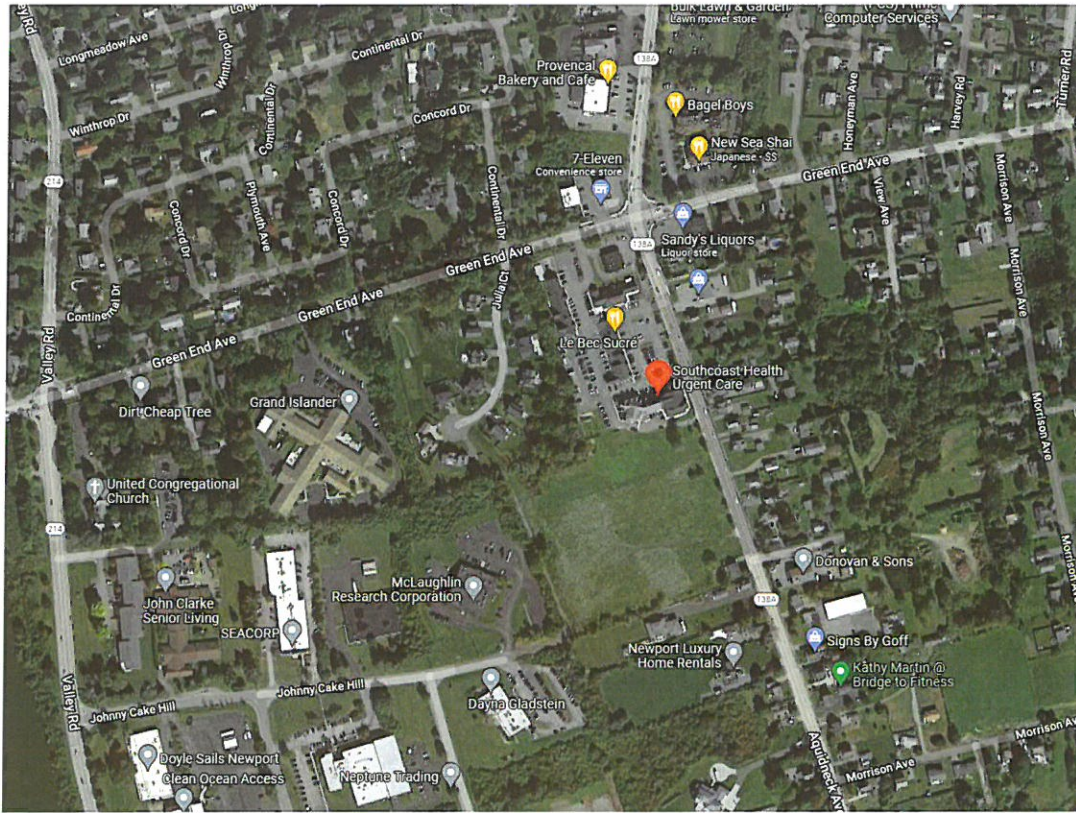


POLO CENTER – POLO VILLAGE – MASTER PLAN COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN REVIEW



TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN, RI April 6, 2022

Prepared for:

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Middletown, RI 02842

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Prepared by:

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24 Weatherly Avenue
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INTRODUCTION:

This report addresses a review of the Town of Middletown’s Comprehensive Community Plan specific to a Polo Center – Polo Village Master Plan proposal. Such proposal encompasses multiple lots including Map 114 (Lots 107, 107A, 107B, 107D, 107 E, 108 and 109). A site visit has been conducted prior to completion of this report. This report has been prepared in anticipation of Middletown Planning Board project review. The Planning Board is scheduled to address the “required findings” as delineated in the Subdivision and Land Development Regulations - Section 404. One of the required findings is “The proposed development is consistent with the comprehensive community plan and/or has satisfactorily addressed the issues where there may be inconsistencies.” This report also briefly addresses a zoning overview given this project includes a “mixed-use development” component. The Middletown Zoning Ordinance explicitly delineates how such “mixed-use development projects” are allowed in commercial zones.

