

Jeff Taylor

Middleton Four Corners

October 18-19, 2002

Middleton, NH



Middleton Corners
19. October 2002

PLAN NH

Acknowledgements:

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The residents of Middleton would like to thank all the volunteers from Plan NH for coming to our community and helping us put our ideas on paper. We were all impressed with the energy and enthusiasm that each of our guests brought to the planning process.

Thanks are due to many people for helping make the Middleton Design Charrette possible through generous donations of funds and time. Among them are the following organizations and individuals:

The Middleton Lions Club
The Middleton Fire Association
The Town of Middleton
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Middleton Corners Design Charrette Middleton, NH

October 18 & 19, 2002



The Historic Middleton Town Hall and Fire Station



Drawing from the Friday night session – Alix Comeau, 10 years old

Sponsored by:

The Town of Middleton and
the Board of Selectmen.

Middleton Corners Charrette

October 18 & 19, 2002

Who is Plan NH?

Plan NH is a professional association for those working in the built environment. The organization includes architects, planners, engineers, bankers, contractors, historic preservationists, and others who concern themselves with buildings and communities. It was established to create a forum for bringing together these different professional groups, and as a catalyst to spur interest in community development. Part of Plan NH's mission is to make a positive contribution to New Hampshire communities. One way in which Plan NH does this is through the offer of free design assistance to communities with demonstrated needs.

So what is a Design Charrette, anyway?

Simply stated, a design charrette is a brainstorming session where lots of ideas are brought forth by both professional designers and local citizens, in an attempt to resolve a problem of local interest. Because of the compressed time frame, the conclusions reached are usually conceptual. Conclusions present the relationship of different plan elements, as opposed to the details of how a particular building would actually be constructed.

At their best, charrettes blend the broad experience of design professionals with local citizens' detailed knowledge of their community, resulting in a plan of action addressing particular issues of concern within the community. The charrette provides an overall framework within which final solutions can be developed. It sets a tone and gives direction against which future decisions can be measured.

How did Middleton end up with a Charrette?

Each winter, Plan NH invites all New Hampshire communities to submit proposals detailing a problem of local interest. Plan NH selects three communities from the submissions to receive a weekend of donated design services. Winning proposals typically address a project that is important to the host community, present an interesting design challenge, and offer a high probability of actually being implemented. A community that is organized and has done some early work on a project scores well. A community whose project seems less likely to be implemented does not fair as well. This past year, Plan NH received two dozen proposals for design assistance. Middleton was one of the three communities selected.

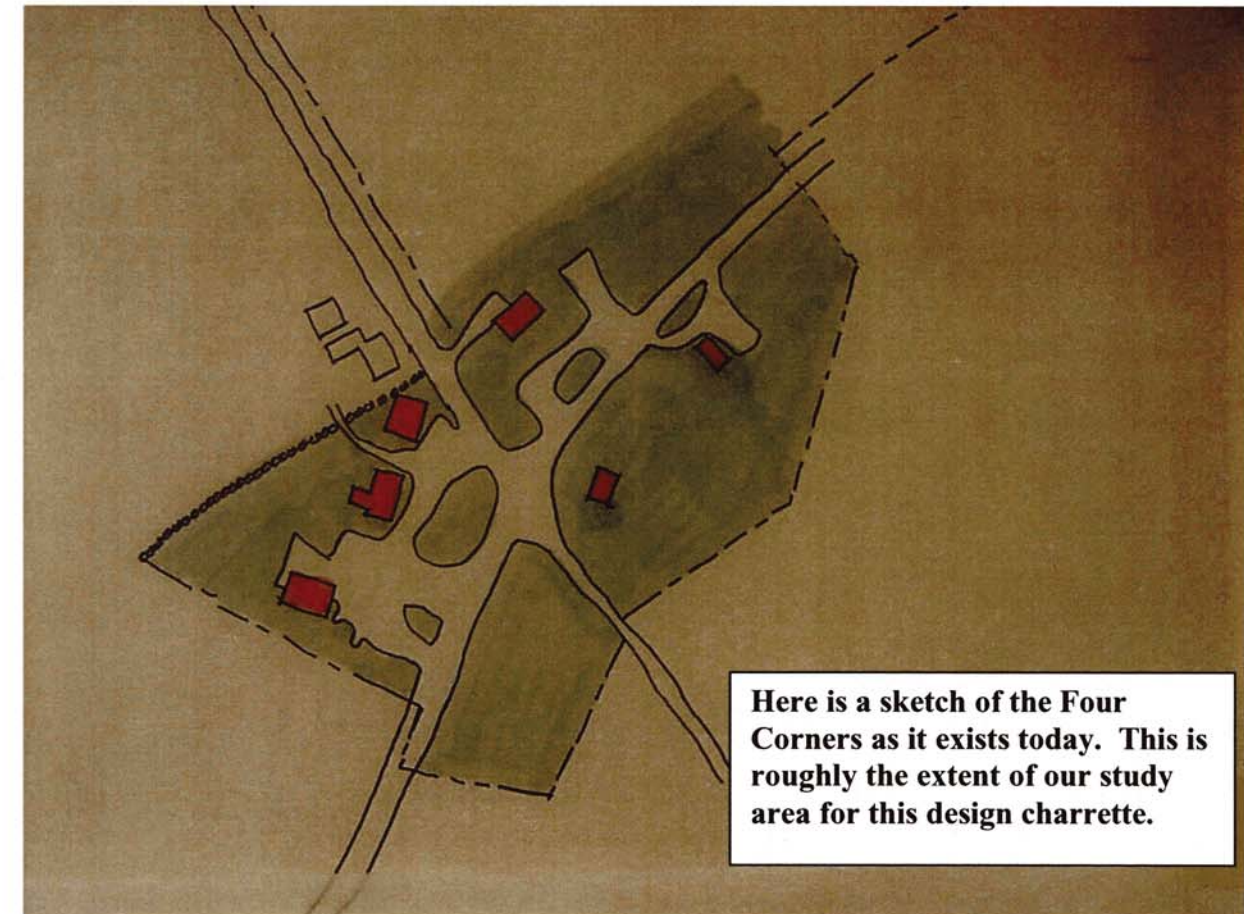
The Proposal

Middleton's proposal included the need for a plan that included short term and long term actions. The collection of existing uses and structures at the Four Corners present the Town with a range of options. In the absence of a plan for the existing and future structures the Town takes a chance of doing something that will create a problem down the road. This became apparent to the community as they began to explore the possibility of making changes to the existing Fire Department and Public Works facilities.

The combination of municipal structures and land at the Four Corners, and the potential for use of the school property place the community at an advantage. The Town Hall, Fire Department, Highway Department, Municipal Offices, and Police Department are all located at the Corners and all owned by the Town.

We arrived in Middleton with thoughts of:

- Examining current municipal facilities, and the services they support
- Exploring expansion opportunities for existing facilities
- Evaluating new facility locations
- Considering other uses that could be located at the Four Corners
- Giving advice on aesthetic issues
- Organizing a plan of both short term and long term steps that the community could take to enhance the Four Corners



The Process

Community members and about a dozen design professionals met at the Middleton Town Hall on a cool Fall day in October to discuss the current buildings and uses at Middleton Four Corners, to develop a “wish list” for the future, and to formulate options for local consideration. Design professionals on the team included architects, planners, a landscape architect, an structural engineer, a historical architect, a cost estimator, and a real estate specialist. The critical piece that the design professionals lacked, which only local residents could offer, was the knowledge of Middleton itself.

