

PUBLIC HEARING - CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL - FEBRUARY 11, 1975

Public Hearing            A Public Hearing of the Citizens Advisory Council of the Housing and Community Development Act Program of 1974, of the City of Middletown, was held in the Council Chamber of the Municipal Building on February 11, 1975.

Present                    Attorney William Howard, Chairman, representing Preservation Trust; Judson Nelson, representing Human Relations Commission; Philip DeRing, representing Chamber of Commerce; Francis Marino, representing the Housing Authority; George Augustine, representing Planning and Zoning Commission; Shirley Nemecek, representing the Homeowners Association; Councilwoman Betty Matteo, Councilman Willard McRae, representing the Common Council.

Absent                    Sue Dunford; David Smith; J. Randolph Ryan; Russell McFadden, Jr.; Rosalind Bryant; Mrs. Trumbull Huntington; Mrs. Theodore Sieracki; Helen Figueroa; William Chadwick.

Also Present              Sherman Beinhorn of the Middletown Press; Mildred Thompson, City Stenographer; and approximately 60 members of the public at large.

Meeting Called to Order            The meeting was called to order at 7:37 P.M. by the Chairman.

Attorney Howard, Chairman, explained that the Committee was meeting at this public forum, because of stipulations in the Community Development Act of 1974 requiring two public hearings for local input for the formulation of a Community Development Plan. He explained briefly the requirements contained in the Act, namely, what the Committee has been charged to do. The Act was designed primarily to replace a number of categorical Grant Programs; specifically the Urban Renewal Program as it is now known. It is designed to provide federal funds for community development. It is emphasized in the Act that there must be a substantial amount of citizen participation. He said that the Committee itself contains 18 members from various groups and organizations.

He explained that the general objective of the '74 Act is to develop a viable urban community by the improvement of housing, neighborhoods, and to extend the quantity and quality of urban services. He said the Committee is charged with formulating a three year development plan, plus the filing of a housing assistance plan.

There are constraints and restrictions in the Act as to what can be done. The City is permitted to use the funds in this manner - acquisition of property which is blighted or needs rehabilitation;

programs that include public works and services where other federal funds are not available. Programs of Housing Code enforcement; removal of physical barriers for handicapped persons; removal or rehabilitation of buildings within a community development area.

He said that we are not allowed to participate in programs involving the provision of general governmental facilities such as municipal buildings, or the erection of things such as civic centers or construction of new housing.

He explained that the Act has a formula for the provision of the funds, and the formula is based upon a federal grant experience which the town has at a given time. The formula produces \$1,068,000. for Middletown to be used over a six year period. We will receive \$267,000. this year, and not very much can be accomplished with so little money. Attorney Howard explained that the Act also provides the Secretary of HUD with discretionary funds which can be used for the process of correcting inequalities in the formula used. He said that this Committee intends to devise a plan that will meet our needs, and will definitely pursue the discretionary funds.

The Committee members present introduced themselves.

Attorney Howard then requested that anyone wishing to speak, please come up to the microphone and identify themselves.

**SPEAKERS:**

Dave Rosenthal, Durant Street, with interests in the South Farms Area.

Mr. Rosenthal said he had watched the South Farms Area go from a thriving neighborhood to one which could be labeled depressed. He said he owned about three acres in this area, however, the zoning in the area is strictly residential, and cannot be used for other purposes. Said the buildings which he owns are deteriorating, and that in the future he will have to spend quite a bit of money to bring them up to par, and will then have to sweat to get his investment back.

He said he has talked to a great many people, and the feeling is that the South Farms Area has been neglected. He said he felt the City was losing out by turning its back on this area. He explained the area is on the doorstep of Metro South, and is adjacent to some of the important highways. Ample utilities are available. He said he thought serious consideration should

be given under this program to do something for the area. He said Main Street has been characterized as the "heartbeat" of Middletown, and he feels that the South Farms Area is a main "artery" and this "artery" is bleeding badly.

Mrs. Jessie Highsmith of 45 Roosevelt Drive, in the Long River Village Project.