GENERAL PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND SURROUNDINGS:

The Polo Center property, located at the corner of Aquidneck Avenue and Green End Avenue, has successfully existed for decades as a thriving small business commercial complex. Existing business uses include medical and professional offices, restaurants, financial services, and retail. These businesses occupy small footprints and are not “big box” operations. Aquidneck Avenue (Route 138A) is classified as a minor arterial state roadway and Green End Avenue is a local collector road. Both are two-way roadways serving as important and primary north/south and east/west automobile corridors.

The Town of Middletown recently rezoned an adjacent land area to the south to Limited Business (LBA). The property owner proposes to create a “mixed-use development” by building 60 new multi-family townhouse-style residential units on the southern land area encompassing 7 ¾ acres. The proposed multi-family residential component on the southern land area is named “Polo Village.” The new residential in combination with the existing commercial land use would form a new mixed-use development project. Such mixed-use would be more horizontally functioning and oriented versus vertical.

Single-family residential uses exist to the south of the existing commercial Polo Center. Additionally, single-family residential uses exist to the northwest of the currently undeveloped Polo Village land area. Land areas to the east (across Aquidneck Avenue) are a combination of residential and small business. Commercial uses exist at the four corners of Aquidneck Avenue and Green End Avenue. The proposed multi-family land use is envisioned to be a transitional use between the existing single-family residential use to the south and the existing commercial use to the north at the Polo Center. Additionally, the Aquidneck Corporate Park abuts the subject property to the southwest. The proposed Master Plan for Polo Center – Polo Village proposes a direct connection to the Corporate Park via Johnny Cake Hill Road. Photographs below illustrate the existing subject properties including developed land and also undeveloped land proposed for development.



View across subject undeveloped property of Polo Center towards the north (above) and view towards southwestern corner towards the Aquidneck Corporate Park (below).





View from Polo Center towards adjacent southern residential property (above) and view looking north on Aquidneck Avenue towards Polo Center (below).



ZONING:

Previously, the Town of Middletown amended the zoning for this property from R-20A to Limited Business (LBA). This occurred after the completion of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Additionally, the Town added a new zoning designation for “Mixed-Use Development Project” to its zoning.

The proposed Polo Village project matches the definition and stated purposes of the “Mixed-Use Development Project” as stated in the Zoning Ordinance. Although the traditional underlying zoning district is Limited Business (LB), the Middletown Zoning Ordinance allows and encourages “Mixed-Use Development Projects” in both the General Business (GB) and Limited Business (LB) zones. Specific to this Polo Village project, this zoning enables the addition of multi-family housing as a use within the Limited Business zoning district. The purpose statements for “Mixed-Use Development Projects” are found in Article 27A of the Zoning Ordinance (excerpt is listed below).

ARTICLE 27A - MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

§ 27A00 PURPOSE.

Mixed-use development is provided as an option for development in the General Business (GB) and Limited Business (LB) Zoning Districts in order to:

- (A) Preserve open land and community character while permitting appropriate development of mixed-use projects in the General Business and Limited Business Districts;*
 - (B) Encourage traditional architecture and historical village settlement patterns which are well integrated into the existing community, while avoiding the creation of large-scale shopping centers, business, or industrial parks having little or no relation to each other or to the surrounding community;*
 - (C) Promote pedestrian friendly environments which provide both a safe walking atmosphere and a logical connection of destinations within and adjacent to the development;*
 - (D) Provide for compatible mixed- uses and development densities, including limited residential, commercial, office, institutional, and agricultural, as well as recreation and open space;*
 - (E) Provide areas for economic development in the community and allow for creative development of businesses that serve the residents of the district and surrounding areas, and reduce the demand upon the automobile for access to business;*
 - (F) Preserve, create, or enhance the scenic roadside view from major arterial roads of the town, and where applicable preserve and enhance scenic water views; and*
 - (G) Encourage development of residential uses, including those that meet the needs of the community as expressed in the Middletown Affordable Housing Action Plan, but which have limited adverse impact on the town's ability to provide necessary facilities and services.*
- (Ord. 2018-16, passed 9-4-18)*

In addition, the Zoning Ordinance definition for “Mixed-Use Development Project” is as follows, “*The use of any lot or lots of record in the GB or LB zones for the coordinated development of more than one building, and*

including not less than three residential dwelling units, to create a mix of residential and commercial uses in accordance with this subchapter.”