Local residents are the experts on the community! They know what makes sense for Middleton, what history has brought forth, what will pass at Town Meeting. The design team relies on resident input and knowledge to develop viable suggestions and proposals.

With that in mind, the team and residents began formulating options for the future of Middleton Four Corners.



The Design Team visits the Highway Garage Friday morning



Kings Highway intersecting with Ridge Road at the Four Corners

The Team began the charrette with a tour of the Four Corners and each of the municipal facilities there to gain a better sense of the current uses and physical constraints. After meeting several municipal employees who elaborated further on the buildings and their strengths and weaknesses for their departments, the team gained a clearer understanding.

In the early afternoon, the design team and a dozen residents gathered together in the Town Hall for the first of two public listening sessions. A few dozen more people attended Friday night’s listening session. During the course of the weekend, the design team listened to Middleton residents talk about the Four Corners at the public meetings, while walking around town, at meals and breaks, and while sketching the concepts. Residents had a great deal to say, and gave valuable direction to the thoughts and perceptions of the design team members.

What We Heard/What We Saw

The public meetings provided community members with a chance to voice their opinions and discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses of Middleton and the Four Corners area.

Most of the discussion focused on the following points:

- The need to keep taxes down
- The need to prepare a long term plan for the municipal buildings and land
- The need to look at practical re-use of facilities
- The Fire Department's need for more space, a shower, a restroom, and a septic system
- The Highway Department's need for a covered structure for salt and mixed sand/salt
- How to best use the large parcel to the Northeast (school property)
- The need to consider the location and scope of a future school site
- Potential short term solutions that can be accomplished
- Preparing a long term plan for this village area (50 years)
- The lack of sense of place and the lack of a location to congregate except the Old Town Hall
- Any spending in the absence of a plan is not good
- Look at the Middleton Corners:
 - Beautify the area
 - Create a rational configuration of buildings
 - Do it all in a sound fiscal way
- Creating an environment and a reason to come here
- Figuring out how to encourage the creation of a store
- Finding a way to provide Senior Housing



Friday afternoon public listening session



Historical photograph of the Four Corners and the Historic Town Hall

Middleton Four Corners is a wonderful place.

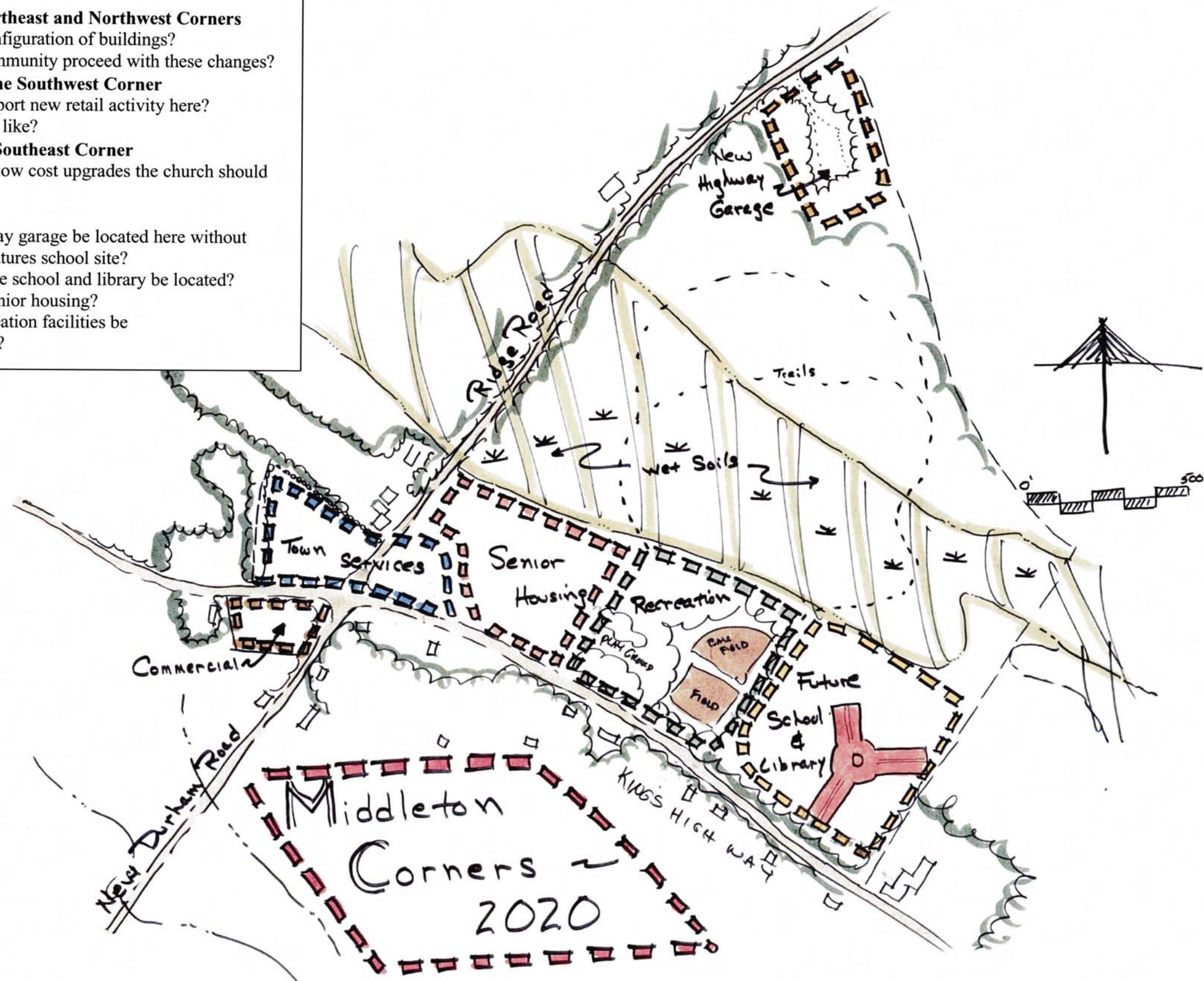
Middleton was settled a short time prior to the revolution, and the early settlers were mainly from Lee, Somersworth and Rochester. The town was incorporated March 4, 1778. By 1822 Middleton Corner was the principal place of business. The post office, stores, a hotel, a public hall, a church and two taverns were all located here.

Today the Four Corners area functions as the center of municipal services and activities in Middleton, but has lost much of the informal social contact that existed when it was a retail center as well. Most of the social interaction happens through structured events and meetings. There is little opportunity for informal interaction.

The real question to the team, beyond where to locate and relocate municipal services over time, was how to create a sense of place at the Four Corners. Many people desire the opportunity to congregate informally, and there is a desire to create a greater sense of community.