She spoke on the two playgrounds out there which need cleaning up. She said trees that fell last year during the storm have not been picked up. Proper equipment is needed, plus a paid staff. She said only in the summer is there supervision, and this is paid through CAGM.

She also spoke about the Community Center which needs a paid staff and equipment. Mrs. Highsmith said it is now just an empty hall and is not being used. Said that the yards at Long River Village need filling, and spoke of the danger in walking around there. Windows need to be fixed; outside of apartments need painting. (Tenants prefer aluminum siding.)

Cup Moody of 2 Maplewood Terrace, Middletown.

Agreed with both Mrs. Highsmith and Mr. Rosenthal in their statements. He said the people in Long River Village are not demanding, but he feels all their considerations should be investigated and heeded. He also feels Mr. Rosenthal's remarks should be considered.

Mrs. Lansing Carpenter, Haddam, Conn.

Mrs. Carpenter said she wished to address herself to the Human Services section.

She said she was Chairman of the Advisory Committee for the Monday Night Club in Middletown, which she described as an ex-patient club. She presented a paper to the Chairman describing its activities. She said the Club was under the direction of Joseph Flood, a graduate of the University of Conn. School of Social Work.

She said the Mental Health Association of Connecticut has just advised that no funds will be available for the Social Club after March 31, 1975. She said they were advised to seek local funds where possible.

Joseph Flood, Ridge Road, Middletown.

Described the activities of the Monday Night Club. He said it was originally established to provide a chance for people

who have a psychiatric history and have been hospitalized to get together in a group meeting once a week. He emphasized that it was not group therapy per se, but more a place for people to meet, share activities, and develop community ties.

He said they tried to produce activities that will help the members become re-oriented to the Community. Also noted that the funding up to this point has been through the State Mental Health Association. Some funding for programs has been through various civic groups and individuals. It was quite minimal - aided in transportation, and that type of thing. He submitted a schedule of upcoming events.

Councilwoman Matteo asked if they had considered applying to the United Fund for money.

Mr. Flood said it had been discussed, but this cutting off of funds by the State Association has caught them off guard. He feels it is a valuable service to Middletown to have such a Club. He said there are between 25 to 30 people attending each Monday. Referrals for members of the Club are received from Clergymen, Community Psychiatric Clinic, and mainly the Connecticut Valley Hospital.

Katherine Ezell, 58 Traverse Square in Middletown, President of the South End Family Association which represents Maplewood Terrace and Traverse Square.

Ms. Ezell said her concern is that something be made available to youth, since there is nothing in the community. She said there are some Community Centers, and she hoped that programs could be set up for the youth - particularly the black youth. She said she thought this would help the youth to stay out of trouble.

She said that staff is needed at both Centers. (Maplewood Terrace and Traverse Square) Volunteers have been used, but this does not work out too well. Proper equipment also is not available at the Centers.

Joseph Biega, Silver Street, Middletown.

Mr. Biega spoke on the new Post Office coming to the South end of Middletown. He said he feels some effort and time should be spent to consider the immediate area, that is Silver Street, and East Main Street. He mentioned the condition of East Main Street at this time which needs looking over, picking up, and developing. He would like to see some private money come into the area, not all government money.

He mentioned the 10 miles of river in Middletown, and noted that nothing has been done to enhance it. Mr. Biega asked how the public sector could help.

Attorney Howard spoke about the assured grant of about \$1,068,000. over the next six years. The balance that the City would like to get, comes from discretionary funds, and one of the purposes of this fund is to make up any inequalities as a result of the formula used.

He said Middletown came out on the low end because of the actual years used in the formula. He said some cities in Connecticut will receive over \$11,000,000. because of the hold-harmless formula, whereas Middletown is eligible for only approximately \$1,000,000. He said to obtain any of the discretionary funds, it will be necessary to set forth an ambitious program with substantial justification for the programs.

Mr. Howard asked Mr. Biega for some suggestions concerning the South Farms area over the next five or six years.

Mr. Biega said that he thought the area should become more commercial. He thought business offices near the Post Office should be erected. He said he thought Silver Street should get a lot of attention. He said he thought East Main Street would become much more populated.

Rosetta Young, 650 Main St., Middletown representing the North End of Middletown.

