



PLANNING BOARD MINUTES  
September 14, 2022, 6pm  
Town Council Chambers – Town Hall  
350 East Main Road  
Middletown, RI 02842

**Board members present:**

Paul Croce, Chair  
Michael Fenton, Secretary  
Art Weber  
B.J. Owen  
John Ciummo  
Joe Pierik

**Also present:**

Ron Wolanski, Town Planner  
Peter Regan, Town Solicitor  
Anita Guo, Principal Planner

**Member absent:**

Bill Nash, Vice Chair

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

**1. Approval of minutes**

- a. August 10, 2022 regular Planning Board meeting, **Motion** Ms. Owen, seconded by Mr. Ciummo to approve. by **Vote:** 6-0-0
- b. August 4, 2022 special meeting, **Motion** by Mr. Weber, seconded by Mr. Ciummo to approve. **Vote:** 6-0-0
- c. August 31, 2022 special meeting
  - i. Mr. Croce asked for a revision to the 8<sup>th</sup> condition of approval for the Mesoella Development Corp. Preliminary Plan so it will read, "Applicant shall approach RIDOT regarding access and egress alterations and traffic signal suggestions."
  - ii. **Motion** by Mr. Weber, seconded by Ms. Owen to accept the suggested change and to approve the revised minutes. **Vote:** 6-0-0.

**2. Correspondence**

- a. None

**3. Continuances**

- a. **Public Hearing** - Application of Aquidneck Group LLC for Development Plan Review for construction of a new commercial building and associated site alterations on an existing commercial property, and including request for waivers from certain design standards of Section 521 of the Middletown Rules and Regulations Regarding the Subdivision and Development of Land. Property located at 99 East Main Rd., Tax Assessors Plat 107SE, Lot 106..
  - i. Mr. Croce requested this matter to be continued. New documents were presented to the Board prior to the meeting but there was not sufficient time for the Board to review the material.
  - ii. Mr. Croce requested for the Tree Commission to review the revised landscape plan, and for Crossman Engineering to evaluate the general traffic flow of the site.
  - iii. Mr. Weber shared his concern with the proposed three drive-thrus at the location. He supported Mr. Croce's request for an evaluation of the general traffic flow of the site.
  - iv. **Motion** by Ms. Owen, seconded by Mr. Ciummo to continue the matter to the October 12, 2022 regular Planning Board meeting. **Vote:** 6-0-0.

#### 4. **Old Business**

- a. None

#### 5. **New Business**

- a. Request of Michael Richards, Esq., on behalf of Lewis Family Partnership for release of maintenance security for the Lewis Drive subdivision. Properties identified as Assessor's Plat 125, Lots 947, 948, 949, 950.
  - i. Attorney Michael Richards represented the applicant.
  - ii. Mr. Wolanski shared that he received a recommendation from the Town Engineer and Director of Public Works to release the maintenance security bond.
  - iii. The Board had no comments or concerns.
  - iv. **Motion** by Mr. Weber, seconded by Ms. Owen to approve the request. **Vote:** 6-0-0.
- b. Request of Middletown Self-Storage, LLC for concept review for a proposed self-storage facility to be located on property fronting on Valley Rd., Assessors Plat 107SE, Lot 43.
  - i. Attorney Bob Silva represented the client on behalf of his partner David Martland. Mr. Silva talked about the request and site. He shared that a self-storage facility is permitted in the zone with a special use permit and the project would have to go before the Zoning Board of Review for approval. Mr. Silva introduced the project engineer Mike Russell.
  - ii. Mr. Russell provided an overview of the site and building. He talked about how the project would have to receive approval from the RIDOT and RIDEM. The project is in the early conception stage and the applicant is seeking feedback from the Planning Board.
  - iii. Mr. Weber commented on the choice of building colors and expressed his general support of the project.

- iv. Mr. Fenton asked about the building height which Mr. Russell addressed will be under the height requirements. Mr. Silva stated that at this point, he does not believe that the applicant will ask for any variance or any other zoning relief besides the special use permit.
  - v. Ms. Owen and Mr. Pierik expressed their dissatisfaction with the building design and encouraged the applicant to come back with a more attractive final design.
  - vi. Mr. Fenton asked about mechanical equipment and utilities which Mr. Russell stated that the building is intended to look similar to the Aquidneck Avenue location.
  - vii. Mr. Croce expressed his concern with the choice of colors and encouraged the applicant to enhance the look of the building and to add more New England-style architectural elements. He also echoed Mr. Fenton's concern and noted that any rooftop mechanical equipment should be shielded. Mr. Croce expressed his support for a self-storage use on that property and area.
  - viii. Mr. Ciummo also shared his support for that use on the property.
  - ix. Mr. Silva stated he will forward the Board's comments to the applicant. He also shared that the applicant will consider the site and abutting residential uses in their design.
  - x. Mr. Fenton asked about the percentage of impermeable surface which Mr. Russell stated that they will approach the project with the required 25% of green space in mind.
- c. Request of LDEC Engineering & Consulting, LLC on behalf of Gold's Wine & Spirits for concept review for a proposed new commercial building to be located at 48 Valley Rd., Plan 107SE, Lot 103B
- i. Mr. Regan recused himself from this matter.
  - ii. The applicant Jason Gold was present via Zoom but due to technical difficulties, could not provide his testimony.
  - iii. Engineer Mike Russell represented the applicant and shared that the plan is to construct a commercial building, with retail use on the first floor and office space on the second. Mr. Russell shared that the project will need to get RIDOT and RIDEM approval but the applicant is seeking feedback from the Planning Board at this time.
  - iv. Architect Dan Herchenroether presented the architectural plans of the building to the Board. Mr. Herchenroether explained that the plan will comply with the Town's standards.
  - v. Mr. Pierik asked about the total square footage which Mr. Herchenroether addressed will be around 13,400 square feet for the two-story building.
  - vi. Mr. Weber shared his excitement to see a small business expanding and expressed his support of the project and building design.
  - vii. Mr. Fenton asked for clarification on the elevations which Mr. Herchenroether addressed satisfactorily.