Areas of Investigation:

- **Town Services on the Northeast and Northwest Corners**
 - What is the best configuration of buildings?
 - How should the community proceed with these changes?
- **Commercial activity on the Southwest Corner**
 - Can the market support new retail activity here?
 - What should it look like?
- **Religious activity on the Southeast Corner**
 - Are there potential low cost upgrades the church should consider?
- **The School Property**
 - Could a new highway garage be located here without conflicting with a futures school site?
 - Where could a future school and library be located?
 - Is there room for senior housing?
 - How could the recreation facilities be improved/expanded?



Northwest Corner Proposal – Short term

The northwest corner currently contains the fire department building, historic Town Hall, and highway garage and its associated machinery and materials. Questions about what to do with the fire department and highway garage have been difficult to answer in the absence of a plan for future municipal facilities. The existing fire department is inadequate because it lacks bathroom facilities and is extremely cramped. The highway garage detracts from the Four Corner’s role as the historic and cultural center of town, and the role of the historic town hall is currently understated and could be improved.



The Design Team examines the Historic Town Hall

The first step would be the construction of a public works facility on Ridge Road in the northwest corner of the school property. This would allow for the relocation of the fire department into the existing highway garage. This facility has bathroom facilities and the possibility of a shower. There is significantly more room available for storage, and one of the existing offices could be used for dispatch.



The Design Team examines the Public Works area

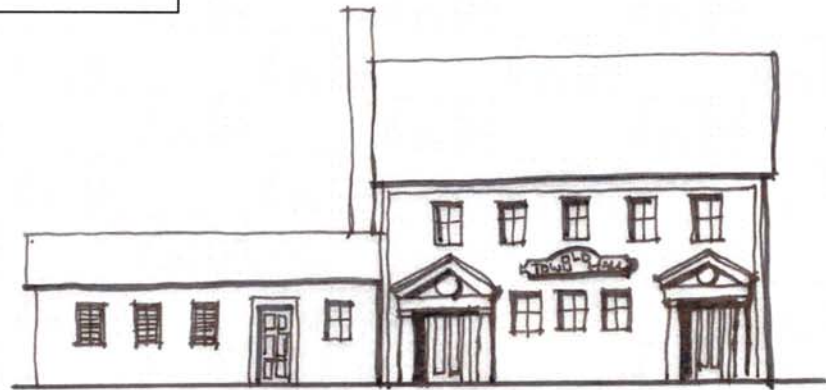
The second step would be to give the historic town hall some immediate attention. Some of the architectural considerations include two exterior improvements, which could be different tasks: it needs entrance porches in keeping with the style and period of the building (two for symmetry, providing access to the two floors, as was originally the case), and it needs to have the concrete vault and mechanical space disguised as an extension of the original kitchen ell, recently used as a selectmen’s office. The sketch proposal also suggests three new ‘windows’ that are just blind openings in-filled with closed shutters, a frequent early-19th Century strategy for maintaining symmetry. It is also important to note the Late Greek Revival painted murals on the second floor of the historic town hall. Were they half as well known as they deserve (and their existence can certainly be promoted), and were thousands of visitors to start to seek them out every year, it might add momentum to the aesthetic improvement of the Four Corners.

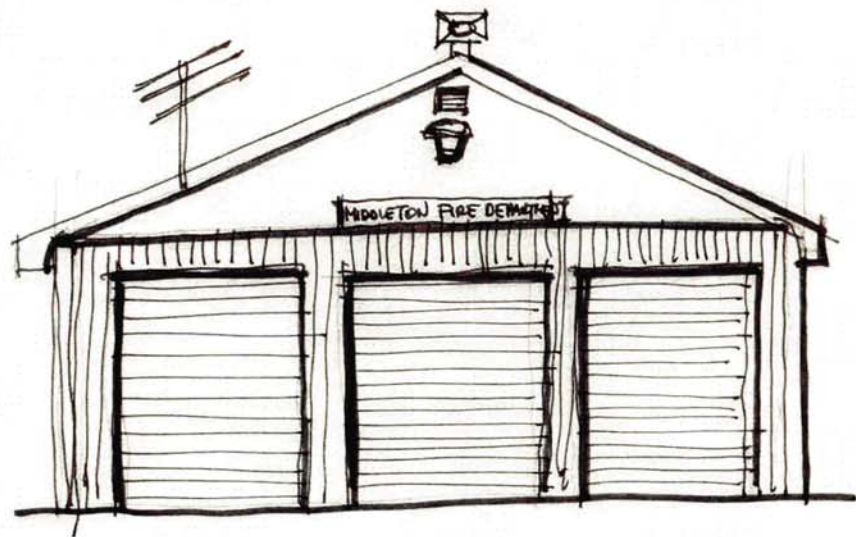
Upgrades for the Town Hall

Existing

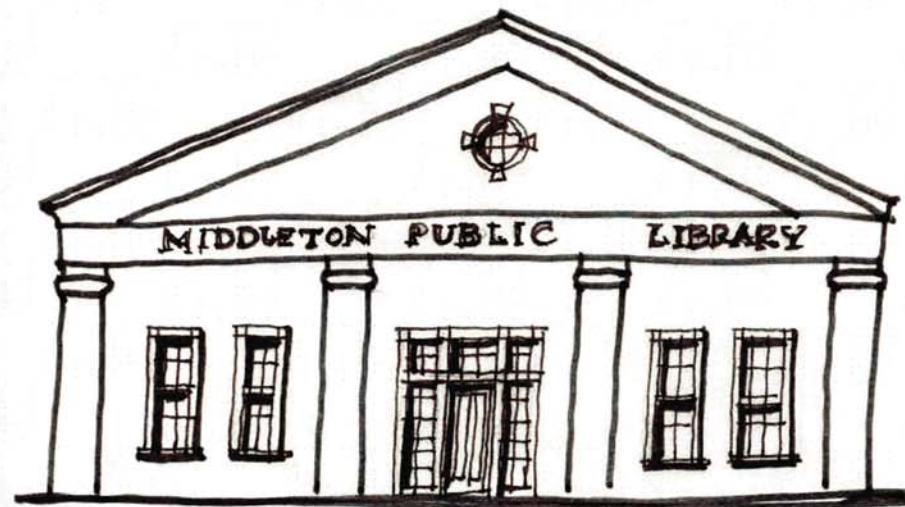


Proposed





The old fire department building could be kept on site and possibly used as a temporary library.

