

MIDDLETOWN LEADS

WHAT IS MIDDLETOWN LEADS?

Middletown Leads is a weekly newsletter intended to connect the Middletown community by providing information about the civic undertakings of the Town.

TOWN COUNCIL MEETINGS

The Middletown Town Council regularly meets on the 1st and 3rd Mondays of each month. For those who are interested, the meetings are streamed on the Town website within a few days following each meeting at <http://middletownri.com/business/government/council-meetings-online/>

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING – MARCH 4, 2019

At the February 19th meeting, the Town Council appointed William D. Kewer, a retired Connecticut Lieutenant Colonel as Middletown's new Chief of Police. The March 4th meeting began with a citation of appreciation for the service of Interim Chief Lt. Michael Faria.

PROPOSED ORDINANCE – LAND USAGE

A second reading – prior to potential approval – of a proposed ordinance defining acceptable retail operations regarding agriculturally related products was not approved by the Town Council to provide time for neighbors to weigh in on whether these other uses would impact their quality of life.

PROPOSED ORDINANCE – EXEMPTION ON RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY

A first reading of a proposed ordinance to increase senior exemptions on residential property was postponed pending information related to the financial impact on the tax rate.

PROPOSED RATE HIKE BY NEWPORT WATER DEPARTMENT

The docket item for an increase in water rates by the Newport Water Department included the information and testimony presented to the Public Utilities Commission. The Water Department cited four primary reasons for the request:

1. A sharp decline in consumption forecasted from the last rate filing, resulting in revenue shortfalls.
2. An increase in operating and maintenance costs.
3. A plan to borrow funds for system improvements.
4. Data showing that current rates do not cover the cost of service.

The Town Council decided to protest the proposed increase although it was conceded that the Public Utilities Commission usually grants requested rate hikes.

SENIOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The need for affordable senior housing has been on the docket since April 2017. Early in 2018, the Town Council met with a local non-profit provider as well as Rhode Island Housing to discuss options.

Subsequently, the Town Council formed a Senior Housing Sub-Committee, which recommended in December that the Town Council hire a consultant to advise the Town about developing senior housing units.

Finally, at the March 4th meeting, following a review of the scope of the work, the Town Council voted not to authorize the proposed Feasibility Study related to Senior Housing. There was consensus that \$22,500 to compile information in 4 months that was already available was not a good use of funds, not to mention the projected 2 to 3 years for the project to actually get underway,

Several points were made that led to a change in direction:

1. If the Town desires to use residency as a criterion for establishing wait lists, then it would be ineligible for grants and tax credits and would have to rely on taxpayer dollars to subsidize the costs of construction and rent.
2. The Town is not going to use taxpayer money to build and operate an affordable senior housing project on its own.
3. A non-profit partner typically has connections within the community and generally keeps money in the project.
4. A for-profit partner general takes money out of the project.

These points led to the decision to reorganize the previous TC Senior Housing Committee which would again review the options within a 2-month deadline for recommendations after which the Town Council would meet with potential partners and, hopefully, get the project underway.

TAX PROPOSAL

There was brief discussion regarding the anticipated report from the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC), which is expected to detail the financial implications of the proposed revision in the way the tax rate is determined in Middletown, including the impact on municipal and school services.

VOLUNTEERS

Residents are encouraged to apply for the following vacancies on volunteer boards. Applications are due no later than March 15, 2019 at the Office of the Town Clerk.

Board of Canvassers	Citizens Memorial Committee
Coastal Resource Management Council	Economic Development Advisory Committee
Juvenile Hearing Board	Library Board of Trustees
Planning Board	Senior Center Board of Directors
Zoning Board of Review	

FOOTNOTE

Weekly essays about Middletown community and municipal affairs will appear on the Middletown Public Library website. Editorial essays may appear in the following: MiddletownLeads@blogspot.com.