

CHAPTER FOUR

Current Land Use and Zoning

The most important function of a Plan of Conservation and Development is to determine the ideal future land use and future population in the community. Proper planning will help to insure a correct balance between residential, commercial, industrial and open space and will insure that the population does not overburden the infrastructure. Zoning is the legal tool to implement the recommendations in the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Middletown has existed as a City for over 350 years. Much of the land has been developed, but there is also a surprising amount of underdeveloped land. The City has been planning its growth since the 1940's. Previous plans of development have defined Middletown's landscape. In recent surveys many residents identify Middletown's mix of urban suburban and rural landscapes as the City's most attractive characteristic.

Table 4.1 displays the land use distribution within the City of Middletown.

Table 4.1
Land Uses by Acreage, 2000

Land Use	Acres	%
Undeveloped		
Agriculture	2,135	7.7%
Woodland/Vacant	9,765	35.2%
Parks/Open Space	4,001	14.4%
Total Undeveloped:	15,901	57.2%
Developed		
Residential	6,080	21.9%
High-Density	875	
Medium-Density	2,445	
Low-Density	2,075	
Multi-Family	685	
Commercial	340	1.2%
Industrial	1,030	3.7%
Public/Institutional	920	3.3%
Roads/Water Bodies	3,505	12.6%
Total Developed:	11,875	42.8%
Total Acreage	27,776	100.0%

Figure 4.1 is the Current Land Use Map for Middletown.

Over 56% of the City's land area remains undeveloped. Figure 4.2 below is a photograph of undeveloped land in the city.



Guida Farm – Kelsey Street

While 15,315 acres remains underdeveloped, there are both legal and physical constraints on some of this land, which will deter or prevent future development.

Figure 4.3 displays the developed land and those areas classified as open space, inland wetlands, and 100 year-flood plain. These areas are undevelopable.

Existing Open Space

Open space areas in Middletown are owned by the City, state, or by private conservation organizations. Below, Table 4.2 divides the open space areas of Middletown into publicly owned, privately owned, and park areas. As can be noted Middletown pursued open space acquisition very aggressively in the 1990's.

Figure 4.4 is a map that shows the existing open spaces in Middletown as of 2003.

Connecticut's Goal of Open Space Acquisition:

Connecticut's goal is to acquire 21 percent of the state's land area for open space, according to an amendment to Public Act 99-235. In order to achieve 21 percent open space, the state sets annual targets. The state's goal in the years 2000 and 2001 was to acquire 4,000 acres each year while increasing to 5,000 acres in 2002.

In order to assist municipal funding of open space acquisitions, a fund called the Charter Oak Open Space Trust Account was created by the state. Middletown has taken full advantage of state matching funds. State funding provided \$1,160,108 to Middletown for the acquisition of eight parcels, comprising of 335 acres total. These acquisitions were all consistent with the Open Space Plan found in the 1990 Plan of Conservation and Development.

City Open Space Plan of 1993:

Since 1991, both the City and land conservation organizations have acquired a number of open space parcels. In 1990, City residents approved of a referendum to create a \$5 million Open Space Trust Fund. Again, in 2003 City residents approved of an additional \$3 million to replenish the fund. This funding was recommended during the preparation of the 1990 Plan of Conservation and Development and identified as a high priority in the 1989 and the 1999 Survey of Citizens. In 1993, the current Open Space Plan was adopted. The ideas behind this plan were to create a corridor system of interconnected open space connecting areas of forests, brooks, steep slopes, and wetlands. The plan also concentrates on avoiding the acquisition of individual properties characterized by unique features. The total number of acres proposed in the Open Space Plan is 9,441 acres, 35 percent of the City. As displayed approximately 4,000 acres out of the 9,441 acres have been permanently preserved. This accounts for 42 percent of the total acres displayed on the Open Space Plan.

Zoning

The city has twenty-eight different zoning classifications. The bulk of these are residential, followed by industrial and then business. Industrial zones line the railroad tracks and portions of I-91 and Route 9. Zones for commercial enterprises lie along the major arterials into town as well as the central business district. Residential and mixed zones make up most of the rest of the land within the city. Table 4.4 shows the zoning classifications and acreages dedicated to each zone. The table indicates that fully 72% of the land in town is zoned residential; 16% industrial; and less than 2% is zone for commercial uses.

Table 4.4			
Zoning Reference, by Acreage			
	Zone Name	Acreage	% Total
	RPZ Residential Prezoning	1225	
	R-15 Residential 15,000 sq. ft. / lot	4920	
	R-30 " 30,000 sq. ft. / lot	3460	
	R-45 " 45,000 sq. ft. / lot	2135	
	R-60 60,000 sq. ft. / lot	5720	
	R-1 Restricted Residence	480	
	M Multi-family	480	
	MX Mixed Use	385	
	PRD Planned Residential Development	785	
	DVD Downtown Village District	70	
	Total Residential	19660	74.9%
	B-1 Central Business	120	
	B-2 General Business	225	
	NPC Newfield Planned Commercial	355	
	Total Business	700	2.7%
	I-1 Service Industrial	170	
	I-2 Restricted Industrial	150	
	I-3 Special Industrial	1995	
	I-4 Limited Industrial Zone	260	
	IOP Interstate Office Park	98	
	IM Interstate Mixed-Use Zone	80	
	IT Interstate Trade	110	
	IRA Industrial Redevelopment Area	1105	
	Total Industrial	3968	15.1%
	TD Transitional Development	150	
	ID Institutional Development	1460	
	RF Riverfront Recreation	306	
	Total Other	1916	7.3%
	TOTAL	26244	100.0%

Development Potential

The development potential for existing undeveloped land was examined by superimposing the zoning map over existing developed and undeveloped land uses in Middletown. Table 4.5 quantifies the developable acreage and presents the development potential for each major zone, making allowances for site constraints such as wetlands and steep slopes.

