



Town of Middletown Planning Department

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

PLANNING BOARD MINUTES – Special Meeting July 20, 2017

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

Board members present:

Paul Croce, Chairperson
Betty Jane Owen
Jim Williams
Liz Drayton
Terri Flynn

Ron Wolanski, Planning Director
Chris McNally, Assistant Town Solicitor
Rita Lavoie, Principal Planner

Members absent:

Bill Nash
Matt Sullivan

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Croce at 3:00pm.

1. Review and discussion with Scott Millar, GrowSmart RI, regarding possible agricultural business overlay district to help maintain working farms in Middletown.

Mr. Millar explained that the intent of the overlay district is to allow agricultural land owners the ability to utilize a portion of their land for agriculturally-related business endeavors including events, the production of agricultural products, and agri-tourism. Mr. Millar reviewed the prior work done on the agricultural business overlay district and the results of previous polling.

There was discussion regarding how to measure and regulate when a secondary use overtakes the principal agricultural use on a piece of land. Mr. Wolanski recommended seeking guidance from the zoning official.

Ms. Flynn asked how many farms are active in Middletown and if their input in the overlay was sought. Mr. Wolanski explained that all land owners in the Farm, Forest, and Open Space program were notified of previous meetings and there will be continued effort to include farmer input. By Mr. Wolanski's count, there are more than ten farms in Middletown including nurseries and equestrian centers.

There was discussion regarding what qualifies as a farm. Mr. Millar explained that under Rhode Island state law, an area over five-acres can qualify under the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Act.

Mr. Millar provided an update on a proposed amendment to the Rhode Island Right to Farm Act, which is still under consideration in the general assembly, but is not likely to pass in its current form.

Mr. Croce asked the board members if they desired to move forward with the concept of the overlay district included updating a draft and holding public hearings. Members of the board responded favorably. Some members stated that they needed more time to review the draft.

Mr. Wolanski stated that he has compiled comments that he will get to Mr. Millar. He can also collect comments from Planning Board members. Mr. Croce requested that members review the draft and provide comments to Mr. Wolanski.

Motion by Ms. Owen to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Williams.

The meeting adjourned at 4:10pm.

Respectfully submitted

Ronald M. Wolanski, Town Planner