

ANNUAL REPORT

FY 1995-1996



Municipal Development Office

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The Municipal Development Office represents a broad range of physical, socio-economic and preservation planning interests aimed toward the enhancement of the quality of life along with the promotion of a greater tax base and the creation of job opportunities for the City of Middletown and its citizens. The various committees served results on balancing a complex agenda of development, housing, environmental, preservation and administrative issues. The following are highlights of activities from some of the major committee assignments:

Economic Development Committee

The Economic Development Committee (EDC) is composed of five (5) members of the Common Council who serve as the development arm of the City. The Committee is also the policy making body for implementing the North End Industrial Area. During the past fiscal year, the EDC approved and supported the following projects:

- ▶ **REINVEST Loan Program** - The City of Middletown sponsors several low interest loan programs for business attraction and development. REINVEST is designed to augment the economic base by providing loans for fixed improvements up to a maximum of \$25,000. To date, sixteen (16) loans have been approved approaching a total outlay of \$300,000. During the past fiscal year, the Economic Development Committee approved loans to the following businesses: Mikado; VanDough; and, Touch of Class.
- ▶ **Youth Conservation Corps** - Each summer, the Economic Development Committee sponsors an eight (8) week program during which time students are trained in conservation

methods and exercise that training to improve Middletown's image as the *Forest City*. Completed projects during the last year include mulching and pruning many trees in the downtown area, both along City streets and in parks, trail restoration at Crystal Lake and Vets Park and considerable effort in restoring part of the original landscape design at the *Long Hill Estate*.

- ▶ **Industry For Middletown (INFORM)** - For a quarter of a Century, the City has had a productive working relationship with INFORM. Over the past several years, the City and INFORM have remained in a contractual relationship whereby INFORM assists in nurturing industry City-wide. During the past year, Robert Hill, Executive Director of INFORM, has been involved in relocating twelve (12) businesses to Middletown resulting in the addition of 340 employees to the workforce and the occupancy of 210,000 square feet of industrial space. With approval and funding through the EDC, INFORM last year, sponsored a major mailing of brochures and promotional videos to targeted industries in the New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. They also established a presence on the Internet which has generated successful responses.

- ▶ **St. Sebastian Convent** - In a multi-agency effort involving the Planning & Zoning Department, the Public Works Department, Design Review and Preservation Board, the Parking Authority and the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust, approvals were secured in the past year to relocate the former St. Sebastian's Convent building on the corner of Broad and Washington Streets approximately 200 feet to the east to a portion of a public

- parking lot. This relocation activity, scheduled for the summer of 1996, will allow for the preservation and restoration of a significant historic property with KidCity as the prime tenant.
- ▶ **Armory** - During the past fiscal year, the Committee heard status reports and worked with the Armory developer in the design and scheduling of the transfer of the Armory property out of the City's hands and into the hands of a the developer for the creation of a community cultural center. Aided with the funds from the Community Development Block Grant program, Wesleyan and the business community, initial construction activities will occur during the 1996-1997 fiscal year.

 - ▶ **North End Industrial Area** - At the beginning of the year, the EDC held hearings resulting in major amendments to the project, resulting in boundary shifts and budget modifications. With appraisals secured, the EDC began its land acquisition activities and its environmental due diligence as the initial steps in creating economic development opportunities in the North End. Working with the State of Connecticut and St. John's Parish, improvements will be made to vehicular and pedestrian circulation under the Arrigoni Bridge. Based upon a recommendation from the North End merchants, this area will be called *Three Rivers Commerce Park*.

 - ▶ **JOBS Advisory Committee** - The JOBS low interest loan program provides up to \$50,000 in funding and is based upon the number of low and moderate income jobs created. During the most recent fiscal year, five (5) loans were approved totaling \$113,000. Since the

beginning of the program, a total of eleven (11) loans have been closed for \$245,000. These loans have guaranteed a minimum of twenty-six (26) jobs. The strength of the loan repayment schedule is such that \$44,000 will become available to the Revolving Fund through loan repayments next year.

