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**To:** [Ronald Wolanski; rlavoie@middletownri.com](mailto:Ronald.Wolanski;rlavoie@middletownri.com)  
**Subject:** Online Form Submittal: Planning Department  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 29, 2022 2:53:47 PM

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## Planning Department

Who would you like your message to go to? Ronald M. Wolanski

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Full Name Mark Hastings

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Email Address [Mhastings0086@icloud.com](mailto:Mhastings0086@icloud.com)

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### Message

I am a very concerned citizen and resident at 417 Forest Ave., (West House) in Middletown, RI. In your capacity for either the Town of Middletown or the State of Rhode Island, I am also sending you a copy of the following, sent today to all the members of the board of directors of the Church Community Housing Corporation:

Board of Directors - Church Community Housing Corporation  
50 Washington Square  
Newport, RI 02840

Email Copies:  
RI State Representative Deb Ruggeiro  
RI State Senator Louis DiPalma

Middletown Town Council Members - Paul Roderigues, Thomas Welch III, Christopher Logan, Terri Flynn, Dennis Turano, Barabara Von Villas, M. Theresa Santos

Town of Middletown - Shawn Brown, Town Administrator. Peter Regan, Town Solicitor. Ronald Wolanski, Director of Town Planning & Economic Development

As you may be aware from correspondence you have previously received from West House resident Nancy Newbury, there is significant concern among West House residents regarding granting access to West House by future West House II under-55 residents. I would like to impress upon you at the outset that the current West House residents fully support the West House II project, with the exception of granting access to West House II residents.

The West House community is fairly tightly knit, and is made up

of 44 women and 9 men; there are 3 married couples. While there are a few newcomers, the vast majority of the West House residents have lived there for several years, and our average age is 75. As such, 12 residents require walkers, 8 need canes, 1 needs a wheelchair, and 1 has limited ability to communicate due to a stroke. I am providing this information in that I think it is important for you to understand that our community is one that is well-established, comfortable with and supporting of each other, welcoming to new residents, and cognizant of the rules and requirements of West House. In short, we are grateful to have such a wonderful, secure environment in which to spend our final years of life. We think that providing a similar opportunity to others by developing West House II in general is a good idea, but not at the expense of our existing West House community.

The State of Connecticut published a comprehensive study in December of 2004 that found that mixing populations creates a very wide variety of problems, especially for the elderly. The existing West House residents are extremely concerned that by granting access to future West House II residents, the trends found in Connecticut would almost certainly repeat themselves in Middletown, RI, to the detriment of their safety.

I recently spoke at The Middletown Planning Board meeting on March 9th, in which I tried to convey the tremendous upheaval that the current West House II plan would cause to the quality of life of West House residents. I am not an attorney, and do not have any experience whatsoever regarding matters of this nature. But, if an incident occurs at West House, besides the physical and mental harm it could cause, there could be liability implications for West House staff, and CCH. I am therefore trying to do what is best for the West House community and convey to anyone I can how serious an issue we face, in the hopes that an alternative to the proposed key access for West House II residents can be found.

The proposal for West House II includes parking spaces for its residents in the East (Forest Ave) lot. The argument follows that if West House II residents park in the Forest Ave. lot, then they should be able to walk through West House in order to get to their building. However, there are only 38 spaces for the existing 48 units, already insufficient for current West House staff, residents, visiting medical personnel, housekeepers, Meals on Wheels, and other visitors. At the Planning Board meeting on March 9th I suggested an alternative to the parking issue, which would completely eliminate the need for West House II residents to enter the existing West House to get to their building:

Revise the proposed parking plan by expanding the Forest Ave. lot towards East Main Rd.

Reserve the spaces created for West House II residents and

their visitors.

Improve the walkway from this expanded Forest Ave. lot so that residents can get to West House II without entering the existing West House

Funding for the parking lot expansion and walkway could come from eliminating the connecting walkway from West House to West House II. In discussions with Mr. Ronald Wolanski, the Director of Planning & Economic Development for the Town of Middletown, since the main purpose of West House II would not be impacted, most likely there would be no additional permitting requirements

Savings from eliminating the connecting walkway could also be utilized to provide common areas in West House II, as described further below

Mr. Christian Belden, the Executive Director of CCH, preceded me in speaking at the March 9th Planning Board meeting. Mr. Belden related information pertaining to West House to the Planning Board that was disingenuous at best, and deliberately misleading at worst. He had visited West House during the Covid lockdown, clearly not the best time to determine which rooms and facilities were being used at West House.

Until about two years ago, there was a HUD-subsidized lunch program in the dining area attached to the kitchen. In addition to the lunches that were provided three days per week, there were several resident-sponsored events. As such, the kitchen and dining areas were used a great deal. Because West House management failed to renew the lunch program, and due in large part to Covid concerns, the kitchen and dining areas are not used as much now as they had been previously. A planned-for residents' council is being formed to address matters such as the lunch program, as well as to manage resident functions in the kitchen and dining areas. It is anticipated that the reinstatement of the lunch program as well as other resident functions post Covid will not leave room - literally and figuratively - for their use by West House II residents.

Anyone visiting West House today would probably reach the conclusion that there are other rooms and facilities that are underutilized. However, this underutilization is caused by factors that are beyond the residents' control, not because they do not want to use the facilities. These rooms and the mitigating factors include:

The equipment in the exercise room is dated and does not function. The future residents' council plans to obtain donations of exercise equipment for use by West House residents. In addition, much of the exercise room is being used for unsupervised storage of books and other material, which make the room cluttered and virtually unusable for its intended purpose

The computers that are in the computer room were donated between 2 and 7 years ago. Only one printer works, but it is locked in an office occupied by a part time staff member. Despite these shortcomings, during non-Covid times the computer room is extremely busy and popular, and not underutilized as characterized by Mr. Belden. The future residents' council plans on soliciting donations for newer equipment, which will make the computer room even more popular than it has ever been, leaving no room for users other than current West House residents

In addition to his misrepresentation of these supposedly-underutilized rooms that could be used by future West House II residents, at a previous meeting with residents at West House, Mr. Belden's comments to some residents were outrageously intimidating. After hearing some objections by West House residents of the intent to allow West House II residents access to West House, Mr Belden asked, "Don't you feel grateful to live here." In fact, despite his condescending attitude and outright bullying in asking this question, nothing could be further from the truth. No one at West House is ungrateful for the opportunity they have been afforded - far from it. But they are intimidated by Mr. Belden, and extremely concerned that any opposition they voice will be met with repercussions, ones that they cannot fathom and are fearful to fight. In addition, the West House community has noticed a significant change in the attitude of the management staff. For example, during the period when residents were required to renew their leases, along with the leases staff presented them with a survey and asked them to sign if they were in favor of or against the West House II project. In this management "survey" nothing whatsoever was said to West House residents about West House II residents getting access to West House; it was conveniently not mentioned. Nor was it ever mentioned when staff went door to door asking residents to sign in favor of the West House II project. Additional proof of the intimidation factor that residents feel is in the signatures obtained from West House residents opposing granting West House II residents access to West House. These signatures, representing 40 of the 48 units of West House, are available upon request. Residents of two units are currently in intensive care and unable to sign. Two additional units cannot sign due to language barriers. Four units are pending, of which I expect at least 3 to sign as well. That would represent 43 of the 48 units opposing West House II access to West House. The total that oppose the access was actually higher, but mere hours after initially submitting their signatures and vocally supporting the initiative, two different individuals asked that their names and signatures not be included, citing fear of reprisals from CCH and/or management as the reason. In any event, approximately 90% of West House residents oppose granting key access to West House II residents, primarily due to safety concerns and the disruption of their long-standing community norms and lifestyle.

In conclusion, please consider the work, legacy, and intent of Jean F. West, in honor of whom West House is named. As indicated on the plaque in the West House lobby, Ms. West, "...challenged the Board and staff of Church Community Housing to develop an affordable housing alternative for frail seniors in our community." West House and West House II are superb examples of her efforts in this regard, with the exception of her reference to frail seniors. The residents of West House certainly fit this description, and as such are extremely vulnerable in several respects. It remains to be seen if the age 55 and over residents of West House II fit the "frail seniors" description as well. But it is certainly not worth putting the safety of current West House residents at risk by allowing West House II residents, and possibly their guests as well, unfettered access to the current building.

I am available at your convenience if you have any questions or if you require any additional information.

Sincerely,

Mark M. Hastings  
417 Forest Ave.  
West House, Unit 224

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