

Redevelopment in Middletown, Connecticut

Department of Planning, Conservation and Development

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Introduction

Redevelopment has had a profound impact on the way Middletown looks today. Someone standing on Main Street over five decades ago will not recognize it today. The following is a brief discussion about the powers, the history and the possible lessons about redevelopment in Middletown.

Powers of the Redevelopment Agency in Connecticut

Redevelopment as envisioned in the authorizing statutes is a very straight-forward process. It gives municipalities the ability to identify problems, plan the solutions and then implement the solutions as it relates to areas that threaten the sound growth of cities.

Chapter 130 of the Connecticut General Statutes governs redevelopment. The stated goal of redevelopment is to eliminate “substandard, insanitary, deteriorated, deteriorating, slum or blighted areas”... [that necessitate] “excessive and disproportionate expenditures of public funds for the preservation of the public health and safety” ... “and the existence of such areas constitutes an economic and social liability, substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of municipalities”.¹

The Redevelopment Agency may develop a plan or adopt a plan proposed by a redeveloper. The plan must include: (1) A description of the redevelopment area and the condition, type and use of the structures therein; (2) the location and extent of the land uses proposed for and within the area, such as housing, recreation, business, industry,

¹ ‘Section 8-124’. Chapter 130: Part I. Redevelopment. Connecticut General Statutes. 2008.

schools, civic activities, open spaces or other categories of public and private uses; (3) the location and extent of streets and other public utilities, facilities and works within the area; (4) schedules showing the number of families displaced by the proposed improvement, the method of temporary relocation of such families and the availability of sufficient suitable living accommodations at prices and rentals within the financial reach of such families and located within a reasonable distance of the area from which they are displaced; (5) present and proposed zoning regulations in the redevelopment area; (6) any other detail including financial aspects of redevelopment which, in the judgment of the redevelopment agency authorized herein, is necessary to give it adequate information.²

In order to formally adopt the redevelopment plan the Redevelopment agency is required to hold a public meeting that was noticed twice in a local paper and at least two week before the public hearing date and seek an opinion from the Planning and Zoning Commission. A plan that consists predominantly of residential development will require the approval of the local Housing Authority.³

The Redevelopment Agency may acquire or rent real property for the purposes of the redevelopment plan. The Redevelopment agency may sell, lease or transfer property of purposes of the redevelopment plan.⁴

With the approval of the municipality the Redevelopment Agency may use eminent domain for purposes of the redevelopment plan. With approval of the municipality the Redevelopment Agency may abate the taxes on property transferred from the redevelopment agency to a private entity.⁵

Bonds can be issued by the municipality, in accordance to state and local laws, or bonds can be issued by the Connecticut Development Authority for the purposes of implementing a redevelopment plan with the approval of the municipality and repaid with revenue, income or taxes generated from special services district or general revenues from the municipality.⁶

The redevelopment statutes are simple and broad, giving significant latitude to communities to undertake renewal activities to maintain their economic relevance. Translating statute in to an implementable plan that exceeds expectations is profoundly difficult and any redevelopment project can be bogged down by a myriad of issues.

Early foundations for Redevelopment in Middletown- pre-1950

As part of Harry S. Truman's Fair Deal, state and federal aid was made available to communities that undertook urban renewal through the Housing Act of 1949. Title I of the act provided federal funding to cities to cover the cost of acquiring areas targeted for

² 'Section 8-127'. Chapter 130: Part I. Redevelopment. Connecticut General Statutes. 2008.

³ 'Section 8-127'. Chapter 130: Part I. Redevelopment. Connecticut General Statutes. 2008.

⁴ 'Section 8-128'. Chapter 130: Part I. Redevelopment. Connecticut General Statutes. 2008.

⁵ 'Section 8-128 and Section 8-129a'. Chapter 130: Part I. Redevelopment. Connecticut General Statutes. 2008.

