

Record of a Joint Meeting of the Planning Board and Town Board

Town of Middlefield

May 26, 2022

Attendees:

Planning Board: Sydney Waller, Chair; Bill Ralston, Abby Rodd, Roy Kortick (zoom), Arthur Weinstock, Johnnie Nemecek; Absent: Andy Baugnet.

Town Board: Dave Karl, Supervisor; Jeff Woeppel, Jenn Pindar van Kempen, Peggy Leon (zoom); Absent: Kelly Brannigan.

Other Attendees: Neal Newman, Middlefield ZEO and IT; Frank Harte, Middlefield Climate Smart Task Force; Maureen Murray, Middlefield Resident.

Meeting called to order 6:43 pm by Chair Waller.

Note: Special Thanks to Jeff Woeppel for his assistance in recording and preparing this summary.

Summary:

The two groups held a joint meeting with invited guest Bruce Boncke to enhance their understanding regarding comprehensive planning. This was open to the public and was designed essentially as an educational session.

Sydney Waller, Chair, Planning Board, asked Bill Ralston to introduce Mr. Boncke who by education and profession is a civil engineer with some experience in comprehensive planning. (Mr. Ralston and Mr. Boncke were High School classmates).

The following points were made during the discussion of the evening.

Mr. Boncke noted that there is a **risk** in accomplishing comp plans: they are often completed and left on the shelf. During the process, those who will be involved in **implementation** must be included.

Many **positive** things can be accomplished in the planning process; he noted that excellent work had been done to date for the Middlefield comp plan.

Three **guiding principles** had supported Bruce during his career:

- Voltaire: The best way to assure failure is to strive for perfection
- Important to manage to the objective, failure is not an option
- One should always leave it better than one found it

Questions about **structure** arose; generally, a **steering committee** is assembled inclusive of various stakeholders in the community. Planning board is usually not that committee, although it should be represented. Make sure to include an implementation sub-committee.

It is suggested that **green housing standards** and the website **homeinnovation.org** would be potentially helpful references, with which field Boncke is involved.

Mr. Boncke stated that **consensus** does not necessarily mean **unanimity**; not everyone will agree with all that is done.

In actualizing comp plans:

- There should be thorough **awareness of the world** around us
- Regarding **SWOT** analyses (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), emphasis is placed on the T [so that it does not dominate] ; threats from the real world often drive the plan
- **Zoning and comp plans** must be consistent: zoning must “be in compliance with” the comprehensive plan
- Adequate **training** must be offered to officials

Upon review of the town’s **zoning laws**, Mr. Boncke concluded that they are well done and that the use of the **PDD principle** is effective, as “performance zoning.”

Further, he suggested that before engaging a consultant to [assist in] guide the planning process, there needs to be clarity and general agreement about **why the process is being undertaken**.

Some possibilities were identified:

- To comply with the **law**
- **To obtain state grants**
- To inform **zoning** regulations
- To identify elements of a **strategic plan**
- To compile an analysis of the Town for **historical and archival** purposes, the Profile of where

Middlefield is right now: learning what the community wants provides the greatest value

The first step in planning, Mr. Boncke indicated: an **inventory** of what makes up the town should be prepared.

Questions utilized in obtaining information from town residents (the survey) should **not** be formulated to drive certain conclusions.

When finished, the comp plan ideally conveys a sense of “**open for business**”; businesses and residents want to know that municipalities have well thought out **plans/zoning regs** in place. Good comp plans can **attract** individuals to towns. “Before people move in, they want to know how comprehensive the community is.” He noted communities are competing for people.

Mr. Boncke’s impression of the Town’s **current comp plan** was that it read more like a **church mission** statement.

He suggested that any revision of the comp plan incorporate **current key principles** and concepts, like incentive zoning. For assistance in this regard, he recommended that **NYS Homebuilders** material be reviewed (Mr. Boncke is affiliated with home builders.)

Importantly, comp plans will address opportunities for **availability and affordability of single-family** homes; we will want to have this for our parents and our children. Further, comp plans might rethink the single-family model and address various types of opportunities for example multi-family dwellings and special use permits for apartments above garages.

Review of infrastructure should be undertaken as this is key to housing development. It is possible that smaller developmental options be incorporated such as cluster projects to encourage affordable housing

One possible approach to comp planning although not the usual sequence is to **review the zoning laws** initially and then proceed to the work on the comp plan.

Reference to the **Rural Resources Commission** material from the 1990’s might be productive.

The New York **Planning Federation (NYPF) and the Dept of State (DOS)** has pertinent information regarding development of a survey questionnaire for acquiring data and feedback from the town’s population.

The meeting concluded at 9:00 PM. Mr. Boncke was thanked for his purposeful contribution to the educational session.

Respectfully submitted,

Johnnie Nemeč