(Ord. 2018-16, passed 9-4-18)

COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN:

The Middletown Comprehensive Community Plan clearly identifies areas suitable for growth as well as areas slated for less development and increased protection. There are several elements of the Comprehensive Plan that pertain to this proposed “Mixed-Use Development Project” in Middletown as well as at this particular location. The Polo Center – Polo Village Center location is generally supported by the Comprehensive Plan. Relevant goals, policies, and narrative from the Comprehensive Plan are as follows:

Land Use Element:

Land Use Vision Statement: The Town of Middletown will ensure that the community remains a desirable place to live by promoting sound growth and quality development which preserves and protects the natural environment, rural landscapes, scenic beaches, and established neighborhoods. We will retain our scenic landscapes while meeting residents’ needs for a strong local economy. Middletown’s balance of land use will promote local and regional sustainability.

The Plan states the predominant land use is single-family (57%) and the largest percentage of residentially zoned land is zoned R-40 (40,000 sf lots). Additionally, the Plan states Middletown has a high percentage of land zoned Open Space with over 17%. Conversely, the Plan also states only 12% of the land area is dedicated to commercial activity including general business, limited industrial, limited business, office business, and office park. As a result, the Plan proactively addresses what type of development is desired and how it should be promoted.

The Comprehensive Plan emphasizes a desire to promote “Mixed-Use Development” including both commercial and residential uses (page IX-20). Although the West Side of Middletown is originally referenced, this mixed-use concept is promoted throughout the Land Use Element as a generally supported design in commercial areas. Supporting narrative envisions transitional improvements to commercial areas through the endorsement of “commercial/mixed-use” designations. In creating appropriate zoning for implementation, the Town of Middletown ultimately designated both the General Business and the Limited Business zoning districts for such mixed-use developments. This was addressed previously in the zoning section of this report.

The “Mixed-Use Development” narrative from the Comprehensive Plan further explains the Town’s mixed-use development objective as follows, *“An objective of the Town is to combine uses in ways that create commercial areas with better character, minimize traffic, reduce infrastructure costs, and preserve remaining undeveloped land. These multiple goals can be accomplished with mixed-use development that combines commercial with other land uses such as office and residential in appropriate locations. Mixed-use development generally requires increased density, which allows for more compact development. Local performance standards should be used to properly mix these uses without creating internal conflicts and to promote a high quality of design. This can be*

accomplished through minor changes and additions to the town's already established regulations including development plan review and commercial design standards.” (page IX-20).

Benefits from such developments were highlighted as follows including specific to reference to Aquidneck Avenue which includes the subject property, *“Mixed-use neighborhoods have many benefits to a community and its residents including creating a sense of place, creating areas that are active throughout the day, increasing housing options, and reducing auto dependence. Mixed-use developments, if designed properly, can produce a pedestrian-oriented center that encourages physical activity and social interaction with storefront-style shopping streets. Aquidneck Avenue was also identified as having the potential to transition to a mixed-use neighborhood.”* (page IX-20)

The Comprehensive Plan further references to the Polo Center property and sets the foundation for an anticipated future zoning amendment as follows, *“In support of the concept to expand the Polo Center south on Aquidneck Avenue and extend Johnny Cake Hill Road, the town is proposing extending the Limited & Office Business designation to several lots currently designated and zoned Medium Density Residential. Zoning would have to be amended for these lots to ensure consistency between the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance and to allow the possibility for future commercial development to occur,”* (page IX-22) Middletown clearly knew this parcel was a development potential by addressing in the Plan. The future zoning changes also allowed for “mixed-use development projects” on parcels with either Limited Business or General Business zoning designations.

