



MIDDLETOWN
Rhode Island

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AFFORDABLE HOUSING PLANS CONTINUE FORWARD MARCH

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (SEPTEMBER 12, 2023) – The Town of Middletown continues to make strides to boost its affordable housing stock.

At a recent meeting, the Town Council unanimously approved an architectural and engineering contract for two of the three municipal affordable housing projects currently under way in the community.

Local leaders said that work would help finish the master plans and potentially secure outside funding for reuse of the Oliphant School property at 26 Oliphant Lane as well as the former Peckham School parcel at 660 Green End Ave. next to the Middletown Senior Center.

While acknowledging it would likely be some time before a shovel was in the ground for construction on either plan, they said Middletown wanted to do the project right without false starts.

Francis Spinella, the town's affordable housing consultant, said there's been quite a bit of survey and related work ongoing now to help move the project to the next phase. He said there have also been adjustments to the parking and density of the Oliphant School project to help make that project a better fit.

"We are (on target)," Frank. "The architect and the engineer are actually already working."

Due to rising price tag and availability of units not only on Aquidneck Island but everywhere, affordable housing has evolved into one of the biggest issues in Middletown.

Largely left to the market to solve until the past couple years, council members have said the town itself needs to do more to make the community more affordable for all.

In addition to the units planned at the Oliphant and Peckham sites, the town bought 4.5 acres at 361 East Main Road almost across from Town Hall in April. Although not as far along in the pipeline as the two other projects, up to 20 units are in the works for that East Main Road land next to Middletown High School.

State guidelines spell out that every community in Rhode Island must attempt to have at least 10 percent of its housing be considered "affordable."

A definition from HousingWorksRI indicates a home is "affordable" when it costs no more than 30 percent of an individual's gross income. That means someone paid minimum wage would spend no more than \$468 a month for an affordable apartment. For comparison, a median-income household in Rhode Island would pay no more than \$1,421 a month for housing.

Town data shows about 5.4 percent of Middletown's housing is considered affordable.

Rhode Island Housing statistics indicate the average price for a two-bedroom apartment in Middletown in 2021 — including utilities — was \$1,724. That's up \$279 from 2016, when the average price for the same unit was \$1,446.

In the past year plus, Middletown has seen a strong reply from the private sector to the call for more housing. That includes close to 500 units of new housing that have been proposed or approved in town.

While some of those are planned for market rates, about 200 are classified as affordable or work force housing. That includes the “Middletown Center” project on 15 underused acres at 600-770 West Main Road, a public-private partnership that includes three-bedroom units, two-bedroom units and one-bedroom units.

Councilman Dennis Turano said he wanted to make sure the town moved as quickly to address the affordable housing situation as reasonably possible. Turano serves as the chairman of the council’s Affordable Housing Subcommittee.

“We want to make sure it’s a win-win for everybody,” Turano said.

Reiterating a familiar message, council President Paul M. Rodrigues asked Spinella at the end of the discussion if the project was “on time and on budget,” to which the answer was in the affirmative.

“We know there’s demand out there for affordable housing and it’s one of our top priorities,” Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said. “If we could, we’d start construction tomorrow, but the process doesn’t work like that for us — or anyone else looking to build affordable housing. We’re going to continue making forward progress and strive for good, quality projects that work for Middletown.”

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