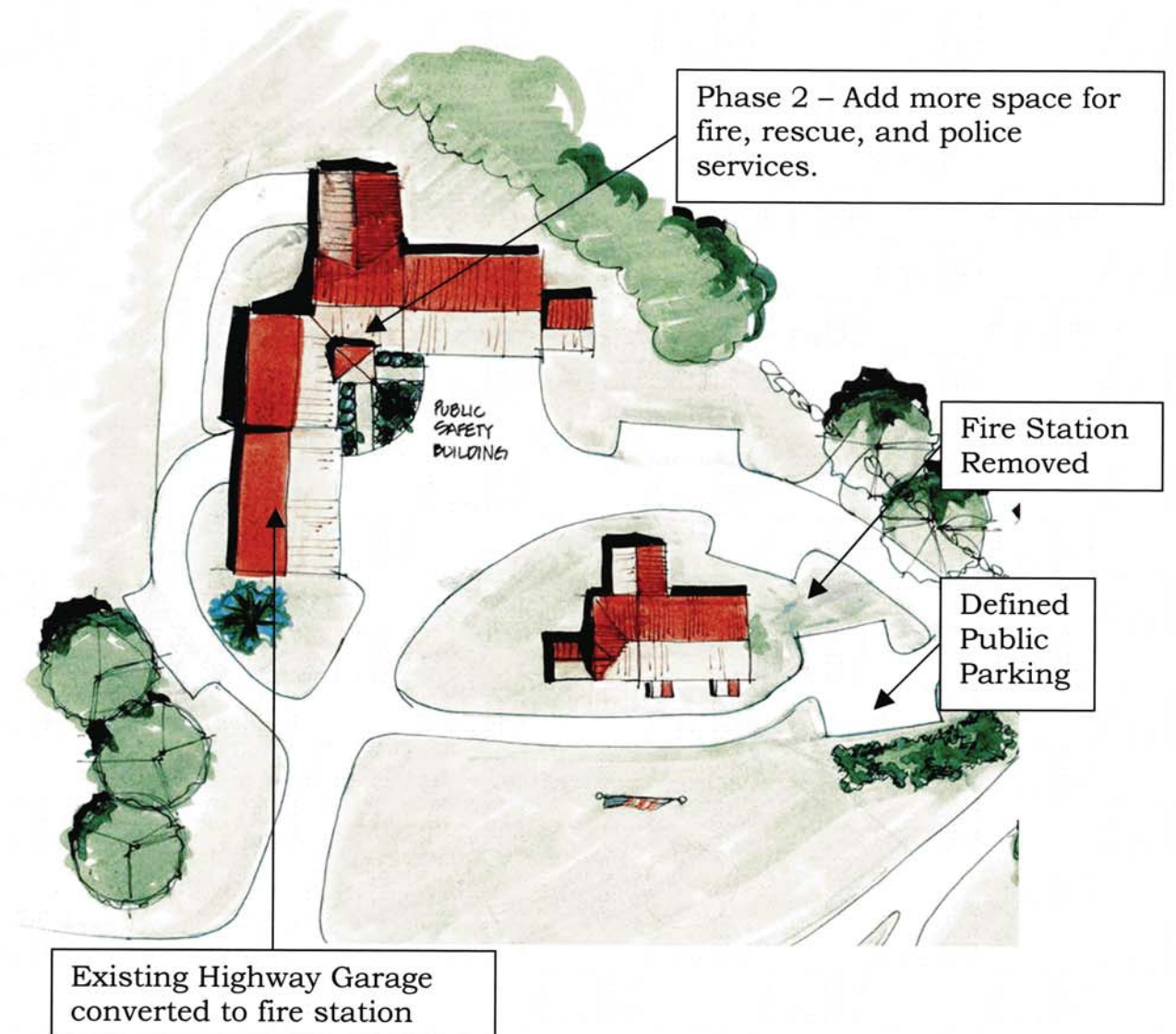


Another possibility would be to move it to the other side of Ridge Road and attach it to the back side of the municipal office building. The structure could then be used by the police department to store vehicles, and safely transport and book criminals.

These changes to the northwest corner also present an opportunity to define parking areas and establish a new traffic pattern on the site. Much of the excess pavement can then be turned into a town green. This will actually result in an overall increase of parking spaces and green space on site.

Longer term

Over time as the town continues to grow **the new fire department building could be expanded into a public safety complex.** The image below shows the ideal expansion which may include an opportunity to house the fire department and police department. The facility should include bays for the fire equipment, and for police vehicles and a sally port. The office for the police department should contain a booking area, bath/shower room, two separate interrogation rooms, and a large evidence room. The fire department office should contain a dispatch room, bath/shower room, lounge, exercise area, and bunk room. Both departments need secure storage space and could share meeting space.



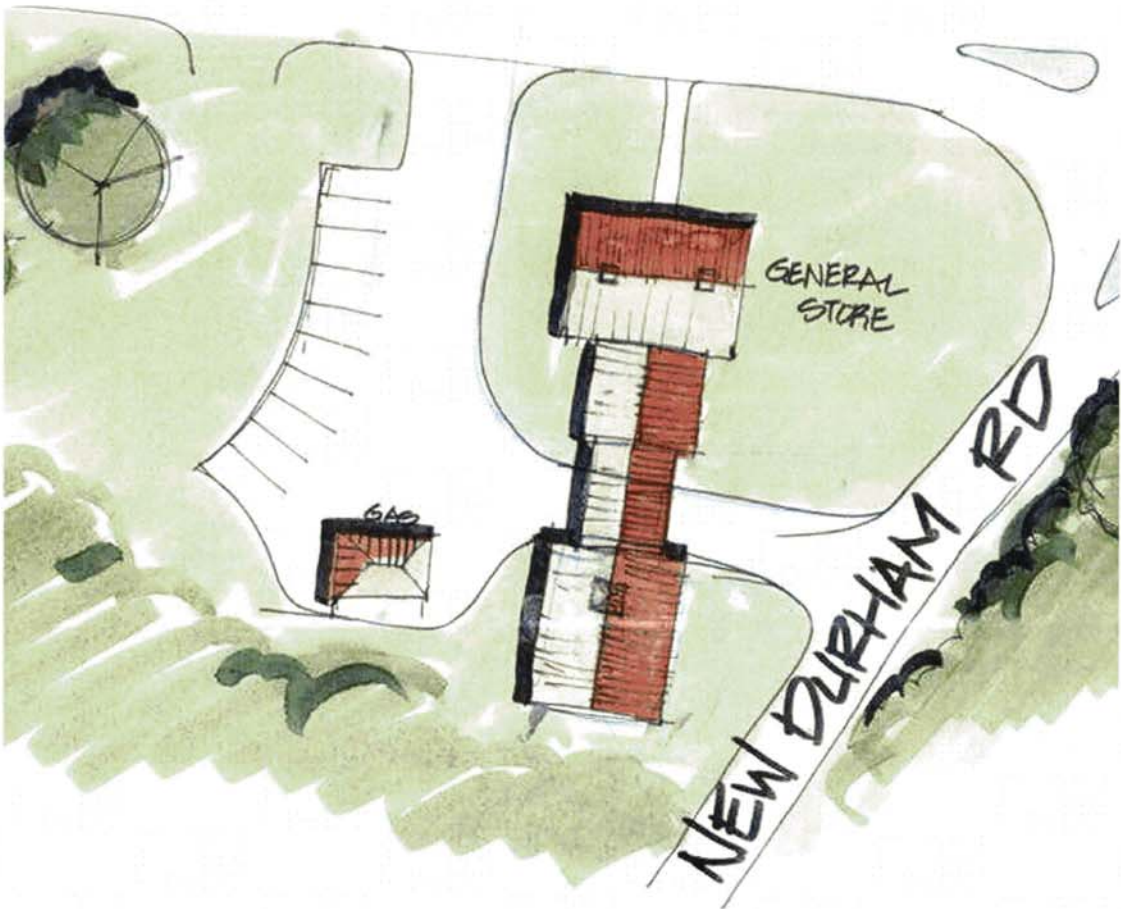
Southwest Corner Proposal

This property is privately owned and may not become available for development. **All discussions relating to the possible future development of this site focused on the possibility of a commercial establishment.** It was suggested that a general store is needed in town and that this location would be ideal. Other suggestions included a contract post office and coffee counter within the store. The sale of gas is another possibility over time. The concept drawings emphasize the need for any commercial structures at this location to be architecturally sensitive to the Four Corners. It would also be possible to provide residential or office space on the second floor above the store. Such an establishment could begin very small and grow over time adding each of these additional services as they could be supported. This would provide a wonderful location for social interaction, and could become extremely convenient when the school is constructed.