The following Goals, Policies, and Action Items from the Land Use Element support this proposed mixed-use development project.

GOAL L-I: To achieve a balanced and harmonious development pattern in Middletown that promotes economic growth and reinvestment while preserving neighborhood integrity, environmental and aesthetic quality, and overall livability.

Policy L-I.A. Promote a land use and development framework based upon smart growth principles.

Action Item L-I.A.2. Adopt mixed-use zoning ordinance which allows for mixed use in all commercial areas.

Policy L-I.C. Create walkable neighborhoods and a connected transportation network for all modes and people of all ages.

Action Item L-1.C.2. Require safe pedestrian accessibility to commercial developments.

GOAL L-II: Appropriately site commercial and industrial uses.

Policy L-II.B. Encourage the redevelopment of vacant and underutilized commercial properties.

Policy L-II.B.1. Consider adopting incentives to attract desirable development and redevelopment to areas of town with existing infrastructure, including a potential Growth Center at Two-Mile Corner.

The **Existing Land Use Map (Map L-2)** within the Land Use Element classifies the land area as “Undeveloped/Unprotected.” The **Future Land Use Map (Map L-4)** proposes the future use to be “Limited and

Office Business.” This intent was implemented by the Town of Middletown in amending the zoning to Limited Business (LB) and also in providing a related “Mixed-Use Development Project” use for the LB district. The **Sewer System Map (Map F-2)** illustrates the property has public sewer. The **Water Services Map (Map F-3)** illustrates the property is served by public water. The **Public Transit Map (Map T-1)** illustrates the property is within the public transit service area. The **Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Map (Map T-21)** illustrates the property is bordered by a pedestrian path/trail on Green End Avenue.

Housing Element:

The Housing Element weighs heavily upon the need for housing, the lack of supply for new housing units, and that new modern housing should be encouraged through a variety of means in strategic locations. Additionally, the element emphasizes that the majority of Middletown’s housing stock is single-family housing. Mixed-use developments are encouraged and supported by the Housing Elements Goals, Policies, Strategies, and Benefits language as follows:

GOAL H-IV: Reduce housing costs while promoting more sustainable development.

Policy H-IV.B. Encourage mixed-use and transit-oriented developments.

Additionally, on page VII-33, there is a secondary table within the Housing Element focused on housing affordability with additional strategies and benefits as follows:

Strategy: Encourage mixed-use development in appropriate locations in town.

Benefits:

- Promotes a village-style and mix of retail, restaurants, offices, civic uses, and multifamily housing
- Promotes pedestrian & bicycle travel
- Promotes a sense of place
- Encourages economic investment
- Makes more efficient use of land and infrastructure
- Guides development toward established areas, protecting outlying rural areas and environmentally sensitive resources.

ANALYSIS FINDINGS:

The following are my professional findings regarding the project and the Town of Middletown’s Comprehensive Community Plan.

- The proposed Polo Center – Polo Village Master Plan is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
- The Comprehensive Plan’s goals, policies, strategy and benefit statements, and narrative strongly support “Mixed-Use Development Projects” particularly in the Land Use Element and Housing Element.

- The maps (Land Use, Sewer, Water, Pedestrian & Bicycle, and Public Transit) within the Comprehensive Plan support the proposed Master Plan.
- The Middletown Zoning ordinance was recently amended to allow and promote “Mixed-Use Development Projects” in the Limited Business Zone (as well as the General Business Zone) thereby promoting the combination of uses including multi-family residential on properties such as the Polo Center – Polo Village.
- Middletown’s “Mixed-Use Development Project” definition is, “The use of any lot or lots of record in the GB or LB zones for the coordinated development of more than one building, and including not less than three residential dwelling units, to create a mix of residential and commercial uses in accordance with this subchapter.”
- Middletown has documented that mixed-use neighborhoods offer many benefits to a community and its residents including creating a sense of place, creating areas that are active throughout the day, increasing housing options, and reducing auto dependence.
- Multi-family housing is referred to by the Comprehensive Plan as a transition use between residential neighborhoods and commercial uses.
- The Master Plan provides secondary access by way of Johnny Cake Hill to the rear of the undeveloped land area.

