

CITY OF MIDDLETOWN CONNECTICUT
Department of Planning, Conservation, & Development

C O M M U N I T Y D E V E L O P M E N T

Middletown Redevelopment Agency

Meeting Minutes -- 26 March 2001

The meeting commenced at 6:07 PM.

A quorum being present, the minutes were approved. Present were S. Leinwand, Chairman, J. Blancato, H. Novicki, J. Fortuna, J. Makrogianis, J. Robinson, J. Tine, J. Coughlin, and G. Daley, Deputy Mayor (left @6:20PM). Also present were Members of the Public, and Redevelopment Agency Staff, W. Warner and M. Johnson.

First, W. Warner updated the Agency on Miller & Bridge Streets. Funding is in place to deal with the north side of Miller Street. Lead and Asbestos work, for city-owned properties, was being done. Political and professional support for a Section 108 Loan from HUD has been lined up to expedite the project.

Agency members inquired into the relocation of the church. W. Warner responded that the Department of Planning, Conservation, and Development (PCD) was working very closely with the church to that end, but that the market was tough and they were still looking.

Next, S. Leinwand opened the scheduled Public Hearing, on the Ferry & Green Streets redevelopment initiative.

M. Johnson updated the Agency on his role with the North End Action Team (NEAT) Housing Committee and turned the presentation over to the Housing Committee.

C. Price introduced members of the Housing Committee and K. Winston outlined the Housing Committee's principles for their revised and amended North End/CBD Urban Renewal Plan. C. Rodenhizer presented plans for the Housing Committee's implementation. M. Taylor discussed the plan's phases, and L. Brewster presented a discussion on community support for the initiative.

The Question and Answer session opened with a question from B. Angelica, property owner on the corner of Rapallo and Main Streets. B. Angelica asked what the project's funding sources were and what the purchasing process was going to be.

C. Rodenhizer responded that the Housing Committee was working closely with landlords and the city. Some properties would be purchased, others privately rehabbed, some donated by the city. Through a process of phasing, much of the neighborhood's revitalization is expected to occur as a private market reaction to the progress made in phase one.

S. Leinwand echoed that projects like this one reflected how conventional "redevelopment" has changed: no longer does big government swoop down and demolish whole neighborhoods, but communities themselves initiate neighborhood-sensitive, small-scale, selective interventions and approach government for their support.

Next, a comment was made by landlord H. Zenowitz that many residents and households in the North End are good, but that it was a classic case of a few bad apples spoiling the barrel.

L. Brewster responded that a key strategy of the initiative was social investment in the neighborhood, through increased owner-occupancy, ongoing community organizing, and the optimism of the community residents.

Captain Pessina commented that the Middletown Police Department was committed to the North End and was researching methods of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) that could be applied to the initiative.

S. Leinwand recommended that these methods be integrated into the Plan.

Captain Pessina continued that methods of traffic design, community policing, and how leases are written can also go a long way toward nuisance abatement.

K. Winston responded that CPTED is a derivation of concepts first articulated by City Planning theorist Jane Jacobs, and are already at work in the plan.

Next, Sue *****, a North End resident, remarked that she had four children and felt that the park on Main Street does not well serve the neighborhood, and that a better location for it would be where the community garden is. She went on to say that the residential streets are too dark.

R. Browne, a landlord, remarked that the neighborhood would greatly benefit from an educational program for residents to teach them about leases and mortgages.

C. Price responded that Liberty Bank is working on one that will include homeownership counseling, training, budget counseling, and a 401(k)-styled savings plan for low and moderate income individuals in the neighborhood.

Next, a question from E. Smith asked about what could be done about the rampant drug problems in the neighborhood.

S. Leinwand responded that those issues were why people were there to approve the redevelopment plan.

Next, S. Thomas spoke about the need for ongoing collaboration and coordination among different social service programs and that the Housing Authority could be a partner in the project.

Next, S. Allison said that she was a North End resident of ten years and that a more proper location of the playground was key to attracting families. She continued that there was a problem with overcrowding homes in the North End: what once were single family homes are now housing six families.

Next, H. McInvale remarked that he owned sixteen properties in the North End and that his hands were legally tied when it comes to evicting problem tenants.

S. Leinwand asked H. McInvale if that meant he supported the Plan, as it would likely relocate problem tenants.

H. McInvale responded that he didn't understand the plan because nothing seemed to match up; properties to be demolished, and those to be rehabbed always seemed to be in flux.

Next, C. Kettleson spoke, saying that she was worried that she would not get a fair price for her building. The appraisal process, she feared, would use an approach that would fail to take into account the full revenue stream she derives from the property as its landlord. She feels that the "income" approach should be used to compensate anyone whose property is taken. Any property that is taken from private property owners for use by other private property owners should occur in the free market, not by eminent domain.

S. Leinwand responded that eminent domain would be a means of last resort, and that its use today almost signifies an admission of failure. Every other approach would be tried and exhausted first. But the MRA is a redevelopment agency and, as such, is empowered to use eminent domain and will, when necessary, to accomplish compelling public purposes.

G. Fitzpatrick, a landlord, echoed C. Kettleson's comments against the use of eminent domain.

B. Angelica submitted that, with respect to the drug problems, she tries very hard to screen her tenants, but that when someone slides through, eviction procedures are extremely difficult. New legislation is needed.

H. Novicki noted that Section 8 certificates are non-renewable for tenants who are arrested.

H. McInvale expressed concern that arrest records be used to block people from living there.

S. Leinwand responded that no one was proposing the exclusion from the North End of all residents with records of arrest.

J. Tine remarked that the Plan looked fine from a 'bricks and mortar' standpoint, but that other issues of qualifying residents, rules, the property management model, etc. were all too vague and needed clarification.

J. Mackrogianis asked if property owners were attending NEAT meetings.

C. Kettleson responded that they were.

There being no further questions or comments from the public, the public hearing was closed at 7:30PM.

S. Leinwand concluded that the concerns expressed by agency members and members of the public were all legitimate concerns, particularly the issues raised over equity, children, rights, and civility of process. These will be duly considered in the proceeding weeks leading to the next agency meeting and final approval or rejection of the plan.

There being no further business, the March meeting of the Middletown Redevelopment Agency adjourned at 7:35PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Munro W. Johnson
Community Development Specialist