She said the houses and area up there need to be fixed up. She suggested they be rehabilitated rather than torn down. Ms. Young said she works at the Community Health Center which the people seem to like. The Health Center needs more funding to purchase needed equipment. She said people would rather go there than to a regular Doctor or to the Hospital.

She also said more recreational facilities are needed at the North End.

Barbara Arafah, President of the League of Women Voters.

She said the League supports this Act, and were happy to have representation on the Committee. She was in agreement that Housing would be a priority, and also rehabilitation. She said the League is also interested in the Human Services, and Human needs.

Ms. Arafah said that she was also a resident of the South Farms Area. Speaking for herself, she said there was a need for young people services, and wondered if some of this funding could be used by the schools to be used for more activities and supervision after school hours.

She also said the League sees the need for restoration and the preservation of historical buildings. Regarding the north end, she feels there are many buildings in that area that would fit into the historical category. Also very interested in the human services needs.

Mike Salventi (sic) spoke regarding a problem of a Mrs. Rodriguez which was strictly a Housing Authority problem. This was discussed, and referred to Mr. Marino for disposition. Mr. Marino suggested she contact Mr. Gionfriddo, Director of Housing.

Mr. Salventi also spoke for himself regarding the Redevelopment Area in the North End. He said that through a census, it was developed that there was 4% minority in that area. He stressed, however, that of that 4% minority, 40% of the 4% were Spanish speaking people. His concern was that this money could not be spent on new Buildings, but wanted to know just where the people who were going to be displaced could move into.

Attorney Howard said the emphasis was in rehabilitating the structures in the North End rather than to demolish them.

Mr. Marino said that in case a structure has to be demolished, housing is planned on being built in Metro South which should accommodate any need for housing.

Mrs. Claude Rotondo spoke as a private citizen.

She asked the question when you do go into areas such as Metro South, the North End, and find buildings that do need rehabilitation, privately owned buildings, is anything said to the owners about their obligation to keep these buildings repaired, etc. themselves, instead of the depending on the federal government through our tax dollars, to help them out? She asked if the building codes could be enforced before these buildings become so run down it necessitates the use of tax money to bring them up to date. Mrs. Rotondo said that these were privately owned buildings, and the majority of taxpayers have to keep their own homes up without using federal money.

Attorney Howard said some of the money could be used for code enforcement.

Mr. Moody commented that all that was left in the south end were some trees, and asked how the people could be sure that the same thing wouldn't happen in the north end.

Mr. Rosenthal spoke again and said that Attorney Howard, in his opening remarks spelled out what can and cannot be done. He said there was one point he was interested in, and that was rehabilitation. He explained that at times it was almost impossible for a homeowner to keep up the cost of average

wear and tear repairs. He asked if there was something in this program where an individual landlord could borrow at a reasonable rate of interest to make repairs.

An answer was given that it is hoped that some of the funds could be used for private rehabilitation.

Diana Vega

Ms. Vega spoke and said she had previously worked for CAGM under the Spanish Program. She said that under this program, the workers went out into the community as a whole for recreation, but then the funds were cut off. She mentioned the lack of benefits for the Spanish speaking people in Middletown, i.e. social services, jobs, ways to get to the hospital, etc. Feels communication, technical assistance and monetary assistance are badly needed. Feels any programs established should be permanent programs, and should not be cut off as soon as money runs out.

Councilman McRae asked what programs she was interested in for the Spanish people. He asked her to outline specific needs.

Ms. Vega said the Spanish people need counseling not only in recreation, but in nutrition, as some of the people do not know how to deal with American food. She said there were programs written up by groups of people, but others who investigated them did not see the need for them because they did not understand them as far as the Spanish people go.

She said one was "Uprose", dealing with people and the community as a whole. She said they had contacted the schools, but because the writers of the programs didn't know what foundations to write to, and people who did know didn't bother, nothing came of it.

Chairman Howard thanked the people for coming, and stressed that there will be a second hearing on this matter. The hearing will be on whatever plan is formulated by this Committee and approved by the Common Council.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 P.M.

Respectfully submitted:

*Mildred F. Thompson*  
Mildred F. Thompson  
City Stenographer