RECOMMENDATION:

The proposed Polo Center - Polo Village Master Plan serves to combine an existing commercial development with a new residential component to form a “Mixed-Use Development Project.” In my professional planning opinion, the project complies with the Town of Middletown’s Comprehensive Community Plan for the reasons stated within this report.

Paige R. Bronk, AICP

Paige R. Bronk 04/06/2022

PAIGE ROBERT BRONK, AICP

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PROFESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS:

- 28+ years of public sector planning and management experience
- Operational, personnel, and budget management
- Implementation of programs, projects, priorities
- Adaptive reuse of public lands (development and preservation)
- Negotiations: labor, real estate, financing, contracts
- Community and strategic planning
- Communication expertise – internal/external/social media/website
- Problem solving - rational and diplomatic approach
- Business and economic development

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Economic and Community Development Manager

Town of Groton, Connecticut

July 2015 – Present

- Serves as the lead POC to attract investment, promote opportunity, and increase marketability.
- Manages Economic and Community Development Program and staff.
- Directly coordinates with Town Council, Town Manager and state and regional agencies.
- Collaborates with Electric Boat, Pfizer, business associations, and Chambers of Commerce.
- Focuses on market analysis, property redevelopment, housing, financial management, bond rating, business retention/attraction, community promotion, and investment.
- Manages Economic Development Commission including Town Council representatives.
- Oversees the Economic Development Fund (\$500,000), Tax Abatement/Incentive programs.
- Coordinates the new Wayfinding Sign Program including design and implementation.
- Assists in amending existing programs to streamline business startups and expansion.
- Implements town supported projects, budgets, and directives relating tax base growth.
- Developed and implemented the Airport Development Zone (ADZ) program.
- Grants including CDBG, Brownfields, and special projects (Nautilus Dock - \$735,000).
- Markets and manages Groton real estate projects including Mystic Education Center Redevelopment, Groton Heights Redevelopment (ThayerMahan robotics), 529 Gold Star Highway (mixed use development), Seeley Redevelopment (housing), Colonel Ledyard Redevelopment (housing), Pleasant Valley (housing), and Data Centers.
- Received 2017 CT Economic Development Association Member of the Year Award
- Launched marketing campaign, video, branding, and website www.exploremoregroton.com
- Serves on CT Economic Development Association (CEDAS) Board as Vice-Chair.
- Serves on Thames River Innovation Place (TRIP) as Secretary.

Paige Bronk Consulting

Sole Proprietor - Newport, RI

January 2015 – Present

- Strategic planning, development, zoning, and fiscal impact consulting services in Rhode Island to municipal and private clients in multiple jurisdictions.

Director of Development*Rhode Island Housing**Dec. 2014 – July 2015*

- Coordinated investors, federal, state and local agencies.
- Oversaw compliance, finance layering, and cost effective program management.
- Recommended project financing awards to the Rhode Island Housing Board.
- Supervised staff (design and construction, program managers, underwriters, development).
- Maximized leveraging of funding while minimizing implementation risks.
- Oversaw RFP processes for real estate (85 Slater Street – Pawtucket half way house), competitive financing, and development programs.

Economic Development Manager*Town of North Kingstown, Rhode Island (contract position)**April 2013- Dec. 2014*

- Managed economic development activities including business attraction and retention, market and fiscal analyses, special projects, marketing, infrastructure planning, property redevelopment, and partnerships with state agency programs.
- Supported Town Manager, Town Council, Economic Development Advisory Board, and Wickford Economic Development Advisory Board.
- Administration and implementation of large grant funded projects (over \$3 million).
- Redevelopment of key public and private properties.
- Initiated the streamlining (LEAN) of municipal functions including departmental coordination, approval processes (permits/licenses), sign ordinance, and financial functions.
- Coordinates business attraction efforts (tax incentive, payment agreements, and public property).

