

February 1, 2022

**MIDDLETOWN PLANNING BOARD**  
**ATTN: PAUL A. CROCE, CHAIRMAN**  
Middletown Town Hall, 350 East Main Rd.  
Middletown, Rhode Island 02842

**SUBJ:** Proposed West House II New Construction Project

**ENCL:** West House II 'Masterplan Application' submitted to  
West House residents by Church Community Housing

DEAR CHAIRMAN CROCE AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING BOARD:

**Greetings!**

A proposal was recently submitted to the town by Church Community Housing for approval of a plan to construct 54 new units of one and two-bedroom apartments at the top of Enterprise Drive, which is the back door location of West House, an existing complex of 51 senior one-bedroom apartments, built in 1985 and dedicated in 1997 to Jean West, a pioneer in affordable housing for seniors. The proposed plan for the new 3-story construction is now before the planning board. Church Community Housing, a non-profit agency that owns West House, also owns the Enterprise Drive parking lot upon which the new West House II property, if approved, would be situated.

Church Community Housing convened a perfunctory one-hour meeting at West House to introduce their plans to residents shortly before submitting them to the town. Approximately 40 West House residents (and a few neighbors) attended that meeting. Christian Belden, executive director of Church Community, passed out only three (3) sets of photocopied plans for the many residents in attendance to look at during the meeting. Coincidentally, those plans (enclosed) bear little resemblance to plans pictured in the 'Newport This Week' newspaper account (enclosed) that Church Community submitted to the town. After that one short meeting at West House where residents first learned of Church Community's plans to forever alter West House way of life, residents were afforded no opportunity to express any objections to the proposed project.

The undersigned residents of West House submit this letter to: 1) voice their concerns and objections; and 2) ask the planning board to rule against the proposed West House II plans as not being in any way appropriate or desirable for West House's back yard.

## **1. Where do we locate senior housing?**

The West House II proposal is an example of poor site location for senior citizen housing. Cities and towns too often locate housing for seniors at the back end of town, or in industrial complexes where residents are unable to walk to shops and services. West House has been designated a “car dependent” walk score (35/100) and has a low public transit score (34/100), both of which present problems for seniors. RIPTA provides minimal bus service to West House on Saturdays only (9:45-11:15am), via Enterprise Drive, and with only one route (Walmart, Stop & Shop). No public transportation is accessible other days or to such places as the library, church, senior center or beach. West House provides no van for resident transportation needs.

It should be noted that the West House II plans submitted by Church Community to residents occupy the upper portion of the Enterprise Drive loop (outside West House I back door and steps), which loop is now used by RIPTA, among others, and is a roadway believed to be owned by the town. Closing off the upper loop on Enterprise Drive (for the purpose of connecting West House I and II) will require West House I residents to walk down the hill that is Enterprise Drive to watch for and catch the Saturday bus, and then to walk uphill from the lower loop with heavy bags of groceries and purchases, an impossibility for frail elderly.

In addition, West House I residents now wait inside the building until the bus appears on the roadway, avoiding cold, snow, heat or rain. Having to walk to the lower loop (opposite KVH) to see and catch the bus will leave residents susceptible not only to inclement weather but to coyotes and packs of coyotes that are known to live adjacent to the back lot property (water stream/creek).

## **2. West House II will overpower West House I**

Approximately half of West House I residents, (or about 20 apartments) live on the west (back) side of the building where the sun faithfully sets, and where residents enjoy a breathtaking view of the lighted Newport Bridge. Those cherished views will be lost with a new three-story apartment complex (West House II) overshadowing the existing two-story building (West House I). Granted, there is a downward incline from West House I to the back parking lot where the proposed West House II will sit, but the slight incline is not to such a degree that the views enjoyed by residents won't be obscured or completely lost.

Recognizing residents would be unhappy to lose the views they have become accustomed to, Church Community gave those affected first refusals for an apartment in West House II. Moving expenses would be the elderly tenant's.