⁶ 'Section 8-134'. Chapter 130: Part I. Redevelopment. Connecticut General Statutes. 2008.

urban renewal. Those sites were then given to private developers. The Federal government paid 2/3 of the cost of acquiring the site, called the "write down," while local governments paid the remaining 1/3.⁷

The construction of Route 9, in the early 1950s, along the river front, juxtaposed a modern new highway next to some of Middletown oldest and deteriorating structures. Along with this new source of funding, the contrast must have set public officials to thinking about what could happen here in Middletown.

Mayor Bailey in an address to the Chamber in 1971 stated his reasons for redevelopment as "The Mayor's office in the Old City Hall ... was on the fourth floor overlooking the dilapidation between Main Street and the River. The scene was a daily depressant ... I had made fire inspections with Frank Dunn, and had seen and smelled the dismal overcrowding. I had cruised the area at 2:00 a.m. with Johnny Pomfret [Middletown's Chief of Police] ... and had seen and had picked up derelicts and drunks ... I knew that the concentration of our urban pathology was within the four blocks that I could see from my office window. I knew that slums were cancerous."⁸

Furthermore City officials' belief in the need for redevelopment are summarized in a 1969 article by Irwin Kaplan entitled Middletown: the renewal challenge. Kaplan summarized the mind set of Middletown as it entered its era of redevelopment projects "Cities age. They become old and rundown as well as obsolete. They frequently can no longer perform effectively the functions for which they were intended, and possibly more critical, the functions for which they were originally intended are simply no longer valid. ... Change however, does not come easily. In human terms, change requires a conscious and positive effort to reverse a tide. ... It also means stepping out into the unknown. ... Although resistance to change deserves consideration and great respect, it must be remembered that the situation which are deteriorating before our eyes will not improve themselves. They will get better only if we make them better."⁹

Middletown's first downtown project was not a redevelopment project but set the tone for the early stages of revitalization in the City: out with the old and in with the new. Mayor Bailey thought the old City Hall on Main street was unsound since "large chunks of plaster (were falling) on the heads of the just and the unjust alike."¹⁰ The Veteran's Memorial project remedied this problem by replacing the old Main Street City Hall with the current building facing the new Route 9.¹¹

⁷ 'Urban Renewal'. Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_renewal. December 20, 2008

⁸ Warner, Elizabeth. A Pictorial History of Middletown. The Greater Middletown Preservation Trust. 1990. page 163.

⁹ Kaplan, Irwin. 'Middletown: The Renewal Challenge'. 1969.

¹⁰ Warner, Elizabeth. A Pictorial History of Middletown. The Greater Middletown Preservation Trust. 1990. page 165.

¹¹ Haze, Joseph. 'Middletown enriched by preservation'. The Hartford Courant. August 26, 1982.

Creation of the Redevelopment Agency and the Center Street Project 1954-1965

In 1954, the City of Middletown created the Middletown Redevelopment Agency, an independent authority to plan and execute the redevelopment of blighted areas of downtown. The federal government and the State of Connecticut had significant resources to give to cities for redevelopment.

The Center Street project (as called the East Side Program) was the first formal redevelopment effort. It focused on revitalizing the two block east of Main Street and between Court Street and Williams Street (now Dingwall Avenue).

However, the project was almost over before it began. In order to raise the local funding for the project, the City had to go out to referendum. The first vote failed.¹² The second attempt done six months later in a snow storm was successful with a vote count of 1730 to 1071.^{13 14}

The Center Street project was an attempt to revitalize Main Street retail and increase parking. The \$3 million (*\$22 million adjusted for inflation*) project on 6.5 acres was funded through the federal Urban Renewal Program and the state's Connecticut Development commission's local assistance program.¹⁵ The City hoped that in return for the demolition of the existing buildings and building a new 500 space multi-story parking garage, a developer would construct new modern shopping and commercial facilities facing Main Street with a first-class hotel that would be located on the eastern section of the block with commanding views of the river. The City was able to construct the parking garage and attract Sears Roebuck and Co. to the site.

