



Town of Middletown Planning Department

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To: Paul A. Croce, Chairman
Planning Board Members

From: Rita Lavoie, Principal Planner

Date: June 1, 2021

Re: Town Council request that the Planning Board consider additional revisions to the proposed new Zoning Ordinance Article 27B- Outdoor Lighting

The Planning Board requested that staff research the proposed zoning ordinance amendment regarding outdoor lighting and present potential revisions at the next meeting. During a Town Council public hearing in May 2021, concern was raised about the potential impact of the proposed regulations on single-family and two-family development. Specifically, the following concerns and recommendations were discussed:

- Concern was raised about the proposed limitations on residential outdoor lighting, particularly in the more rural areas of town with larger parcels. Large parcels or agricultural uses might require lighting that is not consistent with the proposed regulations.
- Council members suggested investigating the possibility of revising the draft to have requirements based on zoning designation.

Planning Department staff examined recommendations from the International Dark-Sky Association along with ordinances from other towns, and the Middletown draft's stated purpose (*A. Protect drivers and pedestrians from the glare of non-vehicular light sources; B. Protect neighbors, the environment, and the night sky from glare and light trespass; C. Promote energy efficiency; D. Protect the visual character of the town.*)

After reviewing the lighting ordinances of Portsmouth, North Kingstown, South Kingstown, Smithfield, and Westerly, Rhode Island, it was found that only Smithfield addresses lighting requirements by zoning district. Smithfield's zoning code does not allow any exterior lighting in a residential district other than streetlights; other zones are subject to lesser requirements. No other examples were found which base the requirements of outdoor lighting on zoning designations.

The International Dark-Sky Association (IDA), however, does recommend that municipalities adopt lighting ordinances based on an underlying land-use-type. But the IDA recommendations are contrary to the consideration of allowing more lighting on larger parcels.

The IDA encourages stricter regulations for outdoor lighting in a municipalities' rural area, and fewer restrictions in urbanized area. The reasoning is due to the rural area's value as a wildlife corridor, heightened sensitivity to light, and because human and specifically pedestrian activity is lower in rural areas. In more urbanized areas, outdoor lighting for pedestrian and vehicle safety is necessary due to higher levels of human activity. Additionally, the IDA contends that urban areas are less able to serve as wildlife corridors, and additional lighting is not as impactful on the

surrounding environment. The IDA still advises that all lighting be minimized and shielded downward.

The Planning Board should consider the results of staff research and make its own decision on any additional revisions.

Please contact me with any questions.

cc. Town Solicitor