

The Middlefield Planning Board is seeking a technical assistance grant for the purpose of obtaining professional planning guidance for creating a Village Center District. The planning board seeks to provide opportunities for creating a more vibrant town center by allowing increased opportunities for business uses that would partner well with the predominantly residential character of the neighborhood.

### **Village Center Character**

The town center of Middlefield, which runs along Skyline Trail, while predominately a residential neighborhood, is also part of the town's business district. The town center's structures are from a variety of distinct architectural periods. While many of the properties in this neighborhood are on small lots and many of the buildings are set close to the road, the minimum acreage and setback requirements are the same as for the rest of the town (2 acre minimum, 200 foot frontage), so that many of the buildings are noncompliant with the town's zoning bylaws. The town's Senior Center, Historical Museum and a Congregational Church, important meeting places that draw people to the town center, also are located in the here. A long stretch of road frontage along Bell Road, also part of the village center, is owned by the Town of Middlefield and is home to the town highway department, fire station, the post office (housed in a trailer), the transfer station as well as undeveloped land. These publicly owned facilities, while conveniently and centrally located in the town, detract from the historic character of the neighborhood. They are also eyesores. Needed expansion to some of these facilities is hampered by their close proximity to wetlands.

### **Middlefield Center Historic District**

The Middlefield Heritage Society, a 501 C3 organization, applied for the Historic District designation on the National Register of Historic Places for properties running along stretches of Skyline Trail and Bell Road. The designation was granted by the US Department of the Interior National Park Service in August of 2012. The planning board's goal of preserving the historic and rural character of this neighborhood, while planning for greater mixed use there, should be done in such a manner that it is compatible with the goals of the Middlefield Heritage Society.

### **Tax Title Taking of The Former General Store Property and Its Adjacent Property**

At the cross roads of the town center lies the former general store, which was until the early 2000's, an import social meeting place and commercial enterprise in the town. With the shuttering of its doors the town lost a most important institution. This building was then declared a brown field. While the contaminants have been cleaned up, the building, along with the abandoned neighboring house, has fallen further into disrepair. The town initiated a tax title taking on the former general store property, the petition for foreclosure has been filed and the town may own the parcel within 3 months. Although the Town has yet to begin a discussion of what it could do with the property (whether to retain it, repair or replace it, or sell it), some possibilities could include providing space for the Middlefield Historical Commissions' impressive and expanding collection of artifacts, a new library, a space for a permanent Post Office or private enterprises. The tax title taking opens up possibilities for a revived town center that might not take place otherwise.

### **Master Plan Committee Recommendations**

Several years ago, the Board of Selectman requested that the Master Plan Committee make recommendations on improving the Town Center. The Master Plan Committee's preliminary recommendations suggested the reuse of a former town dump as the site for the town transfer station, relocation of the town highway department to a site behind the current transfer station, but sited off the road and screened from view. The current town garage structures do not allow for covered storage of much of the highway department vehicles and equipment. The highway departments' proximity to wetlands severely limits its capacity for expansion. The site proposed by the Master Plan Committee would provide space for the construction of a garage facility for all of the highway department vehicles. By relocating these facilities the town could make available a considerable amount of land for private, commercial development that could enliven the center of town.