Metro South Project 1965-1984

The Center Street project was considered a success which gave the Redevelopment Agency the confidence to plan a more ambitious revitalization project. The second revitalization effort became known as the Metro South project. Officially, the 125-acre redevelopment was called Urban Renewal Project Number 2, R-105. The Redevelopment Agency spent much of the 1960s planning and cultivating public support for the idea. The Urban Renewal project was envisioned to be a mix of demolition and rehabilitation.

Middletown signed a urban renewal contract with the Federal government in October of 1970. The federal government approved \$16 million (*\$84 million adjusted for inflation*) in grants for the project. The State of Connecticut pledged \$2.1 million (*\$11 million adjusted for inflation*) for the project and the City was able to partner with Wesleyan University to benefit from their non-profit status to generate another \$2 million (*\$10.5 million adjusted for inflation*) in funding through its beneficial tax status for the project.¹⁶

¹² Spear, William P. 'Middletown was blocked by Agin-ers'. The Hartford Courant. July 11, 1958.

¹³ 'Middletown Agency Thanks Supporters'. The Hartford Courant. Jan 27, 1959.

¹⁴ 'Voters Defy Storm, Pass Civic Development Plan'. The Hartford Courant. Jan 12, 1954.

¹⁵ 'Downtown Middletown Changing'. The Hartford Courant. November 13, 1960.

¹⁶ Millstein, Lincoln. 'Metro Planners Bank on State Funds'. The Hartford Courant. January 25, 1976.

The Metro South project did not go as smoothly as the previous project. Numerous developers that expressed interest in various parcels would ultimately withdraw proposals. Buildings that were proposed of rehabilitation received little to no interest from developers, leaving them vacant in the hands of the Agency for years.¹⁷ The Greater Middletown Preservation Trust used delays of demolition and other tools to delay projects, including a federal court injunction to save the South Green from being bisected and the mansion across the street from being demolished.¹⁸ The withdrawals of developers and active opposition must have warded off other potential developers as well. The Agency repeatedly advertised requesting letters of interests were posted throughout the 1970s.¹⁹

In 1977, the Hartford Courant quoted a developer about Middletown's recent history as "There are a lot of words you can use to describe Middletown's redevelopment project, but 'successful' is not one of them."²⁰

Out of this the Redevelopment Agency and preservationists buried their past battles and became partners in shaping the remaining course of the Metro South Urban Renewal Project. Starting in approximately 1977, the Redevelopment Agency and the Greater Middletown Historic Preservation Trust established an ad-hoc committee to bring issues of renewal and preservation into regular dialogue and came to numerous agreements on subsequent renewal projects.²¹

Local preservationist, John Reynolds III, submitted his own development proposal to save five historic structures and convert them to commercial office space with the goal that these properties pay their own way. Developing these properties was not easy and more than once the project was in jeopardy of falling apart. The Building department denied the first application for a permit since the project did not meet State Building codes. To remedy the situation the Common Council had to redraw the fire district and John Reynolds had to install sprinklers in all the buildings.

These buildings were moved next to the Old Armory and across the street next to the historic Baptist church. The Redevelopment Agency acquired and removed an existing gas station, pizza house and brick tenement, sold the land for a \$1 to John Reynolds III and the Agency paid \$10,000 (*\$36,000 adjusted for inflation*) for each house to be moved. A bank loan of \$300,000 (*\$1.1 million adjusted for inflation*) paid for most of the restoration and by 1978 all the properties were leased, six years after the beginning of the project.²²

¹⁷ Weiss, Gary. 'Redevelopment Staff Offices turning into ghost towns'. The Hartford Courant. November 19, 1978.

¹⁸ Millstein, Lincoln. 'Chamber Backs Block Demolitino Plan'. The Hartford Courant. June 9, 1977.

¹⁹ Public Notice Ad, The Hartford Courant. February 14, 1971; August 8, 1971; March 24, 1974; February 20, 1977; December 11, 1979; December 28, 1980; August 23, 1981.

