-Skilled Arabic Language Program at UMass Amherst, the university announced a final decision to eliminate it. The course will continue at Smith College.

Four-Skilled Arabic is housed in the Languages, Literatures, and Cultures Department at UMass, and was formerly part of the Five College Arabic Initiative until it was terminated last fall. UMass had announced in October of 2025 that the program would end during the fall 2026 semester. Supporters of the program have rallied for its preservation in the intervening months, including gathering the 1,000 petition signatures. Students wearing shirts saying "Keep Four-Skilled Arabic" came to the October 15, 2026 UMass Faculty Senate meeting to demand that the program continue and that the senior lecturer of Arabic remain in her position as program head.

Supporters of the program have received little to no response from senior administrators at UMass, despite urgent efforts to engage with them. Maria del Guadalupe Davidson, dean of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, stated after the Faculty Senate meeting that she would meet with students to hear their views. However, she has declined to meet until after November 9, the date students begin registration for the next semester's classes and the spring catalog is issued.

At the Faculty Senate meeting, a UMass administrator said the decision to terminate the program was made by the Five College provosts, not by UMass. However, the same administrator also said that UMass faces difficult decisions around funding, hence the decision to terminate the program.

– Jennifer Scarlott

NEWSBRIEF: Easthampton Divests from Israeli Apartheid

Over the past six months, a core group developed "A Resolution Calling for the City of Easthampton to Divest from Entities Complicit in Human Rights Violations in Israel and Palestine." They collected over 500 signatures in support and brought it to the City Council on September 2. It was referred to the Finance Committee, which, with some minimal language changes, sent the resolution to the full City Council on September 23.

On October 21, Easthampton City Council voted unanimously in favor of divestment.

The resolution calls for the city to divest funds – over $450,000 – from companies complicit in "substantial, ongoing and intentional" human rights violations in Israel and Palestine (as defined by the American Friends Service Committee), including GE Aerospace, RTX, and Palantir. The goal is to align City finances with community values and refuse to invest in war profiteering.

– Jeanne Allen

Hampshire Commoning Continued...

Whether or not Hampshire College closes and is converted into luxury housing and Airbnbs – which is what happened to Goddard College just two years ago and is what the agents of capitalist expansion are gearing up to do in Amherst – is a site of social struggle.

Instead of inevitability, we have a profound choice – do we take up this historic opportunity to transform Hampshire College into a new, liberated university? An increasing number of courageous and motivated folks in the community are answering YES, seizing this opportunity and working to build a new path forward that is not defined by the ruling class's "inevitability" narratives. As counterintuitive as it may seem, we are seeing these crises as opportunities to build a new liberated world out of the ashes of the old imperialist world. This understanding of opportunities arising during moments of crisis is a basis and motivation for our newly formed organization – Hampshire Commoning.

We all know consciously or unconsciously that the society and world order we live in now is rapidly collapsing. The ongoing closure of Hampshire College, and the successful closures of Goddard College, Marlborough College, and many other liberal arts institutions is just one symptom of this Empire collapse. It is possible that there won't be elections this November, as I.C.E. agents intimidate voters at the polls to keep this fascist, genocidal regime in place. If the U.S. Empire limps along for another decade, then the climate change, pandemic, or A.I. apocalypses will be closing in around us. The rules are changing, and if we want to take advantage of these historic opportunities, we must change the rules we follow too – starting with letting go of what our rulers tell us is inevitable.

I keep hearing that transitioning Hampshire College into a new university requires a lot of money, so much money that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is raising the $60 million or $200 million necessary to buy the campus lands, debt obligations, and operations costs. But money is not a natural force, it is just a social relationship on the surface. The same ruling classes that deliver genocide, unchecked environmental destruction, and the closures of colleges like Hampshire also happen to have the most money. Is it a coincidence that the people with the most money want us to believe we must have lots of money to do anything?

