



Town of Middletown Planning Department

350 East Main Rd., Middletown RI 02842 (401) 849-4027

PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

JULY 19, 2016

Town Council Chambers, 350 East Main Rd., Middletown, RI

Board members present:

Art Weber, Chair

John Ciummo, Vice Chair

Matthew Sullivan

Paul Croce

Jan Eckhart

Bill Nash

Ron Wolanski, Planning Director

Peter Reagan, Town Solicitor

Jack Kane, Building/Zoning Official

Drew Pflaumer, Principal Planner

Member absent:

Liz Drayton

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Weber at 4:05pm.

1. Discussion regarding possible creation of Agricultural Overlay District in Middletown with assistance from Scott Millar of GrowSmart RI.

Mr. Weber introduced Mr. Millar and explained that, while working for the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Mr. Millar assisted the Town with the creation of its conservation subdivision ordinance.

Mr. Wolanski explained that the idea of creating an agricultural overlay district came about during the process of drafting Middletown's Comprehensive Plan as a result of desires to maintain the agricultural heritage of the Town and its rural character. He explained for the benefit of all in the room how an overlay district would function and clarified that the purpose was to ensure long-term economic viability of farming with the Town's number one priority being to do no harm.

Mr. Millar introduced Jennifer West of the Narragansett Bay Research Preserve as his partner in undergoing this project and explained that this offer of technical assistance is a pilot program for GrowSmart RI. He then asked the others in the room to introduce themselves.

At this point Mr. Millar gave his prepared presentation, explaining the economic impact of agriculture in Rhode Island, the secondary benefits of large stretches of farmland, the difficulties faced by farmers, and possible regulatory solutions to allow more economically viable uses of agricultural land.

Mr. Millar then began taking questions and discussing possible answers. Discussion included the following:

- Creating a list of accessory uses the Town finds desirable
- How to minimize impacts to neighboring properties, particularly with regards to noise and traffic, which can be achieved using a combination of setback, lot size requirements, and hours of operation or frequency restrictions.
- How to determine at what point the accessory use “becomes” the primary use of the land. This determination would be up to the Town.
- Discussion of whether the goal is to prioritize the preservation of active farmland, forest, potential farmland, or simply open space. The general consensus appeared to be that, given the widespread distribution of “Prime Agricultural Land” in Middletown, preserving all open space possible accomplishes the goals set forth in the Comprehensive Plan.
- How to manage performance standards without a formalized review process. Mr. Millar clarified that this is functionally similar to simply ensuring lots meet zoning standards- something already done administratively when applicants wish to adjust lot lines in administrative subdivisions.

Ms. West performed a visual preference survey in which attendees were asked to vote on whether or not they felt a given use was acceptable in the context of an agricultural overlay district.

During and after this presentation, a list of priorities was created for the next meeting. These priorities include more clearly envisioning the precise goals of the ordinance, defining key terms, inventorying areas that could take advantage of the potential ordinance, and creating a working list of uses that could be permitted as well as possible criteria by which to license, control, or regulate those uses while keeping the process of application as simple as possible for property owners wishing to take advantage of the option.

Town staff, Mr. Millar, and the Planning Board will work together to determine the date and time of the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 5:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted:
Ronald Wolanski
Planning Director