²⁰ Millstein, Lincoln. 'Chamber Backs Block Demolitino Plan'. The Hartford Courant. June 9, 1977.

²¹ Weiss, Gary. 'Preservationists forge unlikely alliance with renewal agency'. The Hartford Courant. January 20, 1980.

²² Ficks, Robert. 'Early American Gems Saved from wrecker'. The Hartford Courant. March 11, 1979.

In 1979, the Old Middletown High School opened as a 65-unit elderly housing complex. Initially, the Redevelopment Agency was open to demolishing the old High School, but an East Boston Architect, Michael A Interbartolo Jr., submitted a design to rehab the property and won the development rights in 1975. The developer reported that the costs for rehabilitation was comparable with new construction²³.

The Theater Block, now known as Plaza Middlesex, was planned for more than a decade as a mix of new construction and rehabilitation. In 1980 the Agency advertised nationally to seek interested developers to rehabilitate six structures which included the old Middlesex Theater. The Middlesex Theater had been vacant since 1962.²⁴ Connecticut Valley Development Associates (CVDA) was awarded the development rights because they were the only developers that proposed a comprehensive plan for the entire block, which included saving the six structures and proposing 88,000 square feet of new commercial office space in a five story building.²⁵ The developers discovered that the costs were about the same as new construction with a project cost of \$4.2 million (*\$9 million adjusted for inflation*).²⁶ The developers paid \$70,000 (*\$150,000 adjusted for inflation*) for the properties, which the Redevelopment Agency bought piecemeal over the 1970s. The federal government also contributed \$342,000 (*\$726,000 adjusted for inflation*) to CVDA. CVDA also received a \$20,000 (*\$43,000 adjusted for inflation*) Connecticut Historic Commission grant to restore the brownstone on one of the Main Street buildings.²⁷

The Metro South Urban Renewal Project had a mixed record. New developments were created and they were a mixture of commercial and residential uses. The Metro South Urban Renewal project can be credited with the development of Sbona Towers, Wesleyan University High Rise Housing, Traverse Square, YMCA parking lot, Hospital expansion along South Main Street, St. Mary's Church, Water's Edge at the corner of Church and Hubbard, South Green Elderly Apartments, Douglas-Mather House Historic restoration, Medical offices at Church and Hubbard, Community Action for Greater Middletown facility on Williams Street, Zion Baptist Church behind YMCA, Middletown Press Building, Pelton's Drug Store at the corner of main and MLK, ColorMart Rehab, Russell Library expansion, Middletown Plate and Glass, Personal Auto Body, a downtown supermarket, where Destina Theaters now exists, and Rivers Edge Condominiums.

The two notable projects that did not get off drawing board. The development of the Middletown Activities Center, which comprised of an indoor ice-skating rink that could be converted to a convention center and the inability to attract a developer that could secure financing for a hotel or motel.²⁸

Often these developments were at the expense of the existing structures and their tenants. At least 126 buildings were demolished, including the 165-year old Governor Coughlin

²³ Ficks, Robert B. 'Going to School is Fun for Middletown Elderly'. The Hartford Courant. June 17, 1979.

²⁴ Weiss, Gary. 'Middletown Redevelopment unit to act on company to remove chandeliers'. The Hartford Courant. February 11, 1978.

²⁵ Sanger, Elizabeth. 'From noplac to showpace'. The Hartford Courant. August 22, 1982.

²⁶ Sanger, Elizabeth. 'From noplac to showpace'. The Hartford Courant. August 22, 1982.

²⁷ Sanger, Elizabeth. 'From noplac to showpace'. The Hartford Courant. August 22, 1982.

²⁸ 'Two Sides Taking Shape on Arena Issue'. The Hartford Courant. October 2, 1976.

House.²⁹ Relocation for the project displaced at least 98 business and at least 383 households.³⁰ Business relocation assistance expenses totaled \$693,167 (*\$28.8 million adjusted for inflation*) and residential relocation assistance totaled \$1,256,930 (*\$52.3 million adjusted for inflation*).

