



PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

April 21, 2022, 6pm

Town Council Chambers – Town Hall

350 East Main Road

Middletown, RI 02842

Board members present:

Paul Croce, Chair

Bill Nash, Vice Chair

Michael Fenton, Secretary

Art Weber

B.J. Owen

John Ciummo

Joe Pierik

Ron Wolanski, Town Planner

Peter Regan, Assistant Town Solicitor

Mr. Croce called the meeting to order at 6:00pm

1. **Public Workshop** – Presentation, discussion and public comment on the Middletown Commons development concept plan, and determination of consistency with the Middletown Comprehensive Community Plan. Property also known as the West Main Main/Coddington development center, fronting on West Main Rd. and Coddington Highway, Assessor's Plat 102, Lots 3,4,5,6,7.
 - a. Mr. Wolanski provided a summary of the purpose of the meeting and a timeline of work done over the past several years on redevelopment planning. He described the ongoing process of Planning Board and Town Council review of the developers' concept plan. The presentation covered:
 1. 20 year ongoing process
 2. AIPC West Side Master Plan promotes mixed use development opportunities to maximize open space
 3. Latest Middletown Comp Plan mentions this property and goals for development
 4. Town purchase of Navy Lodge property provided a continuous town owned tract from Coddington Hwy to Valley Rd
 5. Town RFP process to select a potential developer
 - b. Attorney Girard Galvin, representing the developer team, introduced the team members, which include Chris Bicho, Rocky Kempenaar, and James Karam. He invited Mr. Bicho to begin the presentation.

- c. Mr. Bicho reviewed the major elements of the plan. He stated that the project has the potential to promote improvement of commercial properties in the surrounding area. The Town will determine if and how the project will proceed. The residential component of the project will include 150 apartments of various sizes, which will include affordable, work force, and market-rate units.
- d. Mr. Karam discussed the proposed hotel, which would include a total of 144 rooms including standard and extended-stay rooms. He noted the year-round demand, in part resulting from Navy personnel participating in training at Naval Station Newport. It is better for the private sector to provide the needed lodging, resulting in real estate and room tax revenue. Lodging on the base generates no tax revenue.
- e. Mr. Karam discussed the anticipated revenue to the Town from the proposed development of \$1.1 million per year, including the land lease, real estate taxes, and room and meals taxes.
- f. Mr. Galvin introduced land use planning expert, Paige Bronk. Mr. Bronk described how the concept follows the Middletown Comprehensive Community Plan.
- g. Mr. Galvin introduced traffic engineer Jeffery Dirk, who attended remotely via Zoom. Mr. Dirk stated that the mixed-use concept will limit the adverse traffic impact of developing the site. The developer team also expects to provide traffic mitigation measures in cooperation with the Town and RIDOT. Extensive traffic study will be required in order for the project to proceed.
- h. With the developer team's presentation complete, Mr. Croce invited comments from Planning Board members.
- i. Mr. Weber stated that the project will contribute to the Town's financial stability. He noted that the ageing and declining population is having an adverse impact. Also to be considered is the need for a new library building and the need to be able to safely cross West Main Rd.
- j. Mr. Fenton asked about the expected demographics for the new apartments. Mr. Bicho responded that he expects interest from single people, young couples, and empty-nesters. The number of children is expected to be limited.
- k. Ms. Owen stated that change is a given, and it can be good or bad.
- l. Mr. Nash stated that there is lot of information to consider before the Board makes its recommendations to the Town Council. He discussed the hotel, community space needs and public transportation. There was discussion of the possible use of the abutting vacant Navy land. He noted previous discussions in town of a possible Fire Dept. substation to better serve the west side of town.
- m. Mr. Pierik discussed the need for a full traffic study and consideration of site constraints, such as the need for stormwater management. Landscaping is an important component. Mr. Bicho stated that site design and engineering, and details, such the size and location of the library and community space would be the next step in the process.
- n. Mr. Ciummo stated that affordable housing is a significant issue that the plan should address.
- o. Mr. Croce stated that the developer team appears ready to work with the Town. He questioned the need for an amphitheater and pool. The hotel should not be the focal point of the project, located at the corner of West Main and Coddington. The library

or other community facility should have a prominent location. He emphasized that the development should emphasize the name “Middletown Commons” not “Hotel Name” Commons.