Citizens Advisory Committee

The Citizens Advisory Committee is organized to advise the Mayor and Common Council in matters concerning the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program as funded annually by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD). During the past year, HUD has mandated significant changes in its funding guidelines resulting in major initiatives at the local level. In July 1995, the Common Council approved major revisions to the Citizens Participation Plan, the guide by which citizen involvement is encouraged in the planning and funding process. The most sweeping change resulted in the creation and adoption of a *Five Year Consolidated Plan* for housing and community development for the period September 1995 through August 2000. All projects which are funded by the CDBG program must provide a principal benefit to individuals and families of low and moderate income. During the course of the 1995-1996 fiscal year, the following major accomplishments fall under the aegis of the Citizens Advisory Committee:

- ▶ \$150,000 was reprogrammed to the North End Industrial Area as a portion of the City's local share to that project;
- ▶ A "bridge loan" was extended to the Middletown Housing Partnership Trust in the amount of \$55,000

- ▶ \$35,000 in loan extensions were awarded to the Shiloh Baptist Church which loan was paid off in the Spring of 1996 resulting in the ground breaking for elderly housing units on Butternut Street;
- ▶ Approximately \$20,000 was reprogrammed for the Christmas In April and North End Arts Rising programs;
- ▶ Due to a change in location of a project, \$125,000 was reprogrammed to benefit the Community Health Center and North End Arts Rising;
- ▶ Contract extensions and modifications were awarded to the Salvation Army, Community Action for Greater Middlesex County, Middlesex Coalition for Children, Shepherd Home and Kuhn Workforce Program;
- ▶ In the annual Grantee Performance Report as submitted in November 1995, the City reported the rehabilitation of seven (7) single family units and two-hundred (200) multi-family dwelling units using a combination of Rental Rehabilitation funds, North End Housing Development Grant funds and Residential Rehabilitation funds.

Harbor Improvement Agency

The Harbor Improvement Agency, in cooperation with other city departments, oversees and makes recommendations to the Common Council on all projects which impact the riverfront. In FY 1995-6 it pursued two main projects: the development of the former "Vinci parcel" as an extension of Harborpark; and the start of a major planning initiative - the Harbor Management Plan.

The Harborpark Expansion project involved the planning for both an attractive new park with spectacular views at the bend of the Connecticut River; and for a complex environmental encapsulation of underground materials left over from the parcel's historic uses. All preliminary and final plans have been through the approval processes, the construction bids have been received and work should begin in the late summer.

The Harbor Management plan is based on the State model used in nineteen shoreline towns; and is an ambitious attempt to co-ordinate all interests in the uses of the river and waterfront in a plan which, when approved by the DEP, DOT and the city, will have some local powers which will enhance everyone's safety and enjoyment of the River. Middletown is unusual in attempting this type of plan since it is outside of the coastal area.

Middletown Housing Partnership/Middletown Housing Partnership Trust

The Middletown Housing Partnership is the entity in City government which supports and promotes the development of affordable housing in Middletown for its citizens of moderate incomes and less. Created as part of the statewide Housing Partnership program its membership is representative of a broad spectrum interests in the development of housing, ranging from commissioners to businesspeople to public interest groups. The partnership has not been active in the past year but has been happy to observe the progress and successful activities of projects and programs which they have either sponsored, brokered, or supported in the recent past. Some of these are:

- ▶ The completion of the conversion of the old Arriwani Hotel into Liberty Commons - a forty unit supportive housing complex with the Buttonwood Tree as their Main Street tenant. This

was a \$3.2M renovation project of a notable historic Main Street landmark.

- ▶ A successful Christmas in April* Middletown project whereby ten houses were rehabilitated for their low/mod income owners on one Saturday in April.
- ▶ The incorporation of the area's new chapter of Habitat for Humanity and planning for its first house. The creation of a local chapter was the result of inquiries to the Partnership by both a group of students at Wesleyan who wanted to donate their services locally, and one of the downtown churches which had an interest in providing affordable housing.
- ▶ The continuing success of the housing community at Military Road.

The Middletown Housing Partnership Trust, Inc. is an independent, private, non-profit Community Land trust, created in 1990 by the Partnership in order to buy the sixteen houses and land on Military Road from the Army. The houses were resold to low/moderate income first-time homeowners; and the Trust continues to own the land and administer the organization for the benefit of the homeowners. Past projects included the installation of a gravity fed sewer, improvement of the road, and its dedication as a City street. Last year one of the homeowners sold their house back to the Trust which is currently qualifying a new buyer in need of an affordable house.