### **3. 61 parking spaces for 105 apartments is sorely inadequate**

12 of the proposed 54 West House II apartments are two-bedroom units and could have as many as two vehicles, requiring a total of 60+ parking spaces alone for West House II. Only 22 spaces are proposed. Only 39 parking spaces are located in the front lot of West House I (Forest Avenue), and a number of the 52 West House I residents (7 to 12) already park in the back lot on Enterprise Drive because there are no spaces available in the front lot. In addition, on snow days all West House I residents are required to park in the back lot on Enterprise Drive so trucks can plow the front lot. With West House II residents taking all of the 22 allotted spaces in the back lot means residents will be snowed-in in the front lot.

If all residents have a vehicle (most do), about 118 parking spaces would be needed for both buildings, not 61. Add to that number 7 or more employees in the two buildings who need a parking space, and 3 or more nurses, CNAs, and physical therapists who are in West House I at any given time providing medical services to seniors so they can stay in their own homes rather than be moved to a nursing home. Upwards of 100 parking spaces are more realistic than the proposed 61 (22 + 39). Friends and relatives and housing applicants also require parking spaces. There is no parking on Forest Avenue or Enterprise Drive.

### **4. West House II is a very different senior property than West House I**

West House II is a proposed 55-and-older senior complex (unlike West House I) and must comply with the Fair Housing Act, as amended, in admitting persons with physical and mental impairments. An exemption can be sought whereby West House II would be subject to an 80/20 rule, which requires only 80% of the proposed new units (or 43 of the 54 apartments) must be occupied by at least one person who is at least 55 years of age. The remaining 11 apartments can be occupied by 'near elderly' (disabled person at least 50 years old), or 'non-elderly disabled' (a person 18 to 49 years of age and disabled). West House I is now exempt from the requirement because it was established and has been operated continuously as a senior complex with age 62 as the rule for occupancy. The majority of HUD's 23 programs serving seniors require age 62 for eligibility. The reason for that and for West House's fair housing exemption relative to underage persons with physical and mental impairments is that older people need greater peace of mind in living alongside impaired individuals struggling with mental or physical disorders, and especially younger persons who experience those struggles. Often, elderly people are fearful of those with mental disorders, and studies show they would be inclined to stay in their apartments to avoid stress rather than come out, which could result in a number of unhealthy situations.

The problem is this: Church Community plans to give new West House II tenants keys to West House I so that the estimated 66 new residents, whatever their age, can avail themselves of amenities at West House I that Church Community erroneously believes are being underutilized. Those amenities include a small chapel, exercise room with several pieces of equipment, computer room, borrowing library, one-chair hair saloon, dining room and a multi-purpose room.

If West House I residents (many 70 and 80-year-olds today with more elderly residing in their homes than going to nursing homes) are expected to intermingle with under-age-62 residents on a regular and daily basis, a major modification happens to West House I, a modification HUD would need to approve. West House II's under-age-62 eligibility becomes detrimental to West House I.

Submitted plans for West House II show no amenities offered to those greater number of tenants (60+) other than a laundry room. As many as 66 new residents (and their guests) will be using West House I rooms (computer, exercise, dining rooms, etc.) lingering in the building, and trudging through at all hours of the day and night disrupting the peaceful way of life enjoyed by West House I residents. It is expected that even the West House I laundry room will be co-opted by West House II tenants as fewer number of residents in West House I would be doing laundry, resulting in shorter wait time for a machine than West House II residents would find in their own building. In summary, the greater number of occupants will be West House II tenants, almost all of whom will be under age 62, and some even under age 55, Life at West House I will be drastically altered.

##### **5. West House II is situated only about 50-feet from the Bailey Brook watershed**

The proposed West House II complex sits less than 50-feet from the creek/stream watershed that becomes Aquidneck Island's drinking water supply. Bailey Brook is shown on Church Community's 'Masterplan Application' for West House II but is designated simply: "EXISTING VEGETATIVE BUFFER."