Assistant Director for Planning and Development*City of Pawtucket, Rhode Island**January - April 2013*

- Executive interim support to the Mayor and Department focused on 45 Division Street Redevelopment (site analysis, environmental, legal, RFP, marketing).

Appraisal Data Analyst*Northeast Revaluation Group – Warwick, RI (contract position) September 2012 – April 2013*

- Property analysis and research for West Warwick and Warren property assessment projects.

Director of Planning, Zoning, Development & Inspections*City of Newport, Rhode Island**September 2000 – July 2012*

- Executive management to City Manager; Newport City Council, Boards/Commissions.
- Directed operational management for multiple divisions (planning, facilities, parking, zoning, inspections, development and grants (CDBG, EDA, TIP, Harbor Shuttle, Cliff Walk).
- Managed operating and capital budgets - \$3+ million annually.
- Developed proposals and secured grants for major projects (> \$1 million each)
- Negotiated land transactions for the redevelopment of high profile properties (bank, brewery, community college, residential condos, conservation land)
- Coordinated revolving loan programs totaling over \$4 million.
- Streamlined development review processes to stimulate business development.

- Planned redevelopment of the North End including a 495 unit housing neighborhood, community college, daycare facility, recreation, and offices (APA Rhode Island Best Implemented Plan Award - 2007).
- Staff liaison to Redevelopment Agency and LRA for Navy waterfront redevelopment.
- Spearheaded the Pell Bridge Realignment Project to free over 30+ acres for redevelopment.
- Managed and coordinated special projects including Ordinance Amendments (Zoning, Subdivision), Land Purchase/Sale, Comprehensive Planning, Economic Redevelopment, Cliff Walk, Noise and Nuisance Mitigation, Pell Bridge Realignment Project, Signage, U.S. Navy Hospital Reuse, Housing, Multi-modal Transportation (Newport Water Shuttle, Rail), School Property Redevelopment, Economic Waterfront Analysis and Regional Planning.

Director of Planning and Building Codes

City of Frankfort, Kentucky

March 1998 – September 2000

- Executive management to City Manager and liaison to City Council
- Directed a development department including staffing to the Planning Commission, Code Enforcement Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Architectural Review Board.
- Administered and updated zoning, subdivision, property, and land use regulations.
- Administered the FEMA - CRS floodplain management program and hazard mitigation plan.
- Administered the housing grant program (HOME, HUD, CDBG, and FEMA).

Natural Resources/Environmental Planner

Chatham County/Savannah Metropolitan Plan Commission

August 1994 – March 1998

- Developed countywide plans for open space, greenways, and land protection.
- Formulated \$9 million budget for a bond funded open space/greenway program.

Solid Waste Management Planner

Coastal Georgia Regional Development Center

June 1992 – July 1994

- Managed department serving eight counties/26 municipalities with a \$1 million federal grant.
- Developed local, regional, and national plans for state/federal approval gaining NADO award

EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION:

- American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), 1996.
- Master of Community Planning and Development (MCP), University of Rhode Island, 1991.
- Bachelor of Arts (Environmental Studies and Geology), Alfred University, 1989.
- United States Coast Guard (USCG) – Master Mariner Captain’s License – 100 GT, 2014.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS:

- International City Managers Association (ICMA)
- American Planning Association (APA) (Rhode Island/Connecticut Chapters)
- American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP)
- Connecticut Economic Development Association (CEDAS) (Vice-Chair)
- Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce (Ex-Parte Board Member)
- Thames River Innovation Place (TRIP) (Board Member/Secretary)
- Eastern Regional Tourism District (ERTD) (Board Member)
- International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC)