

Hamden to unveil new zoning rules at meeting

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By Ann DeMatteo, Assistant Metro Editor

HAMDEN — The first public information meeting on the town's new zoning regulations will be held Wednesday.

With Town Planner Leslie Creane at the podium, the public will get to learn just what is SmartCode, one of the components of the new regulations. The meeting starts at 7 p.m. at the Hamden Middle School, 2623 Dixwell Ave.

"The purpose of the meeting is to review the proposed draft of the new zoning regulations that incorporates smart-growth principles," Creane said. "One of the things that will be addressed Wednesday is strategic development and appropriate growth along Whitney and Dixwell avenues and State Street."

SmartCode combines zoning, urban design, public works guidelines and architectural elements. It promotes mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods instead of sprawl and "one size fits all" zoning.

Changes for residential areas are minimal and are contained in the proposed regulations. The town's non-residential zones are being redefined as transect zones, based on desirable levels of development, Creane said.

Under the new format, the town will be broken up into five transects. T1 is protected space and T2 is more rural areas. The Whitneyville and Spring Glen neighborhoods and upper Whitney Avenue are considered T3 and T4.

The town's main roads — Whitney, Dixwell and State — have a combination of transects. T5 is the town center and the retail area known as the "Magic Mile."

After the Wednesday night presentation, the zoning office will accept comment via e-mail and residents will have the opportunity to comment at 7 p.m. Oct. 15 at a follow-up meeting at Hamden Middle School.

Revisions based on public input of the documents will occur, and officials hope the new rules will become effective in January 2009, Creane said.

"It will be the first adoption of a SmartCode in New England," she said. "What you get from SmartCode is a well-proportioned design and public spaces like you have in traditional New England villages," Creane said.

"There are several motivations for changing the zoning regulations. One is to relieve the residential tax burden by increasing the commercial tax base.

"Another is to encourage environmentally responsible design, including protection of pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as strategic development, appropriate growth, protecting open space and encouraging coherent development that is compatible with the unique character of each neighborhood."

For example, one way for Hamden to strategically develop a greater commercial tax base would be to allow for mixed-use development that would include retail on the first floor and the building of commercial and residential on the second and third floor.

“This would increase property values and income-producing potential for a site and would result in a desirable area to live, work and shop,” Creane said.

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