

## Hamden zoning session spurs debate

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By Ann DeMatteo, Assistant Metro Editor

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HAMDEN — Despite attempts by zoning officials to reassure the public that most of Whitneyville and Spring Glen would be better protected with new zoning regulations, a level of distrust remained during a sometimes contentious meeting Wednesday night.

It was the second public information session on the town's proposed hybrid zoning regulations, which include the so-called Smart Code and strategic development of Dixwell and Whitney avenues and State Street, the major thoroughfares.

Smart Code regulations determine, in part, how buildings and streets fit together and how buildings are placed on lots.

Officials said they would take public comment and answer questions, and even hold a third meeting, if necessary, before the proposal is sent to the Planning and Zoning Commission for more public hearings and review.

More than 250 people attended the meeting at Hamden Middle School.

The meeting chairwoman, Ann Altman, started by saying that as a result of comments from Spring Glen and Whitneyville neighborhood residents earlier this month, protections have been instituted from the town line to Skiff Street to reduce the possibility for development and strengthen the neighborhood centers.

One of the things that concerned residents was the idea of adding floors to buildings that were either residential or commercial, to increase economic development.

Town Planner Leslie Creane reminded residents that even now, nothing is set in stone as the public process continues. She addressed 75 wide-ranging issues from the last meeting.

For example, she said most of Spring Glen is now being proposed as a T-3 zone, rather than a T-4, which provides for less development. She also said T-3 would protect the stately homes near Lake Whitney from being developed, and building heights would be limited to 38 feet, compared to the current limits of 40 feet for residential or 50 feet for nonresidential structures.

Over time, she said, the Smart Code would help with expanding the town's retail center, known as the Magic Mile, and would help increase the town's tax base.

Altman, who chairs the PZC's zoning section, said at the beginning of the meeting that the process was not "adversarial." But members of the crowd got angry when Altman said she wanted Spring Glen residents to hold their questions until after people from other parts of town asked theirs.

Audience members cheered on those Spring Glen residents who wanted to talk, and Altman then let them.

At one point, Helen Blitzer stood up and was told by Altman to sit down. Josh Milrad said that was unacceptable, and that he believed “Hamden was jumping into bed with private developers” because of the Legislative Council’s support of the City and Town Development Act.

Town officials, however, have said that the act would allow more opportunities for development, and that the council would have to follow stringent guidelines for selecting projects.

Blitzer later said that she thought that it was “undemocratic and unfair” for Spring Glen residents to be limited this time when they weren’t the only ones to speak at the last meeting.

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