

**League of Women Voters of Mountain Lakes
Midvale Revitalization Consensus
May 2000**

The League of Women Voters of Mountain Lakes strongly supports the Borough's Master Plan recommendation to promote the Midvale area as a center of our community. The intention of the study was to provide ideas for a long-term plan that would shape the use of the area starting now and incrementally into the future. Much of this area involves private property, and success depends on mutually beneficial agreements between the landlords and the municipality. Portions of the property, all the roads, and most of the sidewalks belong to the Borough. Thus the Borough has a primary role to play in any revitalization plan. The League proposes that the Borough Council establish a special committee to carry out a revitalization of the Midvale area.

Pedestrian Plaza – The League strongly supports the creation of social facilities in this area for residents of all ages. The greatest need identified is for a meeting place that allows intergenerational, social interaction where people can chat and play and learn – in other words "a community gathering area." An important component is the creation of a pedestrian zone or plaza, free of vehicular traffic. This pedestrian plaza would be a safe, inviting public area with nearby eateries, retail shops and rooms for meetings and classes. The pedestrian plaza would also be a gathering area for public events such as parades, fairs and performances. For recreational use it could incorporate a children's play area, benches, tables, and be adjacent to the basketball court.

Use of Borough-Owned Land – The League encourages the Borough to use Borough-Owned land in the Midvale area to enhance its revitalization and to allow the private establishments to flourish. This could include landscaped parking, a community plaza, pedestrian zones, play areas, walkways, and other public facilities. It could also include additional buildings to house offices and meeting rooms and a teen center. This recommendation was qualified by the concern that additional retail establishments might draw excessive vehicular traffic to the area.

Borough Offices and Services – The League strongly encourages that the Midvale area be given serious consideration before any expansion plans to the current Borough Hall are carried out. The League recognizes the advantages of returning some Borough services and offices to the centrally located area, particularly those that encourage residents to stop and stay in the area. (Previous services located in the

Midvale area were the Borough Hall, the police station, the court, the jail, and a school.) A police presence is desirable.

Pedestrian and Vehicular Traffic – In order to protect pedestrian traffic and maximize the use of parking spaces, the League recommends improvements to a pedestrian bridge over the train trestle. This bridge would connect the station, post office, library, and the Esplanade to the Market area. The bridge pathway exists and only needs fencing. However, appropriate ramp/pathways are needed to provide access to the bridge. Members concur that the walkway should be visually attractive and landscaped.

The League recommends that a professional study be done to evaluate what are the best possible means for the calming and rerouting of traffic in this area. One suggestion was that a double yellow line and lines for a pedestrian crossing be added where Elm Road curves past the Esplanade. We encourage completing the sidewalk connecting the Library to the Post Office.

The Esplanade – The League acknowledges the underutilization of the Esplanade Park and encourages new uses. Ideas include developing the area to accommodate its use for concerts, dance performances, a local theater, art exhibits, a small play area, a summer café, and to make it accessible by a pedestrian-friendly walkway.

Library and Post Office – League members urge that the center of the community continue to include the Post Office and Mountain Lakes Library. Therefore, the League encourages the Borough Government to do everything possible to keep the Post Office and the Library in this area.

Mixed-Use Zoning for Apartments – In keeping with the Master Plan's vision, the League supports zoning for the inclusion of some mixed-use buildings in the Midvale area. (There are currently five grandfathered apartments in the area and this would be a continuation of that former practice.) Members agree that having residents on site provides some security against vandalism and fire while adding a human presence to the entire area. Apartments would potentially lower rents for commercial tenants. Any expansions in the area could include upper floor apartments.

Landscaping – League members agree that the entire area would be greatly improved by attractive landscaping. A comprehensive landscaping plan is encouraged.

Funding – The League recommends investigating other consulting and funding sources, such as Main Street New Jersey and Special Improvement Districts. National and State historical designation (for the Market, the beauty shop, Mountain Lakes Motors, and the Lionel Train buildings) was mentioned as a way to make these buildings eligible for more funding. Borough costs can be offset by asking residents to donate some of the amenities such as benches, plaza paving stones, stonewalls, trees, etc.

The Borough's Midvale Area Committee – The League strongly recommends that the Council establish a Borough committee to address the implementation of the revitalization of the Midvale area. The League supports using existing committees to facilitate this process as well as including the area's business owners, landlords and residents. The League recognizes the need to consult professionals for such things as traffic, parking, landscaping and marketing.

Recommendations:

For the Borough:

Establish a Borough Committee

Pedestrian plaza

Intergenerational facilities -- seniors, adults, teens, children, tots – outdoors and inside

Inviting appearance – street trees, landscaping, benches, tables and chairs, good paving and sidewalks, enhanced street crossings

Community meeting rooms – meetings, enrichment programs, studios

Teen center

Municipal Borough services

Additional/landscaped parking

Police presence

Revised ordinances to allow for mixed-use buildings

Sports/recreational areas/playground areas

Traffic calming methods using professional consultation

Pedestrian walkway over trestle

For the Landlords:

Outdoor dining

Eateries/restaurants

Pizza parlor/ snack bar/ soda fountain

Longer opening hours

Practice studios – art, music and dance

Dumpster reduction and more frequent pickup

ATM machine

Dry cleaner drop off

Convenience store

Arts and crafts/ antique shop/catalogs

Art gallery/shop/exhibition space

Gift shop

E-commerce tie-ins for all merchants where possible to enhance viability and reduce need for parking.