

## MIDDLETOWN PLANS WITH A PURPOSE

The story of Middletown's success in planning for the future and its ability to attract the current wave of new corporate citizen interest in our city did not happen yesterday, nor ten years ago; but more likely and actually more than thirty years ago during the administration of Mayor Stephen K. Bailey, the mayor of Middletown from 1952 to 1954.

It was during this time that the organization and some of the tools necessary to plan for the future of Middletown were originally devised.

It wasn't too long after, that the City of Middletown was featured in the very first published edition of Mayor and Manager Magazine in January of 1958.

The publisher in this first edition of his magazine makes this profound observation:

"The Middletown Story is one of city planning. As community leader, the mayor must guide planning, make it broad and farsighted, not merely political and expedient; and, above all, weld to [Planning] the support and enthusiasm of those stalwart and hard working citizen-dreamers whose brain and brawn can build the community. The eight different articles of the Middletown Story portray both planning and cooperation -- enthusiasm from one man, great foresight from another, deep community love from a third, tact, patience, courage, from each in turn."

The publisher of this magazine goes further to laud the credentials and business experience of his editor in providing valuable advice to the subscribers with this quote:

"He has a particular flair for research and part of his work in this organization has been the direction of the IBM key punch, sorting, and tabulation departments used for audience research, circulation and reader surveys. [Methods] are his [meat.]"

The publisher ends his statement by saying, "Mr. Frank Gavin MacAloon, editor, presents for you the January issue of Mayor and Manager and its study of municipal planning in a very real and equally human American municipality -- Middletown, Connecticut."

The eight contributors to this "Middletown Story" are from a diverse segment of Middletown's early leadership. There are republicans and democrats, staff and volunteers, bankers and merchants, a mayor who originated the ideas, a mayor who followed and carried through, and a remarkable citizen who devoted fifteen unselfish years of his life to the well being of the city he dearly loved.

The names today may mean nothing to most of the new generation of Middletown. But they must not be forgotten for their contribution to the process of "Planning Middletown with a Purpose". The names of Mayor Stephen K. Bailey and Mayor Harry Clew, of G. Eugene Goundrey, Bob Traverse, Harold Rowe, Arnold Watrous, Art Wrubel and Howard Smith are not on any monuments or projects, but they were willing to serve their community and to set the stage for the future that we now enjoy. Others, in great number, contributed as well. Middletown planned well with these leaders and volunteers and met the challenge of the times.

The challenge was, in the words of William L. Slayton, Commissioner of the Federal Urban Renewal Administration, Housing and Finance Agency, in an article published in the Urban Renewal Observer, dated April, 1962:

"If you are thinking of attracting new industry for the future, or of recruiting new employees for your businesses, you had better heed the need for quality schools and desirable neighborhoods. In the coming years we will see greatly increased competition for new businesses and skilled workers to man them, and only those cities that can offer these genuine inducements will have a chance in the race of brains, talent, and commerce."

"This, then, is the challenge of urban renewal to businessmen: to pitch into renewal activities in your home town, wherever they are required, in whatever capacity you can serve: as homeowner, merchant, civic leader, employer, and investor. Many businessmen are busily and productively engaged in these activities, and much progress is being made. However, more, much more, needs to be done."

Middletown did meet the challenge that it faced by using its civic-minded volunteers well; by creating more opportunities for citizen participation; and by doing more comprehensive planning during the 1960's.

In 1969 Irwin Kaplan, the city's development coordinator, commenting in a statement entitled, "Middletown: The Renewal Challenge" said:

"Although renewal offers us opportunities we would otherwise not have, it cannot answer all our questions. The program simply offers opportunities. There is no magic. To translate these opportunities into actual accomplishments will take considerable effort on the part of many people. We will be searching for people who are eager to invest in the future of Middletown, and although we have based our plans on the community's economic potential, we must be ready to respond to changing market conditions. We will have to anticipate and meet the individual and specialized needs of families and businesses. We must be prepared for delays, inconveniences and occasional disappointments. Just as there are opportunities we can't foresee, there will be problems we can't anticipate.

But there is one thing we must never forget. The future won't get better unless we make it better."

We made Middletown better, with the effort and hard work of both new people and established leaders, working together. Help was provided by our business, corporate and institutional community, especially by Wesleyan University.

Our downtown today is the envy of a lot of Connecticut communities who are facing the same problems that we prepared for early and met head on. Our natural asset, the riverfront, has been beautifully improved with plans for further improvement and development that can and will provide for future amenities for all to enjoy. Our wide and proud Main Street has been preserved and improved with new and existing uses. The northend of our city is being shaped and changed through a slower process of rehabilitation of existing properties and conversion to new uses.

In May of 1971, former Mayor Stephen Bailey, then Dean of the Maxwell School, Syracuse University, was invited to address the Chamber of Commerce at its annual dinner.

In a letter to Dean Bailey to explain the major activities, programs and events that had occurred since his administration in 1954, Joseph Haze, Director of Redevelopment, reported the following:

"There is much to be told about the City's organization and mobilization in various groups interested in community improvement. Project Area Committees, both business and residential, have been formed for

renewal, the Chamber of Commerce, Greater Middletown Community Corporation (Non-profit housing), Middletown Industrial Development Commission, Common Council Development Committee, Community Action for Greater Middletown (OEO program), Hill Development Corporation and Wesleyan; and an expanded Redevelopment Agency (10 members) have worked together in planning the renewal program for Middletown.

Middletown's total program is ambitious but with the support and involvement of the groups mentioned above, the dreams and opportunities for families and businesses for a better Middletown will come true."

Middletown has come a long way since then by the careful planning and hard work of its people. We did not get where we are today by chance. A comprehensive and well-thought out plan was the basis for the years of change and improvement. We are a solid community and the quality of life that we now enjoy is a major factor in what attracted the new corporate citizen interest in our city. We have been recognized by Aetna, IBM, Bronson and others, as a community that has planned for its future and is prepared to continue this comprehensive approach to planning.

The City of Middletown has not failed in meeting its goals and objectives for its downtown, the industrial development area, the riverfront, nor the northend of our city that is still in the process of change.

Some developers have failed to meet our plans for these areas for a variety of reasons. But, we have not failed.

We are on the threshold of a whole new horizon and opportunity to be creative and comprehensive in planning and completing the job that remains to be done.

Now is the time to draw on the hard work, foresight, experience and wisdom of our civic-minded predecessors who began the process of planning with a purpose.

The old ideas, priorities and objectives may not hold true for our new future. The need today is to once again look at the community as a whole: our downtown, the riverfront, the southend, Westfield. We must take a close look at the relationship of uses and needs of each of these areas and consider how they may best compliment each other to benefit the whole community. We must bring people, groups, leaders, public agencies and commissions and elected officials together to share

new ideas, problems and planned solutions. I do not suggest consultants, although some help may be needed. I suggest that representatives of all groups with current responsibility for various components of Middletown's development and well-being be brought together to consider the issues at hand. (MIDC, Chamber of Commerce, P & Z Commission, MDC, Redevelopment Agency, Citizen Group representatives, others)

It took Middletown more than 300 years to grow and to be recognized as a regional center and leader in the field of community-generated revitalization. It took 30 years to create and implement a plan with a purpose. That plan saved our best, changed our image and appearance, and provided the opportunities that now await our attention. Given the opportunity, our new and potential corporate citizens, I am sure, would join us in meeting the challenge of the 90's. Middletown has a wealth of talent and proven experience in its citizenry. Let us use them.

By: Joseph A. Haze  
Director of Redevelopment

to