Buried under many layers of ideology is the real social force – our collective labor and creativity for how to direct that labor. What if instead of focusing on the goal of money, we shifted our focus to what we can do with our imaginations and collective labor? What if the Hampshire Community started maintaining the buildings, the campus grounds, staffing the dorms, and running the dining hall? What if we transformed our relationship to the land and each other? What if we ran the classes? What opportunities open when the same individuals rotate through the roles of student, teacher, staff, and community member? What if we all become administrators, sharing in the decision-making power of a new Hampshire Commons? Would anything that we've been told is inevitable still determine our lives?

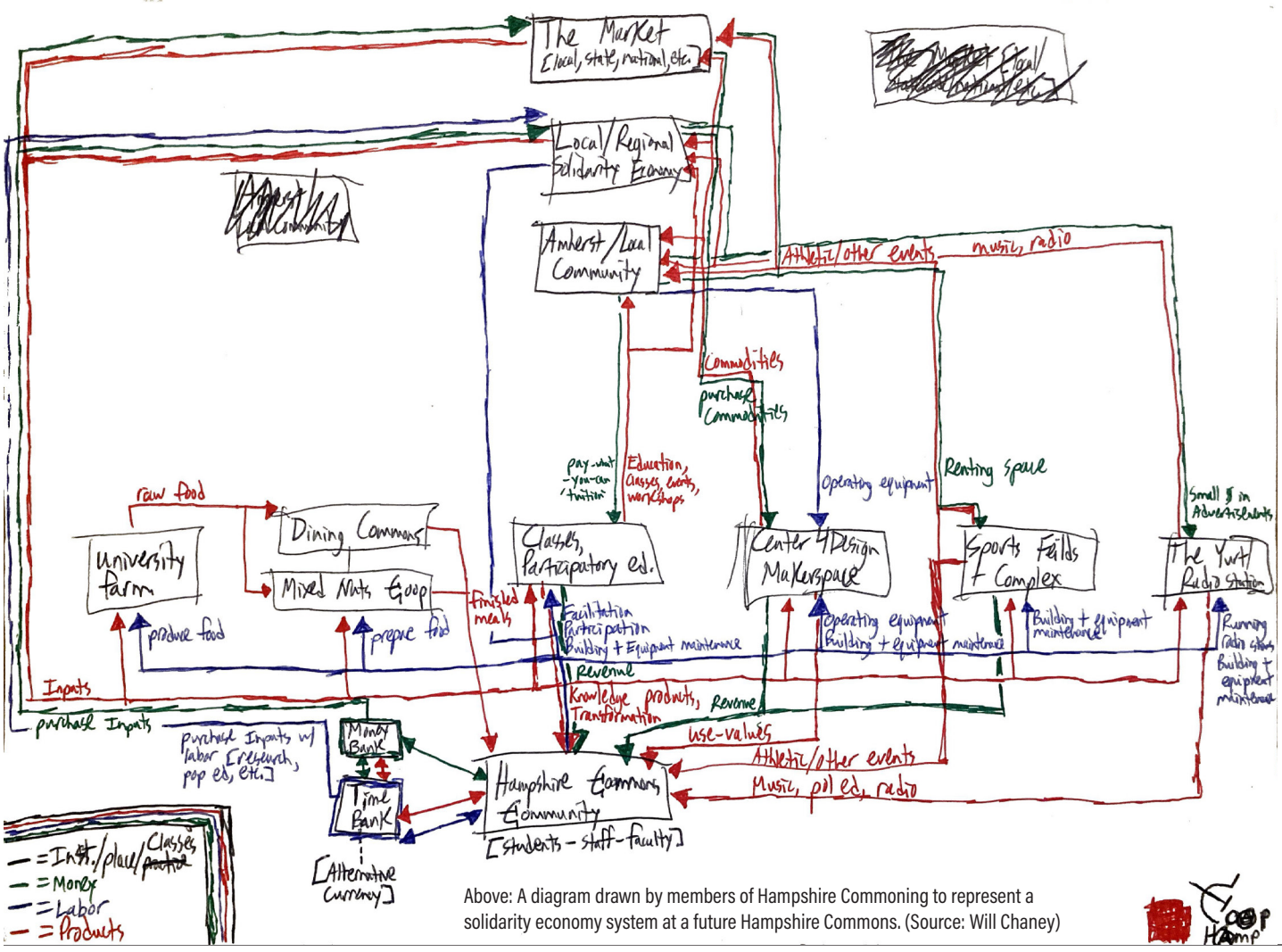
We have a chance here to redefine education, inspiring hope across the U.S. that this wave of college closures is not inevitable – just as living under a fascist genocidal regime is not inevitable. We could choose instead to see the opportunities and possibilities these closures open up. We could combine the unique features of Hampshire College into a new way of practicing education that can finally live up to the aspirations that define Hampshire College – decades of avant garde educational programs, the strong alumni network, the Five College Consortium, and the many existing Solidarity Economy institutions nearby who have been figuring out how to practice democracy. The ruling classes always undermined Hampshire College and contained its radical potential. But now that they've decided to close it, we have an opportunity to transform Hampshire into the revolutionary educational institution it was always trying to become.