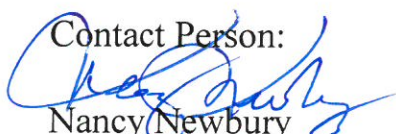
A 200-foot riparian buffer zone is widely recognized today by federal, state, and local agencies. Middletown's Watershed Protection District (WPD) regulations include development restrictions for areas within 200 feet of a water course or water body. Advocates say we need to protect as much land as we can, remediate land that has already been developed, and even increase the buffer zone to 400 feet from 200 feet. We urge the planning board to be vigilant about protecting watershed areas on the island; the source of drinking water for 60,000+ people.

The undersigned thank the Middletown Planning Board and Middletown Planning Department for taking into account our objections to the proposal developed by Church Community for West House II in that the proposal significantly and negatively alters the existing West House I way of life for over fifty elderly residents, contains grossly insufficient parking spaces for the two properties, and violates watershed buffer requirements for keeping safe the island's drinking water.

The planning board is asked to rule that the proposed West House I site for the West House II affordable housing complex is neither an appropriate nor desirable location.

Respectfully submitted,

Contact Person:

  
Nancy Newbury  
(401) 601-5001

**WEST HOUSE RESIDENTS:**

Marcia B. Duchart  
Rose M. Shuman  
Ting Hahn  
John L. Smith  
Elena Parva  
Gust J. Pavi  
J. Bramer

Katie Ripa  
Anna Brown Swann  
Lena A. Gomes  
Phillipa Yeasdale  
Kathy Mullen

**Copies to:**

**Ronald M. Wolanski**

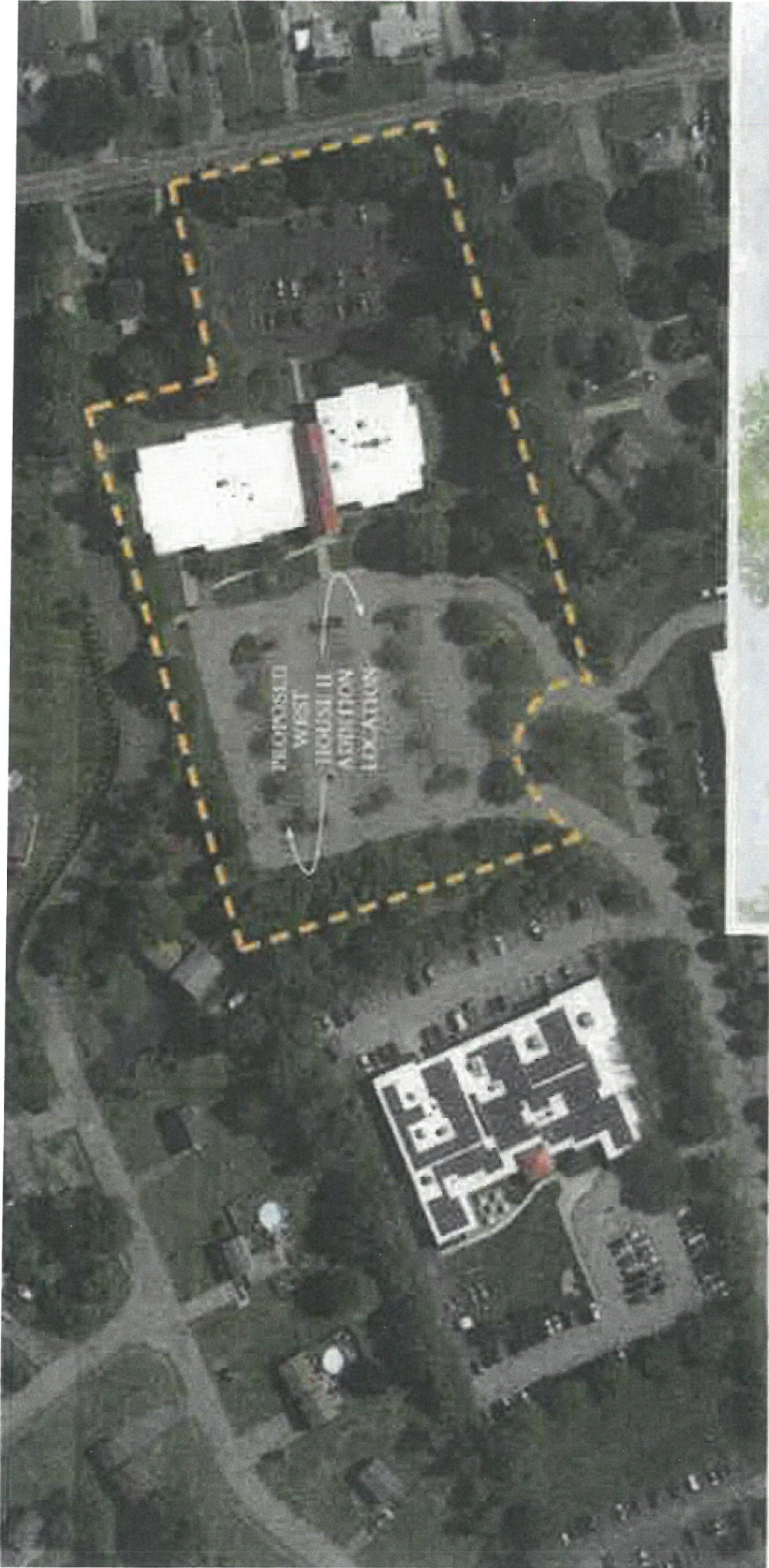
AICP, Director of Planning & Economic Development, Town of Middletown; and

