

Land Development in Middlebury Residential Zones

Middlebury is roughly 18 square miles in size. When compared with neighboring Oxford, at 34 square miles or Southbury with 39 square miles one begins to realize just how small a town we are geographically. We cannot continue to divide and subdivide residential zoned land as if we are some sort of territorial amoebae.

Let's look at topic of residential land development in Middlebury as logically and as dispassionately as possible.

To begin, we have solid, capable volunteer members on our land use boards. The problem does not lie with the individuals on these boards; the problem lies with the regulations that define just what these board members can and cannot do. For example:

1. Our zoning regulations contain far too many loopholes that allow for "exceptions". These exceptions sometimes cause projects to spin out of control.
2. Once a land use board makes a decision, that decision often leaves the sole jurisdiction of the board and enters into the political domain of the Selectmen thus "muddying" the process. This should not be allowed.
3. Notification to the residents impacted by a subdivision is not mandatory under present town regulations. As First Selectman, I would seek to change this process.
4. "Negotiations" between Selectmen and a developer should be made public long before any town meeting is scheduled. The public's right to know trumps any political maneuvering.
5. A key factor in the revamping of the zoning regulations should occur in the area of commercial development. Regulations should allow, if not encourage, commercial development in strategic commercial zones.

As First Selectman, I would propose the following:

1. A thorough and immediate examination and revamping of our zoning regulations. I would empower a panel consisting of State of Connecticut land use offices, professionals from our local college, our own Chairs of the various land use Commissions, local townspeople and land use experts. This group would report their findings to the Selectmen within a one-year deadline. The Selectmen would then call a town meeting for the sole purpose of voting the recommendations up or down.
2. As First Selectman I would never attempt to substitute the judgment of the Selectmen and the town attorney for the judgment of the land use boards. I would never allow, for example, a Town Attorney to negotiate settlements with developers outside the parameters of the land use decisions.
3. I would work for the mandatory notification of any proposed subdivision to the residents impacted by said subdivision. I would not condone or carry on any "secret" negotiations with land developers.

To summarize, what is needed in Middlebury is a complete revamping of the Planning and Zoning regulations. This will be the first step taken by my administration. Once this is done, the First Selectman and the Town Attorney will leave the settlement of land use issues in the hands of the land use boards.