



MEMORANDUM

Date: March 1, 2022

To: Paul A. Croce, Chairman
Planning Board members

From: Ron Wolanski, Town Planner

Re: Comprehensive Plan - Housing Element potential amendment

During a recent meeting the Town Council voted to refer the proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment provided below to the Planning Board for consideration. As part of the work of the Middletown Affordable Housing Committee a suggestion was made to consider amending the Housing Element of the Middletown Comprehensive Community Plan to reflect recent Town activities to create affordable housing. It was suggested that documenting recent and anticipated efforts to create housing and address the recommendations of the Plan will help ensure that the Town has the ability to reject any projects that are inconsistent with these efforts and the Town's goals, and reduce the likelihood of such a decision being overturned by the State Housing Appeals Board.

Potential Comprehensive Plan Amendment

The following draft language is proposed for consideration to be added to the plan's Housing Element, page VII-26:

"2022 update:

During the past few years, the Town has worked toward addressing several action items of this plan that are intended to promote the development of affordable housing. Recent and ongoing actions include the following:

- Establish an affordable housing committee to implement the affordable housing plan and review the plan's progress annually (Action Item H-VI.A.1.) – *The committee has met on a regular basis over the past year to investigate options and opportunities to create affordable housing.*
- Continue to grant tax exemptions to seniors; allow tax deferments for elderly; and freeze taxes for low-income seniors (Action Item H-II.B.4.) – *The Town is actively evaluating alternatives for enhancing policies to benefit elderly and low-income residents.*

- Permit forms of housing that are affordable without subsidies; such types of housing include multi-family housing, mobile homes and Accessory Family Dwelling Units (Action Item H-III.A.4.) – *The Town has adopted a mixed-use ordinance and amendments to make it a more attractive development option.*
- Encourage development of new rental housing by allowing multi-family and mixed-use development where appropriate in the Zoning Ordinance (Action Item H-III.A.5.) - *The Town has adopted a mixed-use ordinance and amendments to make it a more attractive development option.*
- Allow mixed use by right in appropriate areas including second story residential over commercial properties (Action Item H-IV.B.2.) – *Completed with the adoption the Town’s mixed-use development ordinance.*
- Identify both municipally and privately owned properties which could be considered suitable sites for the development of affordable residential units (Action Item H-IV.C.3.) – *The Affordable Housing Committee has been active in evaluating potential development sites, including the identification of three town-owned properties with the potential for 50+ units of senior housing. The Town has also identified the West Main/Coddington redevelopment project as a significant opportunity to create new market-rate and affordable units.*
- Consider adopting an inclusionary zoning ordinance with density bonus (Action Item H-III.A.1.) – *Identified by the Planning Board for consideration in 2022.*
- Continue use of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) funding for programs that create low- and moderate-income units in Middletown supported by the community (Action Item H-VI.B.1.) – *The Town continues to support development and rehabilitation of affordable housing units through CDBG applications, and in partnership with outside organizations such as Lucy’s Hearth and Church Community Housing Corporation.*
- Explore establishing an affordable housing trust fund (Action Item H-VI.C.3.) – *The Town is exploring funding options for creation of a trust fund.*

In addition to these actions taken by the Town, several private developers have recently expressed interest in creation of both market-rate and deed-restricted affordable multi-family residential and mixed-use developments. Projects currently under review include:

- Rosebrook Commons, West Main Rd. – Mixed-use development with 144 multi-family units, 63 of which are affordable units
- West House, Phase 2, Forest Ave. – Senior multi-family housing, 54 additional affordable units.
- Aquidneck Commerce Center, Aquidneck Ave. – 12 market-rate multi-family units.

The combination of Town efforts and private development noted above, if they come to fruition, are anticipated to increase the share of residential units that meet the state definition of affordable from the current 5.2% to 8% or higher over the next several years.”

Comprehensive Plan Amendment Process

Should the Board wish to proceed with consideration of the amendment, a public hearing must be held prior to taking action. The process to amend the comprehensive plan is governed by state law (§45-22.2-8 R.I.G.L.) and includes the following steps:

1. Referral of draft amendment to the Planning Board.

2. Planning Board public hearing to present and accept public input on the proposed draft amendment. Requires three newspaper advertisements over the course of three weeks leading up to the hearing date.
3. Planning Board action to approve and recommend adoption to the Town Council.
4. Town Council public hearing and two readings of the proposed amendments. Requires three newspaper advertisements over the course of three weeks leading up to the date of the public hearing and first reading.
5. Town Council adoption of the amendment.
6. Adopted amendment must be forwarded to the Division of Statewide Planning for approval.

Please contact me with any questions.