We must act quickly and collectively before Hampshire College is carved up and turned into luxury housing and Airbnbs. If you are like me and are inspired by the vision of a new type of college, that is run democratically by its own community and collectively stewarded, join one of the organizations working to make this happen! A college is similar to a small city, and cities have many millions of things happening in them – a Hampshire Commons is going to need all types of people with all types of skill-sets, knowledges, and experiences! I mean this literally – everyone can be a part of this project in at least one way. In addition to other community-based organizations struggling to preserve the Hampshire College practice of education, our newly formed organization – Hampshire Commoning - is working on this cooperative/democratic vision centering Indigenous land stewardship. Nothing in society is inevitable – especially when those with the most money and power are the ones telling us inevitability stories.

Change in society is made by struggle and collective decision-making, and I invite you into this struggle over the fate of Hampshire College. Free the land! Fire the bosses! Elect ourselves and build a new economy!

Take Action: Join the struggle for Hampshire's future – email hampshirecommoning@protonmail.com

Will Chaney is a graduate worker in the Economics Department at UMass and a member of the Center for Popular Economics.



Above: A diagram drawn by members of Hampshire Commoning to represent a solidarity economy system at a future Hampshire Commons. (Source: Will Chaney)

Fort Hill Early Childhood Center Continued...

I invite you to reflect. I invite you to fight for kids and families that you don't know as if they were your own. I invite you to think about what this situation shows you about your own privilege and its relation to politics. I invite you to think about what the Strong Towns-style zoning changes have meant for gentrification and the speculative value of the strip of land Fort Hill sits on and what role that might play in this decision. I invite you to think about how Smith is quite literally subverting democracy in the workplace by announcing the 2027 and now 2029 closure of Fort Hill in the face of an organized workforce.

I invite you to think about all the families seeking childcare who struggle to pay for it and the downward pressure this closure would impose upon them as people compete for fewer slots. I invite you to think about what it says about an institution announcing this closure after receiving a tax cut in the "Big Beautiful Bill" ...an institution that remains an outlier amongst peers with no meaningful PILOT program (and a Mayor who is an alum and who did not push for it). I invite you to join those of us interested in solidarity for all kids and families and fight against privatization, inequity, and injustice in Northampton.



Children protesting the Smith College plan to close Fort Hill in front of Seelye Hall, October 28, 2026. (Photo: Jennifer Scarlott)

I join you in celebrating the October 30 announcement that Fort Hill's closure will be delayed until 2029 and in opposing closure of Fort Hill at ANY time.

Will you join me?

Michael Stein is the Ward 4 Member of the Northampton School Committee and a lecturer of Political Theory at UMass Amherst.