Looking up Ridge Road toward the wooded southwest corner

If this type of development is desired it would be in the town’s best interest to **examine the current zoning requirements for this site.** The current regulations require a two acre parcel with 200 feet of frontage and a 50 foot setback from each road. A special exception is needed for a convenience or “general” store. Some adjustments should be made to the zoning and site plan review regulations to allow this type of development to occur in a way that would contribute to the functionality and image of the Four Corners. One alternative would be to create a Village Zone with a half mile radius from the Four Corners intersection. One half mile is considered a comfortable walking distance for most people and would include all of the elements of this plan. Such a zone should encourage a mix of civic, residential and commercial uses.



Proposed Retail Development

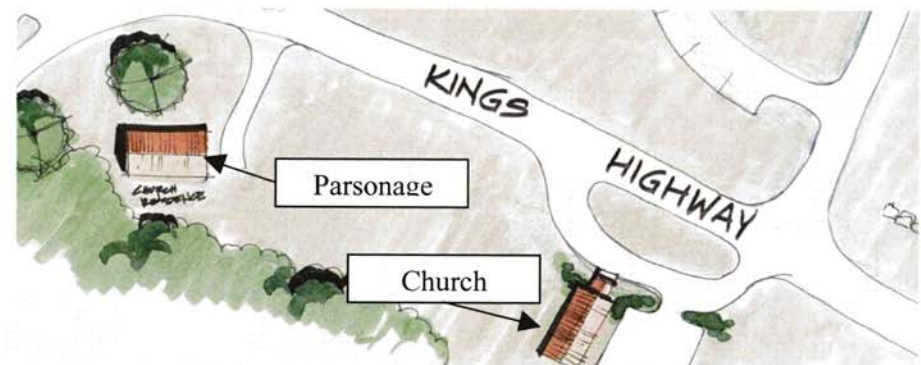


Southwest Corner

Historical photo of the southwest corner cleared

Southeast Corner Proposal

The southeast corner is currently the location of the church and parsonage. **The church could be further emphasized by a miniature forecourt of aligned small trees**, which would appear to magnify its size and presence. For safety reasons, the church parking lot and drive could be better defined to control traffic entering and exiting where they meet Kings Highway.



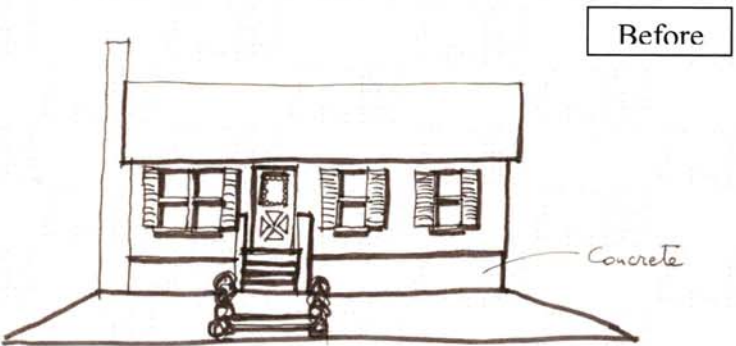
The church

The parsonage is a simple single family residence, but it is currently the most visually prominent structure at the Four Corners. The parsonage could be moved away from the intersection to downplay its role, but this may prove to be too expensive. Unfortunately, it has been set on a mound with 3-4 feet of concrete foundation showing.

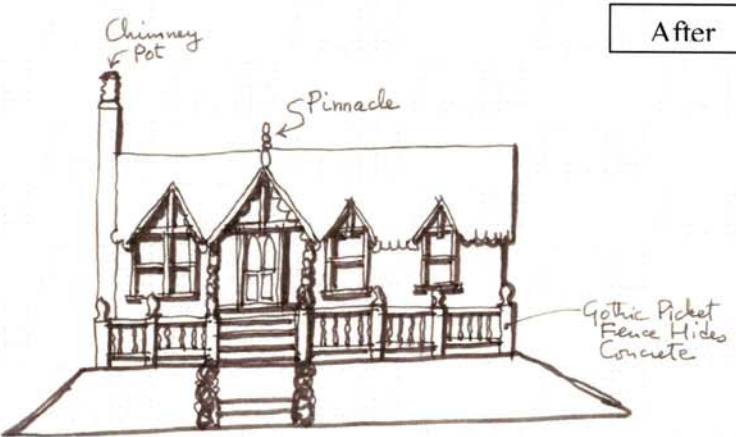
The concrete can easily be masked with a picket fence. The structure could also be easily disguised as an Early Gothic Cottage. Such cottages were being built in the same period as the historic town hall (1840-1860). The before-and-after drawings will reveal that the transformation is really superficial. All the necessary fret-sawn gingerbread is still readily available, so that the main task is just the framing of the decorative hoods over porch and windows.



Church Parsonage



Before



After

This transformation could easily be undertaken as a volunteer effort, and, while the town cannot pay for improving private property, volunteers can do what they want. Perhaps the congregation might take the lead in organizing this.

Northeast Corner Proposal

The municipal office building could benefit from a small addition on the east side which would provide an opportunity to relocate the main entrance and reorganize some of the office space on the first floor. New and expanded parking to the east would then serve the new entrance and provide better circulation as other uses are developed on the parcel. These architectural changes will then tie the municipal office building in with the design of the church.



Municipal Office Building

Before



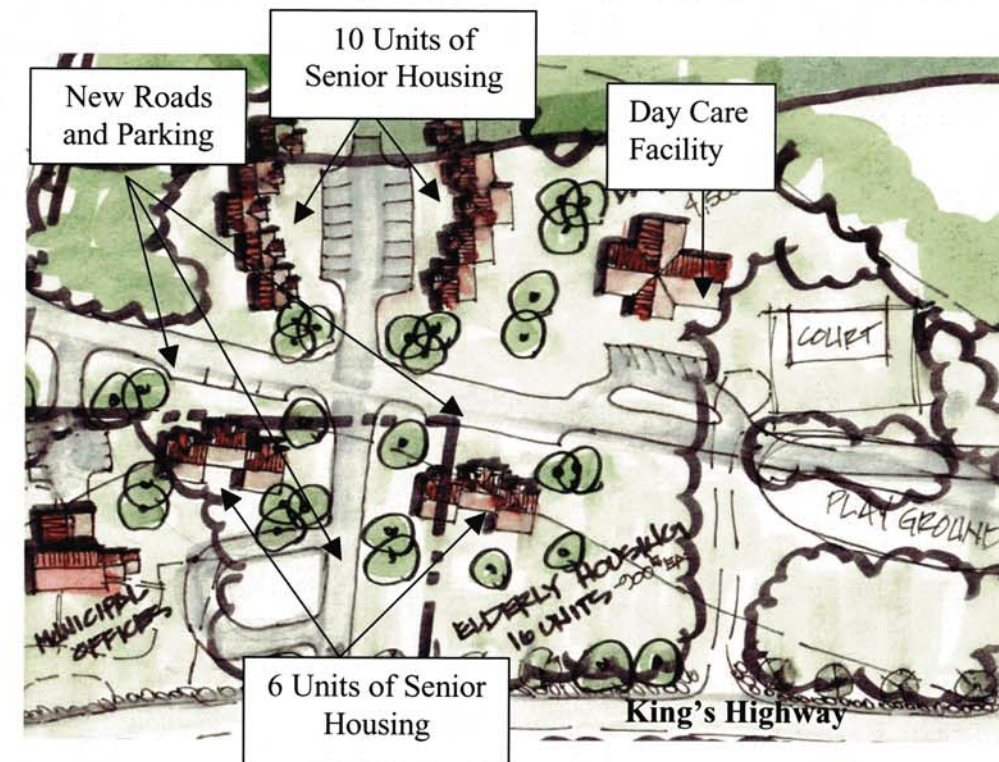
After



Senior Housing

Residents indicated that there is a **lack of senior housing alternatives in Middleton**. Providing senior housing at the Four Corners would provide older citizens with another opportunity to remain in Middleton when a single family residence becomes too much. Small towns are often at a disadvantage when it comes to providing affordable and manageable housing for their senior citizens. There are few rental opportunities available in town and many of the services they require are located out of town. Towns that lose their senior citizens have lost a great resource. Losing these older residents and everything they have to offer to the community is not an inevitability.

Adjacent to the municipal office building there is enough land to develop some senior housing. The concept shows 16 senior housing units located here in close proximity to municipal services, the park, and potentially a store, school, and public library. This number is based on the size of Middleton and work done in similarly sized communities in New Hampshire. The concept for this housing is that each unit be about 1000 square feet in size and would contain 2 bedrooms, 1 ½ baths and an attached garage. These are industry standards and a reasonable starting point for discussion. The goal would be to fit in with the other buildings at the Four Corners drawing on their design elements. This type of plan may not be something the town can consider funding in the short term, but perhaps it could be pursued by others.



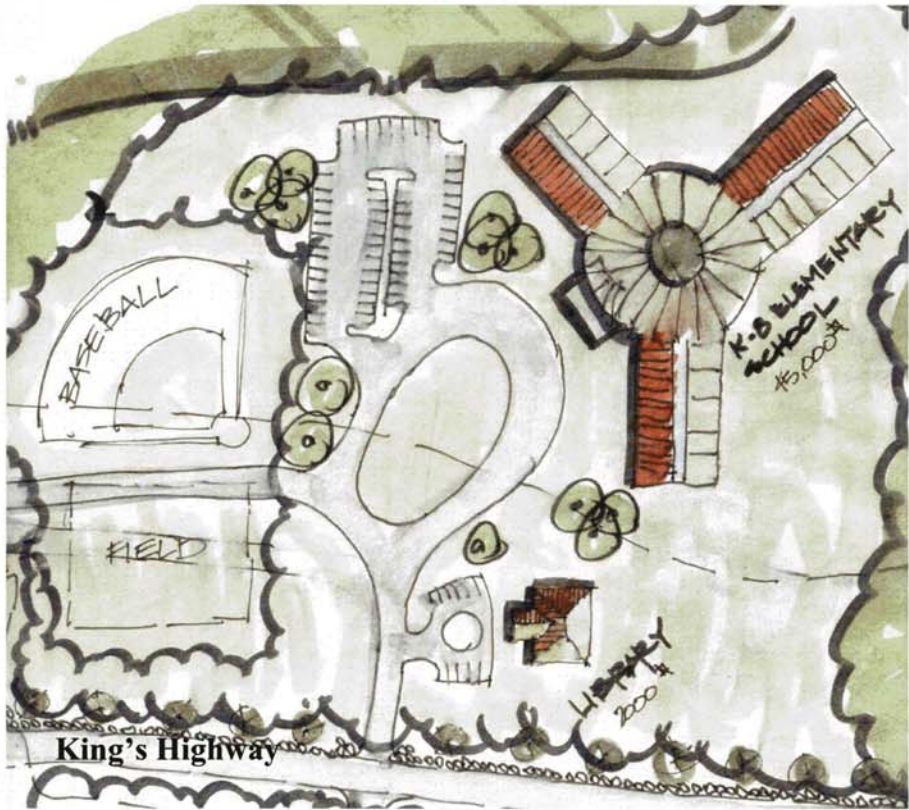
Daycare Facility

Daycare was an issue that came up during the public comment sessions. There is currently only a small daycare center in town. With the growing number of commuters heading to work outside of Middleton each day this will continue to be an issue for parents. A 5,000 square foot facility has been included in the concept drawings found in this report.

School

At some point, whether initiated by Middleton or requested by Farmington, there will likely be a need for a school at least for grades K-8.

Located adjacent to the baseball field, the concept for the Middleton school is a kindergarten through eighth grade facility. The calculations were based on approximately 750 square feet per classroom, and 15 students per classroom. The school design would most likely handle 300 students and provide alternatives for expansion. Auditorium space could double as community space for Town Meeting and other events. This concept suggests three wings including one for kindergarten through sixth grade, one for seventh and eighth grade, one for the auditorium/cafeteria and the school office in the center of the building.



A municipal library could be constructed as a separate building adjacent to the school. This facility would serve the needs of the school and the community.