**Rita Lavoie**

Principal Planner & GIS Manager, Town of Middletown

**Christian Belden**

Executive Director, Church Community Housing

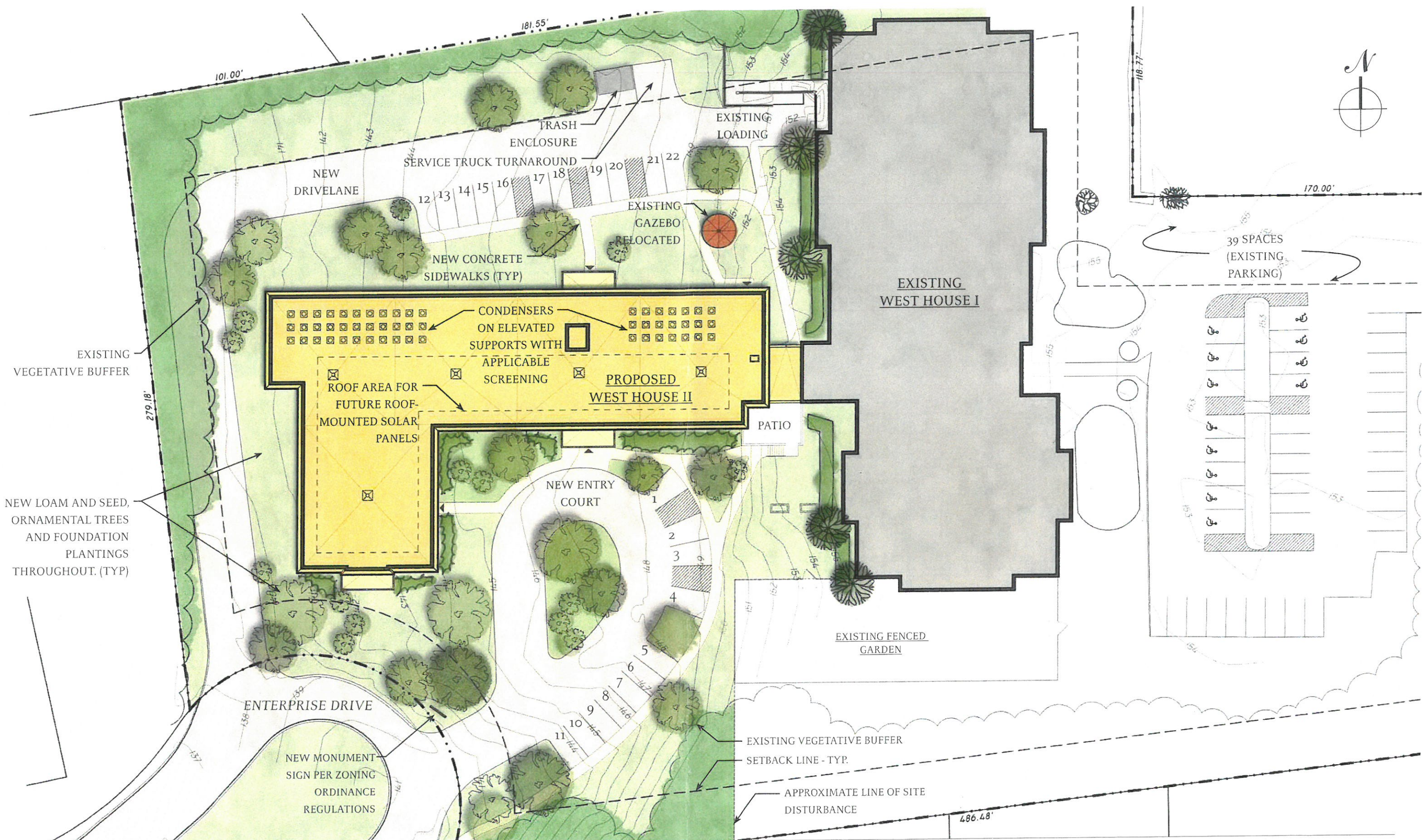


The proposal of 54 units of affordable senior housing would be added to the 51 existing units in West House I. (White-roofed buildings above, right). The new units would consist of 1 and 2 bedroom spaces which include a kitchen and bath.

(Renderings by Union Studio)

« News on This week's

newspaper photos



# WEST HOUSE II - MASTERPLAN APPLICATION

PROPOSED SITE & LANDSCAPE PLAN

OCTOBER 20, 2021

SCALE: 1"=40'-0"





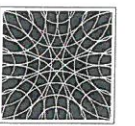
UNITS	
<b>FIRST FLOOR</b>	
(1) BEDROOM:	10
(2) BEDROOM:	6
<b>SECOND FLOOR</b>	
