



# MIDDLETOWN

Rhode Island

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN

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To: Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown  
From: Matt Sheley, Public Affairs Officer  
Subject: "Middletown Commons" Town Center Question & Answer Sheet  
Date: March 16, 2022

Shawn, given the complexity and scope of the "Middletown Commons" Town Center proposal, I wanted to put together a Question & Answer sheet so residents, business people and others would have a better initial understanding of the project.

1. What is the "Middletown Commons" Town Center project?
  - It's a sweeping proposal to remake the heart of Middletown from largely underutilized 15 acres to a new town center as part of a public-private partnership recently approved by the Town Council.
2. Where would "Middletown Commons" be built, should it be approved by the Town?
  - The project is envisioned on the former Navy Lodge property at the corner of Coddington Highway and West Main Road. Moving north on West Main Road, the Town's West Main Road recreational complex, Middletown Public Library and former Kennedy School are also included. The street addresses for those properties are 600-740 West Main Road.
3. Who has the Town teamed up with on "Middletown Commons?"
  - After advertising a request for information locally and regionally, the development team of Christopher Bicho, James Karam and Rocky Kempenaar emerged as the best option to transform the property. Bicho is known as the owner of The Landings on Coddington Highway next door to the "Middletown Commons" project, while Karam and Kempenaar have successfully built hotels nearby on West Main Road.
4. So what are Bicho, Karam and Kempenaar looking to do with the "Middletown Commons" property?
  - According to plans the trio recently filed with the Town, a mix of residential, retail, affordable housing, a hotel, new public library and outdoor space were among the features of the project.

5. Do you have any more specifics?
  - Sure. The conceptual plan indicates that the four-story, 144-room hotel would be built at the corner of Coddington and West Main. Moving north on the property, a mix of retail and restaurants would front West Main, with residential behind. In the area of the Kennedy School, residential would border West Main, with a new 10,000-square-foot Middletown Public Library and an open space complete with a performance area. The plans indicate the residential component will include 15 three-bedroom units, 95 two-bedroom units and 40 one bedroom units. The developers have said a portion of the residential units will be classified as “affordable” and “work force” housing, with the remainder available for rent at the market rate.
  
6. This sounds like a major development. What does Middletown get out of the deal?
  - First off, the developers have assured the community that Middletown would get at least \$1 million in new revenues annually without raising the tax rate. Secondly, the development is planned exactly where the Town’s comprehensive plan and other regulations envision such a project. Further, the project would provide meaningful jobs, another source of much needed housing and could serve as the model for all future development in Middletown.
  
7. Hold on, this sounds like a done deal. What does my input matter?
  - Nothing is a done deal, far from it. While the Town has had early talks with representatives for the developers, nothing is close to being set in stone and the project faces a rigorous examination by the Town and several of its boards, including the Planning Board and Town Council. Throughout the process, your input matters and is encouraged.
  
8. What’s next?
  - The project is being presented publicly for the first time before any Town board or group on April 21 at 6 pm in Town Hall when the Planning Board performs a concept review.
  
9. Great. What’s expected to happen at that meeting?
  - According to the town’s Planning Department, this session will be the Planning Board’s public workshop, which will include a presentation by the developers, Planning Board questions and comments and public input. The Planning Board will then be asked to provide a recommendation to the Town Council on consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and any other recommendations they wish to make.
  
10. Is that it? After the Planning Board makes its recommendations, it’s onto the Town Council and then finished with the Town’s review process?
  - Incorrect. The way the review process for “Middletown Commons” works, if the concept is approved by the Town, the development team and Town will work to draft zoning to allow the plan to proceed. Following that, the development permitting process will begin, which will include public hearings and other opportunities for public input.

11. I want to stay up to date with what's happening with "Middletown Commons." How do I go about getting the latest information?
  - Visit <https://mdl.town/MiddletownCommons> online for any updates and an opportunity to voice your opinion about the project. Also, the Planning Department has regular updates as well at <https://www.middletownri.com/773/Middletown-Commons-West-MainCoddington-D> online.
12. How long is this review expected to take?
  - At this point, there's no set date for the process to wrap up, but it's safe to say it will be months before "Middletown Commons" nears the finish line. The lone date set in stone is the April 21 session before the Planning Board.
13. Where can I see the latest plan for "Middletown Commons?"
  - Visit <https://mdl.town/MiddletownCommons> or contact Town Planner Ronald M. Wolanski non holiday weekdays between 8 am and 4 pm.
14. What happens to the existing buildings on the site?
  - Those details are not finalized, but in all likelihood they would be demolished, with anything that's salvageable reused or sold.
15. Will the Town sell the land as part of the "Middletown Commons" development?
  - Although nothing is close to being finalized, the current plan is for the Town to lease the 15 acres part of the project to the "Middletown Commons" developers. However, nothing has been set in stone on that point or any others regarding the proposed development at this point.
16. Another hotel? Really?
  - While it might feel to some that the area already has enough hotels, have any closed in recent memory? The developers for "Middletown Commons" said their market studies show there's plenty of room for hotel growth, particularly in the upper mid-tier range they're planning under the Hilton or Marriott flags. About half the 144 new rooms are projected to be of the extended stay variety, featuring kitchens and other amenities for travelers who are in the area for a month to a year, such as defense contractors and those connected to Naval Station Newport. And this doesn't include the vibrant wedding industry, which lists the Newport area as the second most sought after destination for weddings in America next to San Francisco.
17. How many new jobs are expected to be created as a result of "Middletown Commons," not including construction employment?
  - Conservatively, the developers of "Middletown Commons" project 200-250 new jobs from the project at a minimum.
18. I heard there's a covenant protecting the West Main Road recreational complex from being developed How does this project address that issue?

- You are correct that there's such a protection, but it's not insurmountable. The Town is actually in the process of transferring those land conservation rights to another similarly sized property in another section of the community to satisfy those requirements and move forward with the project.

19. Didn't Middletown do a renovation recently to the library?

- While it might seem like yesterday, the renovation to the Middletown Public Library actually took place close to 20 years ago and the building at 700 West Main Road originally designed as a Navy childcare center is showing its age. Because of the weight of the book stacks, the concrete floor has cracked in a number of areas, causing the Town to perform emergency repairs. The heating and air conditioning system is also prone to outages and the building itself is criticized as being dated, cramped and not having many amenities desired by today's library patrons.

20. How is "Middletown Commons" going to address the traffic on West Main Road?

- While the project will no doubt attract new visitors to the area, developers said the aim is to mostly capitalize on the traffic that's already here. As part of a multi-prong approach, they've said the development will serve those 5,000-10,000 people who live in the area. The way "Middletown Commons" was designed, it's pedestrian and bicycle friendly. By making better use of the existing four curb cuts, developers said most motorists will probably see no difference in commuting and drive times.

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