

**DRAFT**

THE CITY OF  
**MIDDLETOWN**  
PLAN OF CONSERVATION  
& DEVELOPMENT

September 2019  
Middletown Planning & Zoning Commission  
CITY OF MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT



# DEMOGRAPHICS & TRENDS

Middletown has seen continued population growth in recent decades that is expected to continue through the next twenty years, although estimated population growth has been relatively flat since 2010. Incomes in Middletown tend to be lower and poverty rates higher than in the state as a whole, and Middletown's housing also tends to be less expensive than in Connecticut overall. Many of the demographic, income, economic and housing trends here also show variances among the Census tracts in Middletown, suggesting various parts of the city are experiencing population and economic growth differently.

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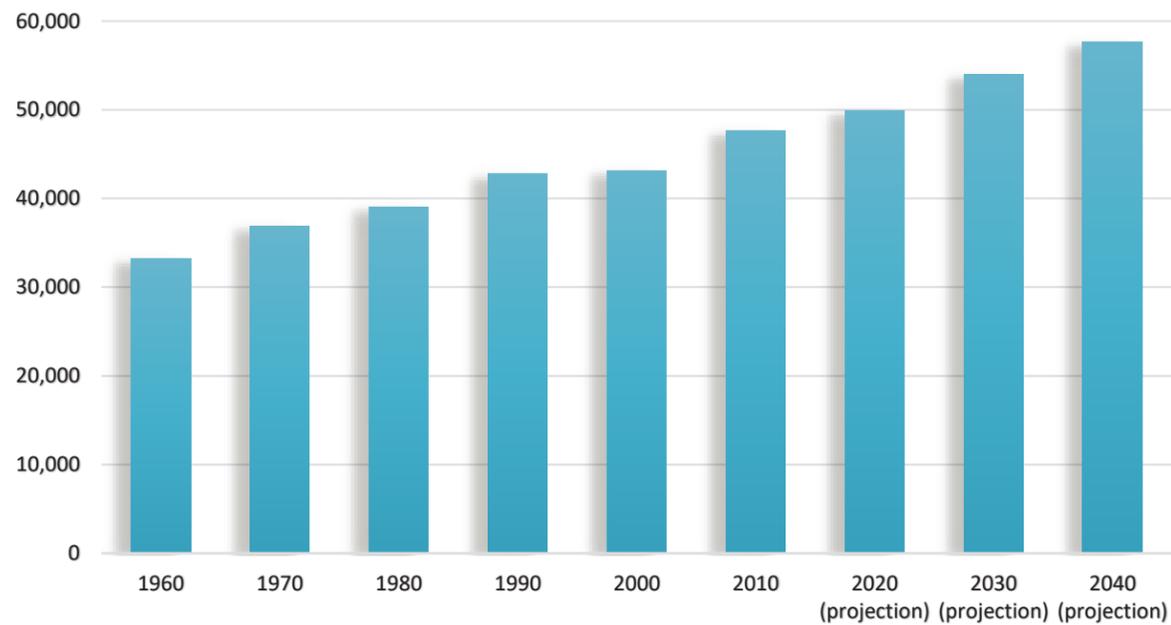
# POPULATION

<sup>1</sup> Since 1960, Middletown’s population has grown from 33,250 residents to 47,648 residents (Figure 1)<sup>2</sup>. This represents population growth of almost 14,400 people since 1960, or 43% growth.

However, the Census Bureau estimates that, since the last census in 2010, the city’s population has been essentially flat, with a slight population loss in 2016 and 2017 from the previous years (Figure 2). Notwithstanding the lack of population change in Middletown from 2010 to 2017, Middletown’s population is expected to increase to over 57,600 residents in 2040, which would increase the city’s population by 21% from 2010. Notably, while Middletown’s growth rate by decade

was below that of Middlesex County and, except for two decades, the state as a whole from 1970 to 2000, beginning in 2010 the city’s population growth has been or is expected to be higher than that of Middlesex County and the state overall (Figure 3). This suggests that residents and elected officials in Middletown need to consciously consider how to handle the city’s population growth even as the rest of the state faces population stagnation.