(1) BEDROOM:	15
(2) BEDROOM:	4
<b>THIRD FLOOR</b>	
(1) BEDROOM:	15
(2) BEDROOM:	4
<b>TOTAL UNITS: 54 UNITS</b>	

# WEST HOUSE II - MASTERPLAN APPLICATION

PROPOSED FIRST FLOOR PLAN

OCTOBER 20, 2021

SCALE: 1/16"=1'-0"



TYPICAL EXTERIOR:

- PNTD LP SMARTSIDE STRAND SMOOTH CLAPBOARD, 8" EXPOSURE WITH MITERED CORNERS
- PNTD LP SMARTSIDE STRAND SMOOTH CLAPBOARD, 4" EXPOSURE LAP SIDING WITH PNTD CORNERBOARDS & WINDOW TRIM
- PRE-FINISHED ALUMINUM / CEMENTITIOUS / COMPOSITE PANELS
- STONE VENEER AT PATIO
- INSULATED FIBERGLASS WINDOWS & DOORS
- PNTD STEEL FRAME PORCHES
- EPDM ROOFING WITH INTERNAL DOWNSPOUTS & ROOF DRAINS



# WEST HOUSE II - MASTERPLAN APPLICATION

PROPOSED WEST ELEVATION

OCTOBER 20, 2021

SCALE: 1/16"=1'-0"

