



PLANNING BOARD MINUTES
Regular Meeting
November 6, 2024, 6pm
Town Council Chambers – Town Hall
350 East Main Road
Middletown, RI 02842

Board members present:

Bill Nash, Chair
Art Weber, Vice Chair
Michael Fenton, Secretary
B.J. Owen
Leon Amarant
Joe Pierik
Charlie Vaillancourt

Also present:

Ron Wolanski, Town Planner
Peter Skwirz, Conflict Solicitor
Anita Guo, Principal Planner

Mr. Nash called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. Mr. Nash shared he is also the Vice Chair of the School Building Committee and was recently elected to the School Committee. He shared he received a recommendation from the Ethics Commission which found this is not a conflict if Mr. Nash chairs the meeting but Mr. Nash will be recusing from this application. Mr. Weber spoke about Mr. Nash's work on the Planning Board. Mr. Nash recused and Mr. Weber proceeded to chair the meeting. Mr. Weber spoke about the development plan review, Technical Review Committee, and public input processes.

1. **Public Hearing** – Request of the Town of Middletown for Master Plan approval of a Major Land Development Project to construct a building to serve as a combined middle/high school, including associated parking, landscaping, and other site work, and including requests for variances from the follow sections of the Middletown zoning ordinance: Section 605 to allow a building with a footprint of 91,750 sq.ft. where 35,000 sq.ft. is permitted, resulting in relief of 56,740 sq.ft.; Sections 27B02(D)(6)(a) & 27B02(D)(6)(b) to allow exterior lighting that does not comply with design requirements to limit projection of light on to neighboring properties and night sky light pollution, and to allow after-hours use of exterior lighting; and Section 1304 to allow provision 348 parking spaces where 995 spaces are required, resulting in relief of 647 spaces. And request for waivers from the following design standards of Section 521 of the Middletown Rules and Regulations Regarding the Subdivision and Development of Land: Section 521.1.B.2 regarding parking lot design; 521.1.D.1 & 2 regarding exterior lighting; 521.1.E.2 regarding screening of rooftop mechanical equipment; 521.2.C regarding exterior

building materials; 521.2.D.1 & 3 regarding roof design; 521.3.C regarding screening along property lines; 521.3.D. 1 & 2 regarding landscaped buffers along property lines; 521.3.D.3 regarding landscaping between building and parking lots; 521.3.F.1 & 2 regarding deciduous tree requirements. Properties located in the public, traffic sensitive (PA) zoning district at 1113 & 1199 Aquidneck Ave., Tax Assessor's Plat 113, Lots 199 & 198A.

- a. **Motion** by Mr. Fenton, seconded by Ms. Owen to open the public hearing. **Vote:** 6-0-0.
- b. Attorney Peter Regan represented the applicant, the Town of Middletown. Mr. Regan introduced Town Administrator Shawn Brown, Matt LaRue from HMFH Architects, Engineer Steve Garvin from Samiotes Consultants, Steven D'Ambrosia from Traverse Landscape Architects, Traffic Engineer Todd Brayton from Bryan Associates, Justin Bernand from Colliers. Mr. Regan shared the application is for a combined middle/high school and received a positive recommendation from the TRC with several conditions of approval.
- c. Town Administrator Shawn Brown shared the process started in April 2021 when the School Building Committee was formed and went over their work including accessing the conditions of all school buildings, current and future community needs, school bond, regionalization, transparency, work with RIDE, and decision to move forward for new combined middle/high school. Mr. Brown spoke about the goals of not disturbing students' education and reusing and redeveloping the current middle school site. The design includes a larger footprint size, larger gym, auditorium, etc. Mr. Brown spoke about the addition of dedicated career pathways space for grades 6-12, existing Gaudet school would be demolished and replaced with playing fields, the High School would be converted to a upper level elementary school for grades 2-5, Forest Ave elementary school will be for lower level elementary school for Pre-K to 1st, and Aquidneck School will become a community center.
- d. Mr. Weber spoke about the influx of NOAA ships and coast guard cutters on the island. Mr. Brown shared a detailed report was conducted to address the changes strategically.
- e. Ms. Owen expressed enthusiasm for a career pathways program.
- f. Mr. Amarant asked about the concept of the community center. Mr. Brown shared the Aquidneck School property is not owned by the Town and would have to work with the Town Council and Trustees on the future community center. Mr. Brown shared that funding could possibly be with third-party partners and is not part of the school bond. Mr. Amarant asked about the school's capacity with the NOAA influx which Mr. Brown shared the Town is working with RIDE and Naval Station on population analysis work.
- g. Mr. Fenton asked about regionalization possibilities which Mr. Brown shared there is no regionalization project in place as of now.
- h. Mr. Garvin spoke about his civil engineering background, existing site conditions, proposed conditions, proposed school layout with the High School on the east side and Middle school on the west, parking lots, proposed utilities lines, proposed stormwater management system, water quality improvement, and existing wetlands. Mr. Garvin stated they will address all the comments from the Town Engineer.
- i. Mr. Regan introduced architect Matt LaRue. Mr. LaRue shared his architectural background, and spoke about the lighting plan, the proposed building layout, floor plan which includes a shared gym, cafeteria, and auditorium, and high and middle school wings. Mr. Weber asked about arrival times between middle and high schoolers which Mr. LaRue addressed the school times are staggered as well as traffic and arrival times.
- j. Mr. Amarant asked about the building design, security elements, and student performance which Mr. LaRue addressed satisfactorily.
- k. Mr. LaRue shared renderings of the project, spoke about the pick-up and drop-off plan, ADA compliance, and building materials. Mr. Pierik asked about energy efficiency of materials which Mr. LaRue addressed.