The project also cost \$6 million (*\$15 million adjusted for inflation*) more than budgeted in 1970, partly due to the rapid inflation experienced during the mid-1970s.

Single-user Redevelopment 1985- 1993

As the redevelopment agency entered the 1980s its status as an independent authority was coming to an end. In 1980, the Common Council voted not to transfer the \$6.2 million (*\$15.4 million adjusted for inflation*) in federal grant funds for urban renewal and required to agency to request payments through the City.³¹ Previously the City had transferred the funds, no questions asked. On September 30, 1984 the City assumed the responsibilities of the Redevelopment Agency, making the agency an advisory body of the Common Council.³² The Agency was reorganized and membership increased from 10 to 16.³³ The staffing functions were brought into the City's Municipal Development Office.³⁴

In the 1980s the Redevelopment Agency was deeply involved with the development of the Middlesex Mutual Assurance Company (MMA) building at Court Street and Broad Street. The MMA proposal called for the construction of a \$9.8 million (*\$15 million adjusted for inflation*) garage with 1150 spaces (374 spaces would be available to the public), and two office buildings costing \$39 million (*\$61 million adjusted for inflation*).³⁵ Redevelopment powers were used to acquire the properties for the garage and buildings. The City would also pay for the cost of building the garage, relocate the businesses, provide tax abatement and waive the building permit fees.

After negotiations the City paid \$8.6 million (*\$13 million adjusted for inflation*) towards the garage and \$650,000 (*\$980,000 adjusted for inflation*) (appraisals came in at \$500,000) for the Mazzota's restaurant and \$58,490 for their relocation expenses. MMA provided five years of free rent at their new location. Polly's Restaurant was acquired for \$451,000 (*\$680,000 adjusted for inflation*) which included relocation costs (appraisals came in at \$375,000).³⁶

²⁹ Legal Notices. The Hartford Courant. April 27, 1970; January 18, 1971; April 12, 1972; August 19, 1972; January 13, 1973; May 20, 1974; August 12, 1974; November 21, 1975; January 26, 1976; April 24, 1978; May 19, 1980.

³⁰ 'Relocation Summary'. Redevelopment Agency Files. 1979.

³¹ Weiss, Gary. 'City to retain control of Agency funds'. The Hartford Courant. February 20, 1980.

³² Kearns, Martin. 'As era of redevelopment ends Middletown debates its value'. The Hartford Courant. September 30, 1984.

³³ Kearns, Martin. 'As era of redevelopment ends Middletown debates its value'. The Hartford Courant. September 30, 1984.

³⁴ Kearns, Martin. 'As era of redevelopment ends Middletown debates its value'. The Hartford Courant. September 30, 1984.

³⁵ 'Project Plan for the Middlesex Mutual Assurance Company Development Project: Volume One'. Redevelopment Agency Files. December 1986.

³⁶ 'MMA/Mazzotta's Deal Memo'. Redevelopment Agency Files. February 15, 1991.

Four historic properties were demolished as a result of the project. The Danforth-Pewter House was relocated from College Street to a site across from the South Green next to the Douglas-Mather House.

This MMA project, like many other urban renewal projects, experienced some setback, specifically around the acquisition and relocation of Mazzato's restaurant. Moreover as the economy entered the early 1990s the property development bust and recession prevented MMA from building the second office tower, which is why the City has a large green lawn. at the corner of Broad Street and College Street. The total project exceeded \$40 million (*\$58 million adjusted for inflation*) when it was completed and only two-thirds complete.³⁷

In 1993, the State of Connecticut decided to replace the existing Middlesex Court House and selected a site along the west side of Court Street. Since the property was previous part of the Center Street urban renewal project, the City was involved in the design, developer selection and transfer of the property. Two competing designs were submitted, one that ran the full length of Court Street and created a plaza at the corner with Main Street. The other was more compact and placed the court house along DeKoven Drive. The City was assured that even though that this was a State building, it would be leased and therefore remain on the tax rolls. The second design promoted by Northland-Daylar succeeded and private investors built the \$37 million (*\$51 million adjusted for inflation*) courthouse.³⁸ However in 1993, the General Assembly passed a public act 93-361 that made all land leased by the State in the past six months tax-exempt, therefore denying Middletown the roughly \$400,000 (*\$500,000 adjusted for inflation*) per year in revenue it had been promised.³⁹