- viii. Mr. Ciummo stated that he is impressed with the building design and parking layout. Ms. Owen also expressed her support.
  - ix. Mr. Croce also supported the building design and reminded the applicant of the landscaping requirements.
- d. Presentation by Melissa Welch regarding proposed Middletown Center Citizen Advisory Committee.
- i. Mr. Croce stated that he sent a memo to Melissa Welch regarding the Middletown Center Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) which stated his opposition to the appointment of the committee.
  - ii. Middletown resident Melissa Welch introduced herself and the proposed CAC. Ms. Welch shared that she envisions that the CAC could provide more citizen input, share ideas and expertise, and do the legwork and outreach to help with the Middletown Center project. Ms. Welch shared that they will focus on the non-commercial elements of the project such as the monument, green space, and landscaping. They will come up with suggestions for the Town Council and Planning Board to consider incorporating into the project. Ms. Welch stated she also supports the idea of having a Planning Board member and other committee members join the CAC.
  - iii. Mr. Fenton asked how long it would take to come up with recommendations, which Ms. Welch shared it will depend on the timeline set by the Town Council. Mr. Fenton talked about the importance of having a timeframe so that the committee will not significantly impact the project timeline, which Ms. Welch agreed with.
  - iv. Mr. Weber expressed he was dismayed upon learning about the appointment of the CAC. He spoke about the time and effort the Planning Board has put into their work. He noted that in his experience, a citizen advisory group is unprecedented in this situation. In addition, he stated that the Middletown Center project will have to go through the Development Plan Review process with the Planning Board. He expressed his concern that there will be conflict between the Planning Board and CAC's recommendations.
  - v. Mr. Regan clarified that the CAC's role is not to review the Planning Board recommendations but to provide input on design elements for certain areas of the site before the plan is complete. The CAC can provide further public input and suggestions to help with completing the plan. With that detailed plan, the Town then can enter into a binding agreement with the development team to develop the property. Finally, the application would go before the Planning Board for Development Plan Review. Mr. Regan shared that it ultimately will be determined by the Town Council, but he did not envision any role for the CAC once the plan is finalized and is in the Development Plan Review process.
  - vi. Ms. Owen agreed that the CAC should be limited in scope so it would not affect the Planning Board's work. Ms. Owen also spoke about how she believes Ms. Welch and Ms. Karen Barbera would make good contributions to the project.
  - vii. Mr. Ciummo echoed Mr. Weber's sentiments and emphasized that he did not want such precedent set for other future development projects. He spoke about the Planning Board's role and work. Mr. Ciummo stated he is not in favor of appointing the CAC.

- viii. Mr. Pierik spoke about public engagement workshops. He suggested in lieu of a committee, a workshop could be organized for the public to utilize as an open forum and an opportunity to exchange ideas. Therefore, when the plan is presented to the Planning Board, Ms. Welch and the public's input would already be integrated into the plan.
- ix. Mr. Croce stated there will be opportunities for community members to give input and expressed his concern of how the CAC could potentially delay the project even further.
- x. Ms. Welch assured the Planning Board that she fully respects and recognizes their work. She reiterated her vision of the CAC's role in the project.

6. Updates

a. Status Report on Planning Board Action Items.

- i. Mr. Croce asked about the status of the application fees. Mr. Wolanski shared that the Town Administrator received the memo from the Planning Board. The Town Administrator is communicating with the Finance Director to provide the requested information. Mr. Wolanski noted the extra duties the Finance Department is currently handling due to changes with the Schools.
- ii. Mr. Fenton asked about the status of the airport zoning public workshop which Mr. Wolanski addressed that October 13<sup>th</sup> is a possible date.

b. Committee reports

- i. Tree Commission – Ms. Owen shared the Tree Commission reviewed two projects at length last month and provided their comments to the Planning Board.
- ii. Open Space and Fields Committee – Mr. Fenton shared that there has not been a meeting since last month.
- iii. Conservation Commission – Mr. Pierik shared that there has not been a meeting since last month.
- iv. Affordable Housing Committee – Mr. Weber shared that there has not been a meeting since last month.

c. Upcoming meetings:

- i. October 12, 2022, 6pm – Regular monthly Planning Board meeting.

**Motion** by Ms. Owen, seconded by Mr. Ciummo to adjourn. **Vote:** 6-0-0

Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:52pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Fenton, Secretary