

CHAPTER SIX

Managing Future Residential Growth

Population growth and suburban sprawl has been a major concern for the City of Middletown. Previous Plans of Development have indicated that the population has the potential, based on current zoning, to increase to 65,000 residents at total residential build out.

Between 1990 and the present, the City has averaged an increase of well over one hundred houses per year. From 1990 to 2000, the City grew by 7 percent. According to a resident survey in 2002, residents felt that a population of 65,000 is too high and that it is very important to maintain the City's rural character. According to the Survey, 60 percent of resident also want to increase the amount of open space in the City.

Pressure on Community Services:

Communities with rapidly increasing populations face many issues. These issues include school system capacity, adequate infrastructure, and the amount of funds needed to provide essential City services. Increasing school costs, the demand for new roads, water/sewer lines, garbage pickup, park and recreational programs, and police and fire services increase as the population continues to rise. There will be additional revenue from these homes, but the costs associated with growth often exceed the revenues received.

What Should Be Done About Growth in Middletown:

Geographically, at 42 square miles, Middletown is very large. Middletown cannot afford to grow in a suburban style. Middletown cannot afford to offer city services, streetlights, snowplowing, public roads, leaf pickup, police patrols, etc. to 42 square miles. Therefore, it is essential that Middletown carefully analyze its undeveloped land to better understand what remains and its susceptibility to change.

Middletown's Developable Land:

In order to predict and maintain a reasonable future population, this plan looks at Middletown's land characteristics then calculates the actual amount of developable acres in Middletown for the potential future population.

Previous plans have assumed all vacant land would be developed at the highest density allowed in the zoning. With this assumption, these plans concluded that the population at total residential build out would exceed 65,000.

Understanding that some parcels will have soils which can not support a septic system and that the City has been purchasing open space at a rate of over 100 acres per year for the past 15 years, and the plain fact that some landowners will choose not to develop their land and others will want a larger lot than what is required by zoning, the City conducted a study to get a better handle on the future population.

The Study (*Appendix II*) concluded that an increase of approximately 11,153 additional residents and 2,165 units could be developed in Middletown based upon the actual number of net developable acres. This is a much lower population increase than the estimated increase concluded in Middletown's previous Plan's of Conservation and Development. **This estimate yields a total population at residential build out of approximately 56,000 residents.**

This estimate is a snap shot in time. It assumes the City will not buy any additional open space, large utility land holdings will be developed and all current farmers and other owners of large tracts of land develop their land.

It also assumes there will be no zone changes to increase or decrease densities and no expansion of the approved sewer service area mandated by the Department of Environmental Protection.

Two recent subdivisions indicate that this conservative process for determining how many lots an undeveloped parcel of land can yield may be still too permissive.

The Pistol Creek subdivision encompasses a 66-acre piece of land in the western section of the City off of Atkins Street. The Fawn Meadow subdivision encompasses a 61-acre piece of land in the eastern section of the City off of Chamberlain Road. Both are characterized by steep slopes, inland wetlands and an absence of city water and sewer. These characteristics are similar to much of the remaining undeveloped land in Middletown.

Using the formula employed to estimate the number of lots at total residential build out, Pistol Creek and Fawn Meadow would have yielded 25 and 38 lots, respectively. The actual approved subdivision plan resulted in 10 and 13 lots respectively.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Commission is comfortable with the current residential zoning classifications and a target population of approximately 50,000 - 55,000.

- To achieve this goal, the Commission and the City must not authorize any zone changes which increase the density beyond what is currently allowed and must not allow the expansion of the currently mandated Department of Environmental Protection sewer service area.