The first column in Table 4.5 shows the number of vacant acres that each zone contains. The second column shows the net developable acreage. This is calculated by first subtracting the environmentally sensitive lands (slopes over 25% and water bodies) from the vacant land, then subtracting 10% of the remaining acres to account for roads and utilities. The third column, potential development, reflects the net developable acres multiplied by the lot requirements and building standards found within the zoning code. This then results in the amount of additional floor space that could be built in the commercial/industrial sectors and the number of new dwelling units possible in residential sectors.

Table 4.5 Developable Land				
Zones	Vacant Acres	Net Developable Acres	Potential Development	Additional Population ***
Commercial B2	100	55	794,000 sq. ft.	
Industrial				
I-1 / IRA	145	115	2,500,00 sq. ft.	
I-2 / I-4 / IT	765	700	12,225,000 sq. ft.	
I-3	1,555	1,174*	8,000,000 sq. ft.*	
IOP	65	55	470,000 sq. ft.	
NPC	135	65	849,000 sq. ft.	
	2,765	2,164	24,838,000 sq. ft.	
Residential				
Multi Family	65	50	300 units	690
R1/ RPZ /R15	1,530	1,250	3,625 units	8,335
R30	1,730	1,420	2,055 units	4,725
R45	1,120	820	795 units	1,830
R60	3,960	2,870	2,085 units	4,795
TD	15	13	52 units	120
Mixed Uses				
MX	45	30	180 units	415
IM	60	55	250 units**	575
	8,525	6,508	9,342 units	21,485

* Connecticut River Interceptor Sewer Project, Middletown Department of Planning, Conservation, and Development.

** Prior to building 250 units, a minimum of 700,000 square feet of office space must be under construction.

*** The 1998 average household size of 2.3 persons was multiplied against the dwelling unit count to arrive at the additional population count. As the trend is toward smaller households, we expect this future population estimate to be overly generous.

Commercial and Industrial Potential

The table indicates that another 650,000 square feet of commercial space could be built and nearly 23,200,000 square feet of industrial floor space. Figure 4.5 shows the location of undeveloped commercial and industrial land in Middletown. Although slopes over 25% were excluded from the acreage calculation, it is possible that the industrial figure remains overly optimistic. For instance, the I-3 section in the Maromas area has a great deal of topographic variety. Even though slopes may not exceed 25% in certain places, parts of the remaining terrain will require substantial preparation for construction and thus may not be truly usable. As Figure 4.5 illustrates, most of the remaining undeveloped business and commercial areas are concentrated in four areas: 1) west of I-91, 2) along the railroad tracks in the northeast corner of town, 3) the Maromas area, and 4) off of Route 17 adjacent to Middlefield. (However, this area does not have access to city sewer)

Housing Potential

Table 4.5 indicates that under current zoning, the majority of new residential construction could take place within the R-15, R-1, and RPZ zones, which have a minimum lot size of 15,000 square feet per residence. The second highest number of new units that could be constructed are in the R-60 zone, those areas on the outskirts of town that are predominately in use for agriculture and woodlands. Figure 4.6 illustrates the land that is zoned for residential uses but has not been developed. Most of the vacant residential areas are west of the downtown area, east of Route 9 and in the south central portion of the city. Only 26% of the land zoned for residential uses has been developed.

Mixed-Use Areas. It should also be noted that Middletown has mixed-use zones that allow both residential as well as commercial uses. The MX zone can be found along major corridors while the IM zone is limited to a site near the interstate. The IM zone has a maximum cap of 250 dwelling units. Table 3.3 only lists the residential possibilities in these two zones, though additional commercial space is possible in the MX zone, and office space is required in the IM zone, as indicated in the table.

Summary

Over the past decade, the city has acquired a very significant amount of open space, added to its housing stock and increased its commercial and industrial tax base. Development during this time has been fully consistent with the 1990 Plan of Development, which sought:

“to encourage the appropriate, coordinated, and economic use of land in a manner which is consistent with the goals articulated in this plan, facilitates conservation of energy, and enables the efficient supply of public utilities and services.”

Goals laid out in the 1990 Plan, such as the acquisition of more open space, encouraging the vitality of the Central Business District, scrutinizing expansion of the water and sewer service areas, and encouraging a diverse mix of single-family residential dwellings set the tone for open space preservation and development over the past decade.

Looking to the future, residents have strongly voiced their concern to limit Middletown’s growth to approximately 50,000 people. At the same time, 65% of respondents also want the City to pursue commercial and industrial expansion and continue open space preservation.

The quality of the new growth is going to be a significant factor in the future. Already, residents are speaking out about the design of their community – 74% of those surveyed said they want greater design review of all projects. The city needs to ensure that growth is visually compatible with and enhances the existing built fabric.