Neighborhood Redevelopment 1989-present

In May of 1968, after the planning stages of the Metro South urban renewal plan had been completed, the Redevelopment Agency set its ambitions for urban renewal the north side of Washington Street. A request for state funding in the amount of \$33,000 (*\$200,000 adjusted for inflation*) was submitted to study a possible new proposal for the entire northern half of downtown Middletown.⁴⁰ The preliminary map showed a redevelopment area twice the size of the Metro South plan.⁴¹ It seems that this proposal did not gain any traction since no other record, other than the grant request has been found.

In 1987 the City and the Redevelopment Agency revisited the idea of addressing issues of blight in the North End. This Urban Renewal Plan encompassed some 70 acres comprising of the properties north of Court Street to the Arrigoni Bridge, all the buildings on the fronting on the west side of Main Street and all the properties to the east.⁴² The

³⁷ Redevelopment Agency Files. 1991.

³⁸ Pach, B. Peter. 'Tax Deal Taking Money out of the City's Pocket'. The Hartford Courant. July 14, 1994.

³⁹ Pach, B. Peter. 'Tax Deal Taking Money out of the City's Pocket'. The Hartford Courant. July 14, 1994.

⁴⁰ 'Neighborhood Development Program; Application to CT Dept of Community Affairs'. May 1968.

⁴¹ 'Neighborhood Development Program; Application to CT Dept of Community Affairs'. May 1968.

⁴² North End Central Business District Urban Renewal Plan. 1992.

1989 plan called for the creation of a Special Service District to raise funds through tax increment financing, the creation of a Design Advisory Board, and use of Community Development Block Grant funds.⁴³

The North End Plan was beset with immediate setbacks after adoption by the Common Council. In 1991 a bonding referendum was defeated to secure funds for the acquisition and renovation of the Arrigoni Hotel at Main and Liberty. The North End businesses were cool to an idea for a special services district and the first election for its creation was defeated. It wasn't until 2001 that a special services district was established; however it was successful only by not including the majority of the North End.

In 1995 the Design Review and Preservation Board was established to create guidelines and review exterior rehabilitation and new construction in business zones and advise on demolition of buildings in historic districts.

Other than the formation the Design Review and Preservation Board and the special services district, the City accomplished little else. Then in October 1996, Omar Irving, a 16 years-old was shot and killed on Ferry Street which galvanized the local community to demand some action to deal with the persistent drugs and violence that existed in the North End.⁴⁴

In 1997 the Mayor convened an "Urban Homesteading Task Force" which grew in the North End Action Team (NEAT).⁴⁵ NEAT working with City officials, Wesleyan University and the Yale Urban Design Workshop developed a conceptual plan for revitalizing Ferry Street, Green Street and Rapallo Avenue. In 2001, the Redevelopment Agency adopted the conceptual plan as part of the North End Urban Renewal Plan. The Redevelopment Agency advertised a requested for letters of interest from developers to carry out the conceptual plan beginning in June 2003. The request received one response from a group of non-profit developers (The Connection, Alderhouse Communities, Nehemiah Housing Corporation, Habitat for Humanity and the North End Action Team), calling themselves North End Housing Initiative (NEHI). The proposal included 15 affordable homeownership units and 24 affordable rental units with a total project cost of \$4 million (*\$4.5 million adjusted for inflation*).⁴⁶

Over the next year and half NEHI would apply twice for tax credits from the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, but were unsuccessful. Banks were unwilling to offer a construction loan to such a loosely formed coalition and did not find the finances of the proposal acceptable.

