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Growth plan fails to impress Spring Glen residents

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By Ann DeMatteo, Assistant Metro Editor

HAMDEN — At a recent informational session, folks from the Spring Glen neighborhood were the most opposed to the proposed zoning regulations for the town, which incorporates the concept of smart growth.

About 120 people turned out for the meeting at Hamden Middle School.

Town Planner Leslie Creane said the proposed hybrid regulations combine traditional zoning with the smart code. The plan calls for “strategic development along State Street and Whitney and Dixwell avenues and proposes few changes for residential zones. They encourage responsible development and aim to increase the tax base.

The smart code promotes walkable neighborhoods, more public spaces, a mix of land uses and pedestrian and bicycle-friendly areas. It also promotes keeping neighborhood centers compact and rural land open.

There would be five transect zones, natural landscapes; rural; suburban, general urban and urban center. General urban, or “T-4,” would allow for a mix of houses, townhouses, small apartment buildings, and three stories in some instances. “T-5,” the urban center, would typically have three-story buildings with four floors in some instances; parks, plazas, squares and median landscaping.

Creane dispelled the rumor that “stately homes on Whitney Avenue would be wiped out” with the new regulations, stating that it’s up to property owners not to sell to “disreputable” developers. Current regulations allow for office buildings in an R-4 zone along Whitney Avenue. The proposed regulations allow for office use but encourage any new development to be harmonious with the neighborhood.

Yet, residents expressed their concern that there would be added traffic and driveways in Spring Glen if commercial enterprises were allowed from Harmon Street to Skiff Street.

“Smart growth has the potential of doing great damage to Spring Glen,” said Helen Blitzer, who felt the changes, such as adding floors to commercial spaces, would be beneficial to developers. Blitzer said Spring Glen is already a “walkable community” that would become congested if the proposed regulations took effect.

Similarly, John Morrison warned that destroying the residential area that surrounds the commercial section of Spring Glen would cause higher taxes for everyone since Spring Glen is the Number One generator of taxes in town. “Single-family homes keep taxes down, compared to higher-density,” Morrison said.

“This is not about Spring Glen but about the town of Hamden,” said Marsha Walsh, president of the Spring Glen Civic Association. “I don’t think people on Dixwell Avenue or whatever road would want four- or five-story buildings in town. I implore you to go very slowly and cautiously with this. I understand you’ve spent money on this but I’d rather waste the money than

have a plan you'll ultimately regret."

According to Creane, the new regulations clearly state that the health, safety and welfare of the public, the protection of environmental and natural resources and growth and development are foremost in the document. Other elements call for the protection of historic structures; licensed home inspections of student housing; no gravel mining operations and illumination standards.

There also would be neighborhood plans in the new document.

Another public meeting on the new regulations will be held Oct. 15. The plan can be found at www.hamden.com.

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