- l. Mr. Regan introduced landscape architect Steven D'Ambrosia. Mr. D'Ambrosia spoke about the overall landscape plan, courtyards with flex space, stonewalls, multiuse fields, screening, existing trees, and shared that they have met with the Tree Warden on relocating and replacing some trees. The plans were reviewed by the Tree Commission and Mr., D'Ambrosia stated will incorporate their comments into the plans.
- m. Mr. Regan introduced traffic engineer Todd Brayton and shared his professional background. Mr. Bradley spoke about the traffic study, counts, staggered traffic, bus and car circulation, northern driveway access for construction use, and found no adverse impact on existing traffic. There were questions about traffic counts, distribution of cars using the two egress, parking lots and sidewalks, pick-up/drop-off circulation and parking during sporting events which Mr. Brayton addressed.
- n. Mr. Regan went over the zoning relief requests for building footprint and parking. Mr. Regan went over the parking space and calculation based on fire code which overestimates the actual occupancy of the building in practice. Most students will not be driving to school. There was discussion on the parking calculations.
- o. Mr. Weber opened the floor for public input on the variance requests.
- p. Mandy Lawson, 291 Turner Road expressed the addition of 20 spaces is not enough and sharing how during sporting events, cars would park on the grass and the number of spaces is not sufficient.
- q. **Motion** by Mr. Vaillancourt, seconded by Mr. Fenton to approve the two variance requests.
 - i. **Requested zoning relief:**
 - 1. Variance from Zoning Ordinance S605 to allow a building footprint of 91,750 sq.ft. Where 35,000 sq.ft. Is permitted, resulting in relief of 56,740 sq.ft.
 - 2. Variance from Zoning Ordinance S1304 to allow provision 348 parking spaces where 995 spaces are required, resulting in relief of 647 spaces.
 - ii. Discussion revolved around that expert testimony supported that the proposal is reasonable, it received positive recommendations from TRC and Town Committees, and received approval from the State.
 - iii. Mr. Amarant expressed concern with parking during sporting events.
 - iv. **Vote:** 5-1-0, with Mr. Amarant in opposition.
- r. **Motion** by Mr. Vaillancourt, seconded by Mr. Fenton to approve all the 6 requested waivers.
 - i. **Requested Waivers:**
 - 1. Section 521.1.B.2 – Parking lots of greater than 50 spaces must be separated into smaller lots separated by landscaping.
 - 2. Section 521.2.E.2 – Required screening of rooftop equipment from view from public streets.
 - 3. Section 521.2.C – Building exteriors must be constructed of traditional materials such as wood, stone or brick, or alternative materials that resemble traditional materials.
 - 4. Section 521.2.D. 1 & 3 - Roof is a traditional form such as hip, gambrel, or gable OR a flat roof incorporating decorative details on all building sides and/or designed to incorporate a sloped design for the portion of the roof visible from the public way, which is designed so that any mechanical equipment installed on the roof is not visible from the public way and abutting properties.

5. Section 521.3.F.1 – Deciduous street trees required to be planted in planting strip between curb and sidewalk, minimum 30 feet apart, minimum 4” caliper size.
 6. Section 521.3.F.2 - Deciduous parking lot trees required, minimum 4” caliper size.
- ii. Mr. Pierik asked about waivers 2 and 4 and whether screening could be used to minimize rooftop equipment. Mr. LaRue shared investigated using screening but due to cost was removed and stated that the visibility of the rooftop equipment from Turner is low.
 - iii. No members of the public wished to speak.
 - iv. Ms. Owen asked about addressing Tree Commission’s comments despite approving waiver. Mr. Regan confirmed opportunity to address comments.
 - v. **Vote:** 6-0-0.
- s. **Motion** by Mr. Vaillancourt, seconded by Ms. Owen to approve the master plan of a major land development project, subject to the three conditions, and make the required findings.
- t. **Conditions:**
- i. A vehicular connection, at a minimum adequate for emergency vehicle use, between the parking areas on the east and west sides of the proposed building shall be provided.
 - ii. Prior to the preliminary plan application, closed circuit video recording shall be performed in order to evaluate the condition of the existing public sewer connection and lines intended to serve the new building. w
 - iii. Questions and recommendations provided by the Town Engineer during the TRC review or subsequent communication, relative to traffic circulation, parking layout, ADA requirements, and stormwater management shall be considered during final design and preparation of the preliminary plan application package.

Motion by Mr. Vaillancourt, seconded by Ms. Owen to adjourn. **Vote:** 6-0-0

Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:20pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mike Fenton, Secretary