In mid 2004, faced with these setbacks the Redevelopment Agency decided to use the expiration of the NEHI memorandum of understanding to advertise a second request for

⁴³ North End Central Business District Urban Renewal Plan. 1992.

⁴⁴ Poitras, Colin. 'Middletown teenager killed in shooting in North End Neighborhood'. The Hartford Courant. October 11, 1996.

⁴⁵ North End Housing Initiative: Proposal. January 2003.

⁴⁶ North End Housing Initiative: Proposal. January 2003.

proposals. This time the City received three letters of interest: NEHI, Middletown Housing Authority and the Richman Group. The Redevelopment Agency selected the Richman Group, based on the considerable financial resources at their disposal and a confidence that they would be able to secure financing for the deal. However, the Richman Group conveyed a need to increase the density of the project to make it financially feasible.⁴⁷

The selection the Richman Group did create controversy, especial concern by NEAT that such a large corporation would not be responsive to the neighborhood. As a result NEAT suggested that another developer be considered, Broad Park Development Corporation.

The Redevelopment Agency did consider the request, since the Agency wanted local support for the project, but also wanted a developer that could get the job done. A compromise was fashioned to allow the Richman Group to remain as the rental housing developer and to have Broad Park as the homeownership housing developer.⁴⁸

In the summer of 2005, the Richman Group was able to secure tax credit financing on their first attempt and received the largest award in State history at \$15 million. Richman quickly secured construction financing. In January 2006, after the City spent \$350,000 on relocating 22 families, the Richman Group began the demolition of seven buildings and construction of the rental units becoming available for lease in May of 2007. The total project cost was \$22 million.⁴⁹

In the meantime Broad Park proceeded with the predevelopment aspects of the homeownership project. It became apparent that the Hartford based developer was limited in the funding. As a result in order to secure funding for site acquisition Broad Park with the consent of the Redevelopment Agency partnered with Nehemiah Housing Corporation, which secured a \$2 million loan from the LISC.⁵⁰ The City relocated the 6 families at a cost of \$195,000. The City also acquired two properties through eminent domain for public health reasons and transferred the properties to the homeownership project. The developers have been working to secure funding for the \$6 million project, but as of January 2009 it is not known when the project will begin.

At the same time as the North End project was being undertaken the City also established another redevelopment called the Miller and Bridge Street Redevelopment Plan. The neighborhood is physically isolated from the rest of the City and significant portion is located in the floodplain. In May 1998 along with the North End Action Team and the Yale School of Architecture a 2 day plan workshop was conducted to find solutions to the issues facing the neighborhood. The conclusion of City officials and residents was that the neighborhood was no longer viable and should be acquired and demolished. The

⁴⁷ Kovner, Josh. 'Agency Choice Angers Group; Private Developer picked for Project'. The Hartford Courant. April 22, 2004.

⁴⁸ Kovner, Josh. 'Renewal Plan Given Boost; Council Agrees to get Hartford-based non-profit involved'. The Hartford Courant. May 4, 2004.

⁴⁹ Redevelopment Agency Files. 2003-2006

⁵⁰ Kovner, Josh. 'Deal Sought to tap funds for Housing; Developer wants local partner'. The Hartford Courant. October 18, 2006.

project area contains twenty (20) lots, twenty-two (22) principal buildings, thirty-six (36) residential units, one (1) church and one (1) full service restaurant.⁵¹ The project was estimated to cost \$1.7 million (*\$1.9 million adjusted for inflation*) and envisioned to be completed by 2004.⁵² Today roughly half the properties are in City ownership, but to complete the project would cost an additional \$3 million.⁵³

Lessons from Redevelopment

“[Renewal] offers us opportunities we would otherwise not have, it cannot answer all our questions. The program simply offers opportunities. There is no magic. To translate these opportunities into actual accomplishments will take considerable effort on the part of many people, and a commitment to the future on the part of all our people. We must prepare for delays, inconveniences and occasional disappointments. Just as there are opportunities we can’t foresee, there will be problems we can’t anticipate.”⁵⁴

Edwin Kaplan

In evaluating Middletown’s experience with redevelopment it is difficult to weight what was gained versus what was lost. While the numbers of lost buildings can be quantified and project costs tallied, to put a value on what might have been had redevelopment not been undertaken is difficult to gauge. Therefore this analysis can not answer the question is Middletown better off based on the experience of redevelopment. However there are some lessons that can be concluded.