- p. Mr. Croce opened the meeting for public input.
- q. Valerie Gelb of 94 Shore Drive discussed the different levels of affordable housing. Workforce housing is proposed. She agreed with Mr. Croce that the hotel should not be the focal point of the development. Traffic concerns will need to be addressed.
- r. Karen Biastre of 207 Maple Ave. stated that she is member of the town’s affordable housing committee. She stated that there are currently 13 hotels and inns on West Main Rd. Another hotel is not needed. An indoor recreation facility is needed since many have been lost over recent years.
- s. Mark Donahue of 600 Green End Ave. stated that he supports the redevelopment of the property, but a hotel is not preferred. Affordable and workforce housing is needed as well as a new library building.
- t. Jennifer Berrera of 59 Beacon Street discussed the income levels that define workforce housing. Lower cost housing is needed for service workers, though new market-rate housing will contribute to the overall lack of housing supply. She noted the high rate of student homelessness. Uses currently in the former JFK school, including childcare, will need to relocate. Recreation space in this area of town is also needed.
- u. Linda Finn of Compton View Drive stated that she is not in favor of a hotel at this location. The development should be a true town center that serves the needs of the community.
- v. Charles Earl of 6 Toni Lynn Terrace stated that the library should be located on the corner of West Main and Coddington. Consider allowing taller buildings. Consider structured parking.
- w. Karen Barbera of 36 Wolcott Ave. stated that the development will need to address stormwater management. More park and recreational space should be included, and the library should be connected to the open space. Consider orienting the bandshell to avoid late day sun glare for audience and performers. Outdoor lighting should be dark-sky compliant.
- x. Joe Pratt, Chairman of the Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce stated that the Chamber generally supports the proposed development, He cited the need for housing, the need for hotel rooms, and the good track record of the members of the developer team.
- y. Middletown resident Alan Bradley questioned how the proposed rents of the apartments can be determined at this point when development is 2-3 years away.
- z. Chuck Allott, executive director of the Aquidneck Land Trust, stated that ALT generally supports the development concept. Mixed-use development, with its increased residential density, is an innovative approach that helps take pressure off development in other areas where open space preservation is desired.
- aa. Carol Ann O’Connell who lives off West Main Road stated that ground-floor, single-story housing for elderly is needed. A larger library is needed. A hotel, retail and restaurants are not needed.

- bb. Lori Bradley of 4 Barton Lane stated that she is concerned with the loss of recreation space and educational services currently provided in the JFK school building. She also questioned financial impact on town of public water and sewer capacity expansion.
- cc. Lori Verderosa of 426 Third Beach Road and director of the Middletown Prevention Coalition stated that a community center is needed to provide space for programs and activities for Middletown's youth.
- dd. Liana Fenton of 53 Berkeley Ave stated that there is a potential to increase the school-age population with 2 & 3-bedroom units. She discussed the current student homeless population. The library should be expanded and should include a STEM center. The traffic study should consider heavy traffic during the late afternoon.
- ee. Mike and Deborah Murphy of 102 Ridgewood Road stated that there are enough hotels in the area. Open space is needed, and the existing field is being used regularly. A new library building is not needed. They have concerns with traffic impacts and the proposed drive-thru uses. Their street is currently used as a cut-through. Stormwater runoff and flooding is a concern.
- ff. Antone Viveiros of 45 Bayview Park stated that he has concerns about traffic impacts from the development. Regarding Mr. Nash's reference to a possible Fire Dept. substation, he stated that the cost of staffing a substation would not be justified. Recreational space is needed – where do children play when Pottsy Field is gone?
- gg. Kim Blass of 111 Compton View Drive stated that the Town should not be providing a hotel to accommodate the Navy's lodging needs. The library or community center should be located on the corner of West Main and Coddington. The plan does meet the community's needs.
- hh. Michael Cunningham of 21 Alston Ave. stated that he generally supports the proposed development. Concerns over the hotel and traffic impacts of the development are justified. He suggested that a center turn lane on West Main Road could help traffic flow. Undergrounding utilities in the area and a pedestrian crossing for West Main Road should be considered.
- ii. Sarah Gauch of 18 Donald Drive stated that she is chair of the Middletown Library Board of Trustees. The library needs a new building, but it should be bigger than proposed in the current plan. The library should be in a more prominent location on the site. Indoor community recreation space is also needed. She expressed concern over soil conditions on the property and stated that a bank with a drive-thru is not needed.
- jj. Alex Schofield of Maple Ave. stated that it appears that the proposed hotel would have modest sized rooms and would not have amenities, such as banquet facilities. Providing such facilities should be considered.
- kk. Dorothea Bantal of 92 Boulevard stated that she is a member of the Friends of the Library. She is concerned with the reduced size of the proposed library. She stated that the library should serve as a community center.
- ll. Deborah Murphy of 102 Ridgewood Road stated that improvement to the playground at Linden Park is needed.

- mm. Mr. Galvin stated that his clients have been taking notes and will address comments as the process unfolds.
- nn. John Bagwill of Tuckerman Ave. stated that, regarding suggestions that certain aspects of the plan be eliminated, the project must be financially beneficial for the developer, otherwise the project will not proceed.
- oo. There being no other members of the public wishing to speak Mr. Croce asked the Board how it wished to proceed. He requested that a transcript of the input received during the meeting be provided to the Board.
- pp. There was consensus of the Board that an additional meeting will be needed for the Board to consider the input received and to formulate specific recommendations to the Town Council. Mr. Wolanski was asked to poll board members to schedule a special meeting.
- qq. Mr. Nash asked the applicant if there was any flexibility to make changes to the proposal. Mr. Galvin stated that the major elements of the plan, including the hotel, must be retained in order for the project to proceed. His clients will be able to address other comments, such as design considerations.
- rr. There was discussion and consensus that the Board should vote regarding consistency of the concept plan with the Comprehensive Plan.
- ss. Motion by Mr. Weber, seconded by Mr. Ciummo to find the presented concept plan to be generally consistent with the goals and policies of the Middletown Comprehensive Community Plan. Vote: 7-0-0.

Motion by Mr. Weber, seconded by Ms. Owen to adjourn. Vote: 7-0-0

Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:50pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Fenton, Secretary