

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Planning Middlebury's Future Growth

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Chairman, Economic Development Commission

Every once in a while, I hear a grumbling about something changing in Middlebury that was unexpected and unwanted, at least by some. Usually this is construction in what had been undisturbed property, and, oftentimes, the property was well known to be zoned commercially, with faded real estate signs providing the telephone number of a broker waiting for someone to be interested. "Can't someone do something" is the lament, after bulldozers are clearing the land and foundations are being poured.

Such is the push and pull between conservation of our beautiful land and development of taxpaying businesses to pay for government services. Some want to conserve every bit of unspoiled land, while others, at the other extreme, want to bring in as much business as possible to lower the residential taxes. Every town and city deals with this tension in its land use decisions, and Middlebury is no different. However, Middlebury actually has a well-defined public process for commercial and residential development that conforms to a legal requirement called the "Plan of Conservation and Development," a document that follows Connecticut State Statutes Section 8-23 (a)(1), and which is used by the town to guide decision making. Most importantly, the public has the right to participate in the formulation of that plan as it is periodically updated, so it represents the wishes of the residents.

The current 75-page plan, available on the town website, was last published in 2015. It has four overall goals that drive the rest of the document.

1. Maintain the semi-rural, small-town character of Middlebury.
2. Recognize that there is a limited need for additional residential growth.
3. Promote the economic growth of Middlebury in a way that preserves the character of the town, making the most efficient use of properties designated for commercial and industrial development while avoiding the creation of commercial sprawl.
4. Guide the growth of Middlebury into an environmentally sustainable community, appropriate for a modern semi-rural community of the 21st century.

The Economic Development Commission is mindful of these goals, adding an additional goal to preserve and enhance the "upscale reputation" of Middlebury, a primary factor in our attractiveness to quality businesses and business owners.

Not forgotten in preserving Middlebury's "upscale reputation" is the flip-side of development, conservation. Our town is blessed with the well-supported Middlebury Land Trust which, since

2015, has increased the amount of conserved land from 1,771 to 1,923-acres out of a total of 11,810-acres overall, an increase from 15% to 16.5% in about five years.

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.