Redevelopment is expensive. – Redevelopment often poses unknown expenses that result from relocation, environmental remediation and historic preservation which can not be fully known until after work begins. These unknowns make a project seem out of control or mismanaged, but these are the realities that redevelopment faces.

New construction and rehabilitation are equally difficult and equally expensive. – There have been many new buildings constructed and many older buildings preserved as a result of redevelopment. Neither shows a panacea for reducing the costs of redevelopment.

Projects will take longer than anticipated. – Most redevelopment projects have taken longer than anticipated, often years longer. The reasons are many; developers back out, financing is unattainable, historic preservation issues, environmental issues, and public opposition to name a few. The goals of the project should always be clear and the need justified, so that any delays will be put into perspective. Political will needs to remain flexible so that lessons learned during the process are implemented in order to reach the ultimate end.

⁵¹ Miller Street and Bridge Street Redevelopment Plan. 2000.

⁵² Kovner, Josh. ‘City moves to end ailing neighborhood; Council to borrow for purchases, relocations’. The Hartford Courant. February 4, 2002.

⁵³ Redevelopment Agency Files. 2008.

⁵⁴ Kaplan, Irwin. *‘Middletown: The Renewal Challenge’*. 1969.

Projects never turn out the way they were proposed. – Just as projects take longer than expected, projects will change from their initial conceptual plan. Again the reasons are many and again there needs to be an expectation that flexibility will be needed.

Public support will change, but through renewed involvement it can be regained. – Change especially in a City such as Middletown will cause reactions. Efforts to involve the public not just at the beginning but through out the project should be undertaken. Listening and responding appropriately will help the project, the public and the City.

Smaller projects are no more or less successful. – The size of a project does not remove the complexities of redevelopment.

Resources are very limited to conduct redevelopment. – The days of federal and state money for redevelopment ended decades ago. Available resources for brownfields and affordable housing are increasingly difficult to secure. The future of redevelopment will be locally initiated and locally funded, either through City grants, loans, tax abatements, or other creative financing tools, such as tax increment financing. The benefit of local funding is greater flexibility and greater control over redevelopment projects.

Private sector developers are not eager partners in a redevelopment projects. – Even if you do extensive public involvement in a plan and provide the land for \$1 to carry out a City vision for a project, it will be difficult to attract developers. Numerous occasions through out the past five decades resulted in requests for letters of interest that failed to attract desired developers and in many cases the developers failed to perform. Many developers will also try to change the project to something that they are more experience in developing. The fact is real estate development is market driven. Developers will develop where there is a market. Redevelopment attempts to turn around areas that have failed and where markets are very weak, in the eyes of private developers and investors. Government Assistance may make a redevelopment project achievable, but in the long run it will only succeed if the market is strengthened.

The search for private dollars, developers will compare urban redevelopment to green field development. – Developing in untouched land is the cheapest and most predictable method for new development. Redeveloping urban properties is fraught with unknown liabilities and hurdles. The chart on the next page shows some of the additional development challenges when dealing with redevelopment.

Green Field Development

Purchase price of undeveloped land
Obtain planning permits
Obtain building permits
Secure Financing
Install utilities
Build structures and improvements

Urban Redevelopment

Purchase price of developed land
Relocation of tenants
Environmental investigation of property
Historic preservation issues
Parking issues
Obtain demolition permits
Demolition of structures
Abatement of hazardous materials
Disposal of demolition debris
Obtain planning permits
Obtain building permits
Secure Financing
Upgrade existing utilities
Install new utilities
Build structures and improvements