Middleton Baseball Field

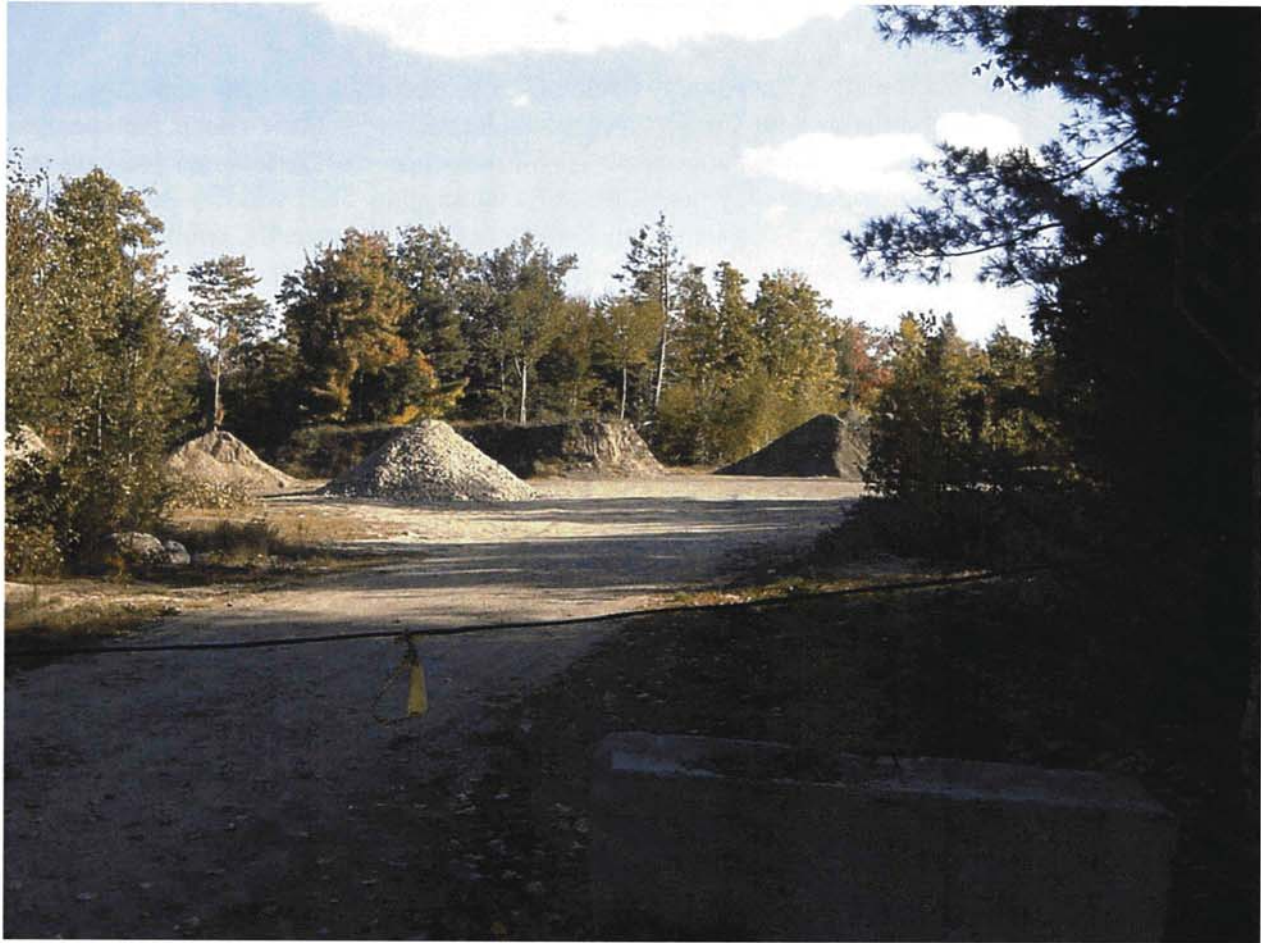
One short term step would be to address the condition of the park/playground. Although the basketball court and baseball fields are in good condition, the playground is aging and the site needs some help with visibility and parking. The concept drawing demonstrates the need to do some pruning and landscaping that will expose the stonewalls and create a green border along Kings Highway through the Four Corners.



The existing trail system on the school property could be used to connect the municipal office building, park, school, library, and senior housing units.

New Public Works Facility

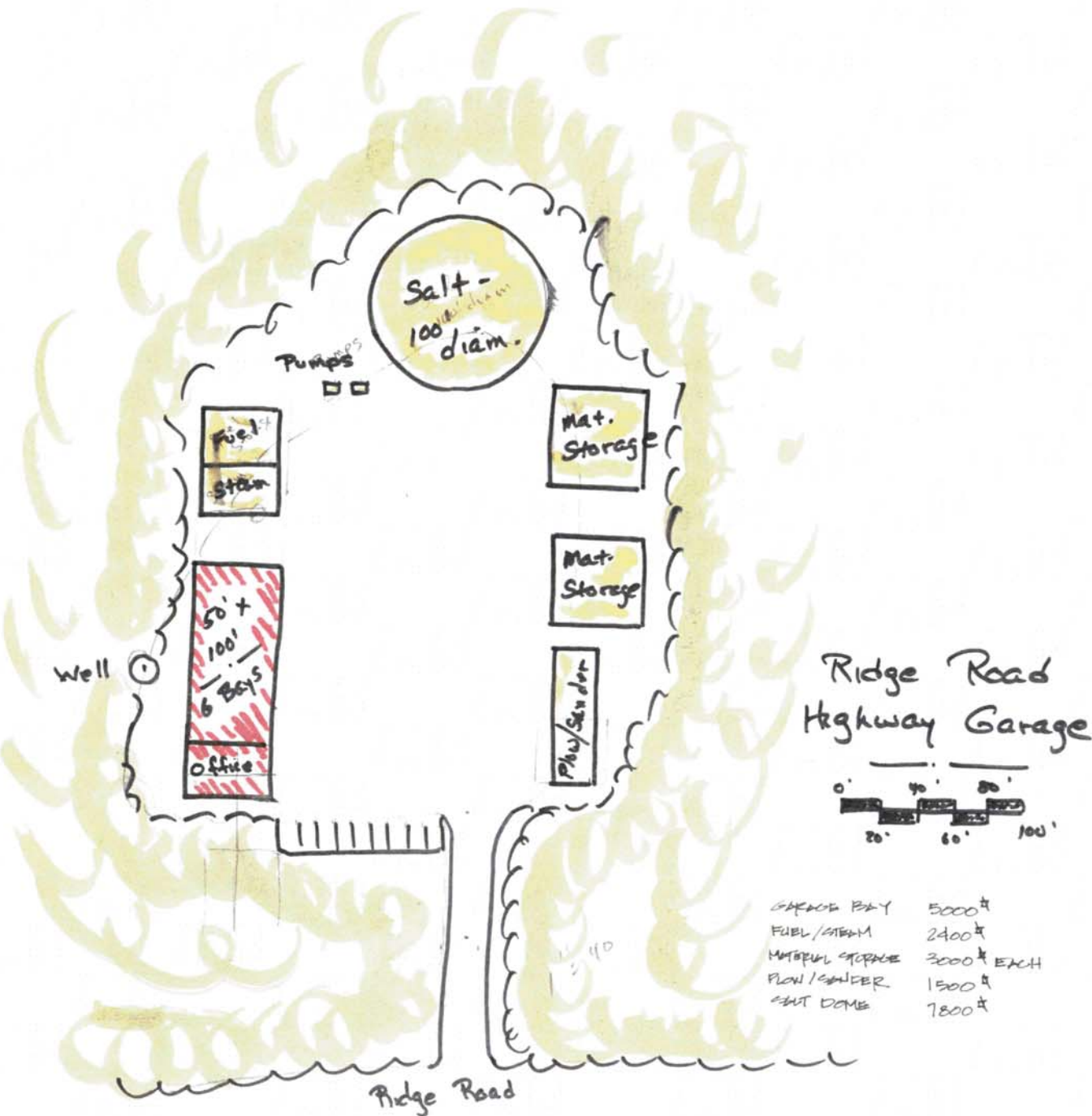
The final suggested step is **the construction of a public works facility in the northwestern corner of this property.** This is a crucial step and the first project that should be completed because it will then make other steps possible.



Northwest Corner of the School Property

The new facility should include a six bay 100' by 50' building with an office, tool room, break room, kitchen, and bathroom. The current highway garage is only a 60' by 40' structure. A modern building would also include radiant floor heating and a wash bay. A salt/sand shed will also be needed on site. This structure must be large enough for 1000 yards of sand and 500 tons of salt, and must provide a loading area. The fuel station will also need to be relocated to this facility. This may also be a suitable location for the towns recycling activities.

