

1969
Erwin Kaplan, Middletown Development Coordinator

(1) 69

MIDDLETOWN: THE RENEWAL CHALLENGE

The renewal project can be discussed in terms of its objectives, opportunities, and limitations. Any one of these criteria can not adequately and honestly describe the renewal process, and any renewal project must be viewed as a mixture of all three. In this sense, the renewal process is the community-level equivalent of the personal and professional choices each of us makes as individuals and families.

The premise, simply stated, is always the same; to make a change for the better.

Cities age. They become old and rundown as well as obsolete. They frequently can no longer perform effectively the functions for which they were intended, and possibly even more critical, the functions for which they were originally intended are simply no longer valid.

Renewal therefore, is an acknowledgment by government of its responsibility to the people of the project area as well as to the City as a whole.

Change however, does not come easily. In human terms, change requires a conscious and positive effort to reverse a tide: it's always easier to ride with the tide. It also means stepping out into the unknown, and it feels safer being with "the devil you know" rather than to go searching for "the devil you don't". Although resistance to change deserves consideration and great respect, it must be remembered that the situations which are deteriorating before our eyes will not improve by themselves. They will get better only if we make them better.

As a community with a commitment to its citizens therefore, recognition of the need and the responsibility to initiate change cannot be avoided.

The question is how to bring about the best possible change.

1

OBJECTIVES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

The plan is designed to achieve a variety of social, economic and physical objectives. In practice however, these three areas are interrelated and cannot be dealt with separately.

SOCIAL OBJECTIVES:

The fundamental social objective is to provide quality housing to the area's residents and to significantly alleviate the problems of housing for low and moderate income families. It is intended to provide such housing in the project area with all the necessary supporting facilities and amenities, so as to raise the quality of living in addition to merely provide adequate shelter. These will include open space and recreation areas, parking facilities, street improvements and where necessary, neighborhood shopping facilities. One of the great opportunities urban renewal offers a community is that of improving the living conditions of families in blighted neighborhoods. Relocation, which is a vital concern and a sensitive process, should not be viewed as an obstacle to renewal, but as one of its chief goals. It would be a weak excuse if poor housing were permitted simply because the inhabitants find it difficult to move.

In addition to meeting relocation needs, there will be included in the provision of housing for low and moderate income families, housing for the elderly, designed for easy access to all of downtown's facilities and institutions, and married student housing, easily accessible to the University. The housing will be designed to be an integral part of the community, rather than a part from it.

The plan also proposes to accommodate the expansion or relocation of downtown institutions. This includes plans for church and synagogue expansion, YMCA expansion, provision of expanded medical facilities,

parking for downtown institutions, adequate post office facilities, library expansion. There also has been considerable enthusiasm expressed for the retention and renovation of the old Middlesex Theater as a major landmark and a source of community pride. In addition, the project may offer a unique opportunity to provide apartments for the private market which will be both close to downtown and overlooking the River.

ECONOMIC OBJECTIVES:

The renewal project is designed to realize three key economic objectives. First, the cost of carrying out the project is within the City's means, even though it is an ambitious project by any standards. Second, it will raise the local level of economic activity, and third, it will increase tax revenues from the project area and from neighboring areas as well.

The cost for carrying out the project is shared between the Federal, State and City Governments. The Federal Government will pay approximately three-quarters of the net cost of the project, and the State and the City will share the remaining one-quarter of the net project cost.

There are several ways the City may provide the local share of the project cost. The obvious way is with hard cold cash. The City could not easily afford to undertake a project of this magnitude if it had to raise the local share in this manner. Another alternative is to apply some of the costs of municipal services and facilities which would be provided in support of the project. These "non-cash" contributions are used to offset the cash which the City must use toward the project. A third alternative which is permitted under renewal law is what is often referred to as "112 credits". This refers to a section of the act which permits a municipality to enter into a cooperation agreement with a

university so that certain costs incurred by the university as part of its own expansion program may be credited towards the City's share of a renewal program.

The opportunity for this type of arrangement exists in Middletown between the City and Wesleyan University, and due to Wesleyan's major expansion program, considerable credits can accrue to the City to offset its share of the project cost.

A summary of project costs is as follows:

Budget Summary

I. Local Share of Project (City and State) from Form HUD-6200

1. Net Project Cost	\$14,792,700
2. Project Capital Grant *	- 11,094,525
3. Local Share	<u>\$ 3,698,175</u>

II. Total Project Cost to City

1. Local Share of Project	\$ 3,698,175
2. Ineligible Site Improvements	<u>+ 293,576</u>

Total: \$3,991,751

III. Resources Available to Finance Total Costs

1. State of Conn. Grant (½ Local Share)	\$ 1,849,087
2. Credit for Low Rent Public Housing (107 credits)	193,300
3. Credit for Wesleyan University Expenditures (112 credits)	<u>1,657,400</u>

Total: \$ 3,699,787

IV. Cash Contribution by City

1. Total Project Cost to City	\$ 3,991,751
2. Resources Available (Non-cash which may be applied to City's share)	- 3,699,787
3. Required Cash Contribution by City	<u>\$ 291,964</u>

* The Project Capital Grant (\$11,094,525) plus Rehabilitation Grants (\$44,000) and Relocation Grants (\$439,850), both of which are 100% federal costs, make up the Total Federal Capital Grant of \$11,578,375.

The project area will provide an opportunity for new investment and reinvestment by Middletown's businesses. It is the intent of the project to provide an attractive setting for modern, efficient commercial facilities which are easily accessible and provide adequate parking. Considerable interest has been shown by local merchants in downtown investment. These are people who are prepared to commit themselves to the future of the City. In addition, a downtown Inn which has been discussed for so many years is expected to finally become a reality. The project area will make provision for new office space which is needed in a growing City such as Middletown. There will also be attractive opportunities designed to draw new business to the City.

PHYSICAL OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of the project is to structure a downtown which is efficient as well as attractive. The basic ingredients of an exciting and attractive downtown are already there. It will be our job to carry out a plan which will display each component to its best advantage, and to unite these in a mutually advantageous manner.

Middletown is a City which is blessed with a wide, proud Main Street, and which is bordered on one side by a beautiful River, and on the other by a handsome campus.

How many cities have anything remotely comparable?

Renewal offers Middletown the opportunity to highlight these three basic components so that together they form the most exciting downtown complex in the east. This would be supported with programs for landscaping and beautification as well as for new sewers, streets and utilities.

A street system is designed that will facilitate access and egress to downtown, and which will be supported with adequate and properly located parking facilities. Many of downtown's existing institutional structures,

such as the churches and the Historical Society will provide the scale and tone of new design.

LIMITATIONS:

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, and a commitment to the future on the part of all our people. 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. It won't get better unless we make it better.