Middletown Design Review and Preservation Board

The Middletown Preservation Board was created in 1980 to promote historic preservation in Middletown, to act in an advisory capacity to Planning & Zoning in matters which affect historic buildings or districts, to be a watchdog and advocate for saving endangered properties, and to be a public resource in matters regarding historic preservation. The Board gives annual Preservation

Awards each May to property owners who have completed a sensitive renovation/restoration project. In June 1995, the Board took on the additional role of Design Review - not only for the historic districts and properties, but also wherever requested by other Departments.

1995-6 was an excellent year for both preservation and design review. In the preservation area, the Board applauded the culmination of the City's efforts to save the *Wadsworth Mansion* at Long Hill Estate (Cenacle). This property had been on the endangered list for over five years; and with the passage of the referendum to allow funding for its restoration, it can now be taken off. Closer to downtown, after almost two years of trying to find a party interested in moving the *St. Sebastian's Convent* on Broad Street, the Board was happy to see the City agree to transfer a new site for this 1835 historic building in their Washington Street parking lot, and to approve The Connection Fund, Inc. as the developer. St. Sebastian's Church is donating the building. This move will add to the historic street scape of the area, and the restored Camp/Stearns/Sheldon House will have KidCity as its tenant. Further up Main Street, another major project of the Connection Fund, Inc. renovated the 1914 *Arrigoni Hotel* thereby restoring it to its appropriate landmark status in the Main Street Historic District... and in the Metro-South Historic district, plans for the conversion of *the Armory* into a community cultural center have focused on the imminent restoration of the two historic Main Street buildings and the entrance facade. The board also reviewed renovation plans for the *Jeremiah Wilcox House* on Bradley street, the *Synagogue* on Broad Street, a proposed canopy for the *Oddfellows Playhouse*, the changes to the *Danforth Pewter Shop*, the plans for the Armory, and saw the return of the marble facade on the *Pythian Building*. Through staff it also kept in close touch with the State Preservation Office, the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust, the Memorials Restoration Committee, and other preservation organizations. Insofar as Design Review was

concerned, the highlight of the year was the Mayor's Logo and Slogan Contest which was initiated by the Board at the request of the Planner. A Panel of judges selected by the Board came up with the winners from among over 635 entries. The board also reviewed a sign application, a garage application and the Downtown Plan with William Warner, planning director.

Long Hill Estate

The development of Long Hill Estate is under the aegis of two separate committees; the Wadsworth Mansion Building Committee and the Long Hill Estate Stewardship Committee. The former is charged with oversight of the renovation of the mansion itself, in preparation for its new uses as a meeting and banquet facility and office building; and has full building committee powers and duties. The Long Hill Estate Stewardship Committee is in charge of developing a management and stewardship plan for the historic landscape, including both historical research and current oversight of the parklands. They oversee the work crews on the land as they attempt to make the park usable, and to restore some of the Wadsworth landscape features prior to the acceptance of a master plan for the entire park. Both of these committees see their work as being complete when 1.) the mansion renovation is complete and the building turned over to its governing authority; and 2.) when the land management/stewardship plan is complete and able to be incorporated into a master plan, and the park is fully open to the public.

As background, it should be noted that in June 1994, the City of Middletown purchased the mansion of Col. Clarence Wadsworth and 104 surrounding acres, known as Long Hill Estate. Whereas most of the land will remain public open space, conceptual plans for the renovation and reuse of the

mansion itself are complete. The budget is \$3.821 million - the majority of which is for the mansion itself, the remainder representing site work and soft costs.

Long Hill Estate was once very grand, and included 450± acres of rolling countryside in the western corner of Middletown where it adjoins Middlefield. A good portion of that land remains in the public domain either in Wadsworth Falls State Park, or on the campuses of two schools and a development of the Housing Authority. The house was designed in a style called Academic Classicism, similar to several mansions in Newport, R.I. and the Berkshires. The Religious of Our Lady of the Cenacle acquired the property from the Rockfall Corporation in 1947 for use as a center for retreats and used it until 1986, when the property was sold to various developers.