The new facility should include a six bay 100' by 50' building with an office, tool room, break room, kitchen, and bathroom. The current highway garage is only a 60' by 40' structure. A modern building would also include radiant floor heating and a wash bay. A salt/sand shed will also be needed on site. This structure must be be large enough for 1000 yards of sand and 500 tons of salt, and must provide a loading area.



Quick Fix Suggestions/Long term solutions

So where do you start? There are a lot of ideas presented here and, as always, only a limited amount of money available at any one time. The most important thing is to start with something small; say something the town can get done in a few months. Many of the other projects will need to be prioritized based on the town’s needs and the town’s financial resources. Having a plan on how to proceed and where facilities could potentially be located was the objective of this charrette. You now have a list of options and a roadmap on how to proceed.

Middleton residents are the only ones really suited to make decisions about what will work and what won’t work in their community. We hope that this charrette has sprouted a few new thoughts and built upon ideas that the town has already considered. Clearly there is a great amount of interest and enthusiasm in town and it is clear that town leaders are in a great position to get started.

It is important to keep in mind that the options discussed at the charrette and in this report are only points for discussion and are not set in stone. The most important thing to understand is the basic design principles behind any strategy the town pursues. As the town decides how to move forward, it might be helpful to restate some of the principles that have guided the design team.

The cheapest short term solution may not be the cheapest in the long run.
Remember that the cheapest solution for any one project or any one town ‘need’ may not be the least expensive overall solution, and may not fit well into the broader vision or plan for Middleton Four Corners. All of these improvements need to fit together and they need to make sense.

With only limited funds available, it is crucial to invest them where you’ll get the biggest return on your investment.
Simple improvements are sometimes overlooked but can have lasting impacts on a community. If you start with a \$2 million project, it may take years to complete. In the meantime some of the energy may fizzle and some of the smaller projects might never get done. Look for improvements that will elicit pride among residents and spark interest in what’s going on in the town center. Simple landscaping and clean-up projects are needed and could be completed with volunteer labor.

Respect the existing structure and integrity of Middleton Four Corners
This is your living room. Make it livable and comfortable. Make it an inviting place for residents to gather and for visitors to appreciate. Focus on improvements that will maintain or improve upon the character of the existing village, and will invite people into the area.

Connect the pieces of Middleton Four Corners
The stronger the connection between the parts of the Four Corners, the better the center will operate. Tie these town resources together. Improvements can be made in stages. Even a small improvement will show the whole community that there is a plan and a serious commitment to make these improvements happen.

Respect the qualities of the built environment already there.
Reinforce the characteristics already present at the Four Corners. Building setbacks, building height and massing should reflect the best elements of existing development. Revisit zoning regulations to make sure that the zoning language reflects the town’s goals for the future. Remember that zoning regulations should reflect what the town *wants* to see so that, if the situation ever arises, buildings can be rebuilt as they exist today and new uses can be established.

Get Started!
We keep harping on this point but it really is important! Build off of the energy and enthusiasm displayed at the charrette people care about Middleton Four Corners and would be willing to help make small changes happen right off the bat. If the process is set in motion now, it will make some of these larger projects seem more feasible and it will be clearer how these projects all fit into a larger plan. Start with the park and playground. Coordinate volunteer labor to cut down on any dollars needed. This has the double benefit of being cheaper, and more importantly, getting people involved and invested in the idea.

- Recommendations for the Four Corners**

Short Term

 - Clean up and fix up the playground
 - Construct a new Public Works Facility on the school property
 - Move the Fire Department to the existing Highway Garage
 - Use the Fire Department building for a library, or use it as an addition to the Police Station
 - Fix up the Old Town Hall
 - Encourage the church to give the parsonage a face lift
 - Create a Green along the east side of Kings Highway
 - Promote the development of a General Store
 - Give the Municipal Building a facelift and move the entrance and parking to the side

Long Term

 - Create interior streets and parking on the school property
 - Create approximately sixteen units for elderly housing on the school property
 - Create a Safety Services building
 - Design and Build a school

Cost Estimates

The Cost estimates below describe the preliminary estimates for several different projects and phases presented in this report. These are estimates and will change based on the actual plans developed.

A. Park <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>Park clean up</u> Budget Cost: \$25,000 If volunteer labor is available	TOTAL: \$25,000
B. Public Works Facility <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>5,000 s.f. garage, 1,500 s.f. office, salt storage, new well and septic, and gas/diesel fueling station</u> Budget Cost: \$850,000	TOTAL: \$850,000*
C. Library from Fire Station <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>Remodel; including new well and septic</u> Budget Cost: \$100,000	TOTAL: \$100,000
D. Historic Town Hall <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>Remodel; including new porches, and exterior of vault</u> Budget Cost: \$15,000○ <u>Basement</u> Budget Cost: \$200,000 Cost Per Sq. Ft: \$100	TOTAL: \$15,000
E. Parsonage <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>Upgrade exterior</u> Budget Cost: \$10,000 If volunteer labor is available	TOTAL: \$10,000
F. Municipal Office Building <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>Addition, landscaping and parking</u> Budget Cost: \$20,000	TOTAL: \$20,000
F. Commercial Development <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>Small store</u> Budget Cost: \$120,000 Cost Per Sq. Ft: \$100○ <u>Larger store with other services</u> Budget Cost: \$360,000 Cost Per Sq. Ft: \$100	TOTAL: \$120,000



G. Senior Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>16 units</u> Budget Cost: \$1,600,000 Cost Per unit: \$100,000	TOTAL: \$1,600,000
H. Day Care Center <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>5,000 square foot facility</u> Budget Cost: \$500,000 Cost Per Sq. Ft: \$100	TOTAL: \$500,000
I. Public Safety Complex <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>6,300 square foot addition to existing four bay garage</u> Budget Cost: \$ Cost Per Sq. Ft: \$60 (Garage Space) Cost per Sq. Ft: \$100 (Office Space)	TOTAL: \$420,000*
J. K-8 School <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>Facility for approximately 360 children</u> Budget Cost: \$6,075,000 Cost Per Sq. Ft: \$135	TOTAL: \$6,075,000

* For a completely engineered facility built by an outside contractor.

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UNH Technology Transfer Center
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The Rural Development Administration is a good source of grants and low interest loans for rural communities.

The Economic Development Administration may be able to help with funds for projects that will create jobs.

The regional planning commission is a good source for technical assistance on planning and zoning issues. They may be able to assist with grant preparation.

The regional development council has low interest loans, and can help with the preparation of applications for economic development projects.

The Municipal Bond Bank packages small town bond issues into aggregate proposals to secure lower interest rates.

The Housing Finance Authority is the source for both planning and development funds for projects that create housing for low income groups and the elderly.

The Office of State Planning distributes funding for projects which can demonstrate an ability to meet the needs of low and moderate income individuals.

The Authority provides financial and technical assistance to community development corporations, worker cooperatives, and certain municipal entities.

The technology transfer center may be able to provide some technical assistance related to the new public works facility, and any traffic calming efforts at the Four Corners.

