

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### How Middlebury Encourages Businesses

By Terry McAuliffe

Chairman, Economic Development Commission

For businesses, Middlebury is considered an “upscale” town and a prestigious address with a good nearby labor force, great access to highways, and a unique proximity to Waterbury hospitals and acute care facilities.

But our commission didn’t know how existing business owners felt about the town, so we asked them in a 2017 survey sent to 300 owner occupied businesses to find out, and some of the answers were surprising. Safety was the top factor for choosing Middlebury as a place to do business when rated against all other reasons, and it was mentioned frequently in written comments as a plus, either directly or by implication. The town was said to have a “safe feel” for women-oriented businesses.

Less surprising, location was cited most often as the biggest plus of doing business in Middlebury. Located just off I-84, it was said to be easy to get to for traveling customers and those from surrounding communities. Many business owners have their home in Middlebury and enjoyed working where they live. Demographics of the town were another top factor for choosing Middlebury as a place to do business. Written comments called Middlebury a small, well run, beautiful town, with friendly people, good values, and character. Owners cited the ability to get to know people and develop loyal customers. Town employees were said to be friendly and helpful.

But many worried about losing the small-town character and attractiveness of Middlebury and cautioned the commission about chain stores, franchises, and strip shopping areas. When non-residents think about Middlebury they think of Middlebury Consignment, Quassy Amusement Park, and the Greenway. The commission was advised to “think outside the box” to make the town a desirable destination worth the travel time to get here. We needed to give customers more reasons to think about Middlebury.

Newer commercial investors agreed with Middlebury’s pluses at land use meetings, telling the commission they chose premium construction designs, with upscale aesthetics and appearance features, over less costly designs used in ordinary towns. The developer of a new medical building on Straits Turnpike said Middlebury was in a unique position for convenient and accessible “ambulatory offices” to provide preparation and follow-up to the acute care centers at Waterbury Hospital and St. Mary Hospital. He said Middlebury has a reasonable mil rate, compared to the city of Waterbury, and offer medical visitors a more pleasant experience along with highway access and convenience to surrounding towns.

The Commission is comprised of seven members appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The Commissioners are Town residents and business owners who possess a wide range of

experience and expertise about Middlebury and its economy. The Commission operates in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 7-136 Municipal Economic Development Commissions. Its work focuses on conducting research on economic conditions and trends in Middlebury, promoting economic development, and supporting existing and prospective businesses.

We currently have an opening for a commissioner and there are openings on other Middlebury boards as well. If you are interested in helping Middlebury keep and maintain its business orientation, please call, text, or E-Mail.

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