Previous to the City's purchase of Long Hill Estate, a facility report, conducted by Gilley-Hinkel Architects of Bristol, CT., determined that, in spite of severe damage by fire and vandalism, the historic building - as constructed by Col. Wadsworth - was structurally salvageable, and, historically, eminently worthy of renovation. The immediate recommendations were to replace the roof; demolish two non-original wings; and to secure the building against future damage; all of which were completed in 1994-5.

The previous Long Hill Estate Committee, after over a year of study - which included visits to similar facilities, in-depth historical research, and analysis of community needs, desires and resources - developed a prioritized schedule of uses and established various policies and objectives intended to provide guidance for restoring Long Hill Estate to active use. These were:

- The Long Hill Mansion, together with the property, should be regarded as public property accessible to the residents of Middletown.
- The building should be always regarded as an integral part of the surrounding parkland. Any use of the building should be compatible with the property's primary use as space suitable for passive recreation and vice versa. The historic integrity of both should be maintained.
- The City should make sure it retains primary oversight over the land and the mansion, even if the building, or part of it, is leased to an outside operator.
- Some part of the building should be accessible to the general public when and where appropriate.

In FY 1995-6 the major work of the Building Committee was to bring the \$3.8M renovation of the mansion, with its immediate grounds, to a public referendum which was successful on June 25th. Their recommendations to the Council on May 20th reflected the earlier work of the Long Hill Estate Committee and were "...to renovate the Mansion with funds generated from a City bond ... to be used as a multi-use public building with enough private, income-producing uses to cover its operating expenses as well as to pay back the bond and interest over twenty years ... the private uses to include rental office space for a non-profit agency on the second floor and rental of the main floor for parties, banquets and business conferences. The historic integrity of both park and mansion to be restored and maintained, and their uses to be compatible. "

During this time the committee kept in touch with potential users, continued with historic research supported the Wadsworth Estate Historic District nomination to the National Register of Historic

Places, and responded to numerous requests for public appearances and exhibits from both public and private sector groups.

The Stewardship Committee, in looking for a landscape architect and historian to carry out a research project funded by the Rockfall Foundation, was overwhelmed by the interest in this property from experts of considerable renown. The Committee chose Thomas Elmore who had recently completed the research on this property for the State of CT Historical Commission in conjunction with their Survey of Historic Parks. The project, which is to document the "History and Current Conditions of the Historic Designed Landscape at Long Hill Estate", was completed in June with Mr. Elmore's slide presentation and final report.

Meanwhile, under the auspices of the City Forester, Bruce Spaman, work on the park land began in the summer of 1995 with the YCC crew, and continued in the fall, winter and spring with the crews of the Alternative Incarceration Center (AIC). In both cases, the City Forester performed the major tree work while the workers, each group with its own supervisor, made vast progress against the jungle of vines, poison ivy and debris which was a result of over 50 years of neglect. The AIC work project has been so successful that they are now using Long Hill as a model project, and have formed a "Forestry Corps" which can handle brush clearing and wind fallen trees with their own equipment. The Forester decides what lumber can be used for Long Hill, what can become firewood to benefit the "Forestry Corps" and what becomes chips to put down on the trails.

In the private sector, this property has attracted many visitors and admirers. In October, the

Middletown Garden Club held a day long 80th Birthday celebration which included well attended trail walks and the proceeds from which are all dedicated to the restoration of the landscape at Long Hill. Subsequently, a private, non-profit "Friends of Long Hill" has been incorporated which is carrying on with these walks and other supporting activities for the park and the mansion.

In addition to the foregoing major Committee assignments, the Municipal Development Office: works with the Middletown Redevelopment Agency; is grant recipient for the Meriden-Middlesex Regional Workforce Development Board; is staff to the Enterprise Zone Advisory Committee (EZAC) and the Restore Our Waterfront (ROW) Committee; has completed its assignments with the Police Station Building Committee, the Railroad Exploratory Committee, and the Supermarket Task Force; and, is responsible for administering the Eddy Center Emergency Shelter grant. The office is also responsible for the planting and care of the barrels on Main Street with the advice of the Middletown Garden Club and the labor from the Chamber of Commerce's Worker Preparation Program. Staff also participates in a number of local, regional and statewide organizations relative to Economic and Community Development and Historic Preservation.

William M. Kuehn, Jr., Director

June 28, 1996
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