**Figure 1: Middletown Census Population, 1960-2010, and Projections, 2020-2040**

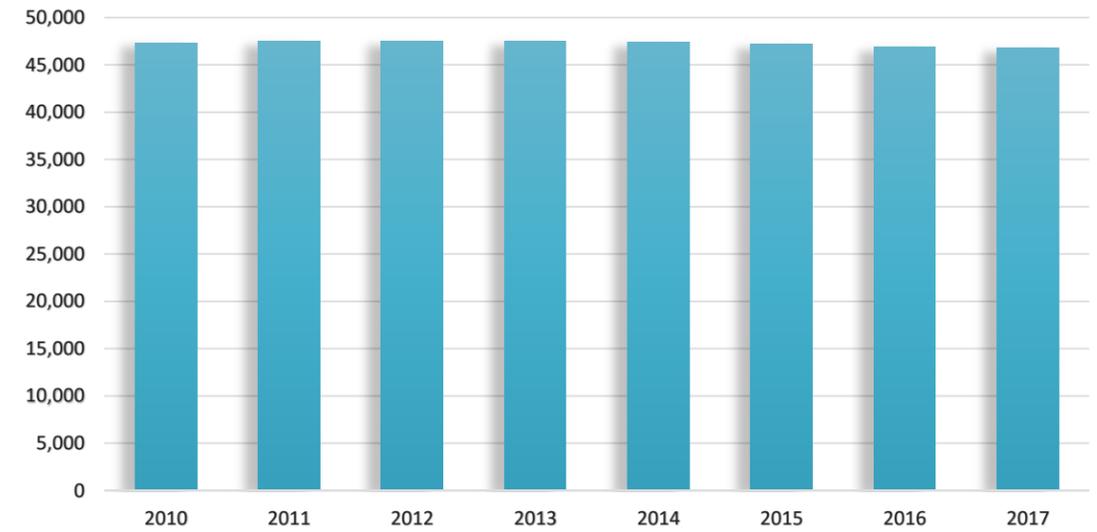


**Source:** Connecticut Secretary of State, Population of Connecticut Towns 1900-1960 and Population of Connecticut Towns 1970-2010; Connecticut Data Collaborative, Population Projections by Town.

<sup>1</sup> Middletown’s population includes some Wesleyan students because, in the U.S. Census Bureau’s words, they “live and sleep most of the time” on campus or in the city.

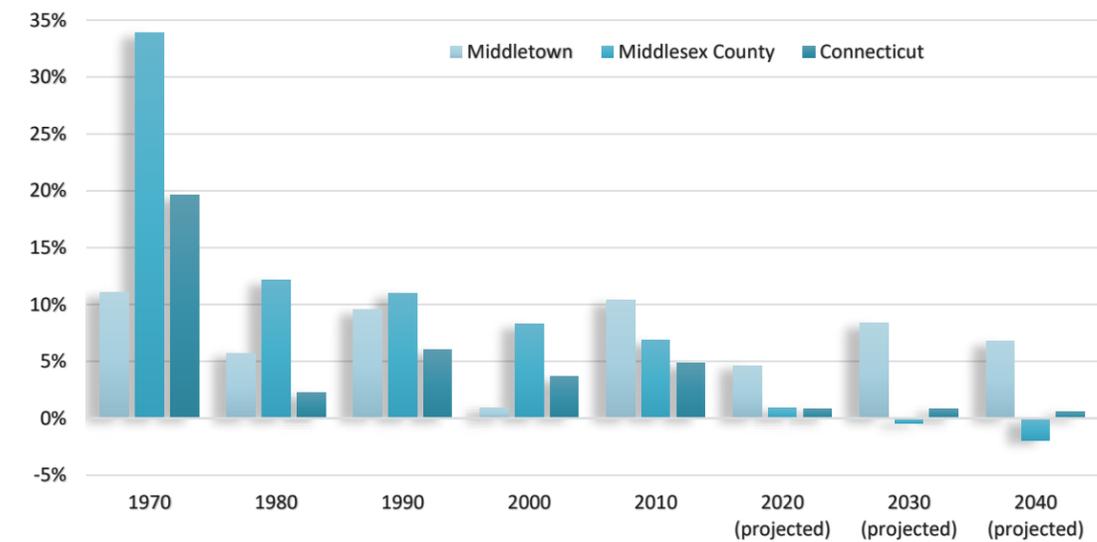
<sup>2</sup> All data is cited in respective figures and tables, unless otherwise noted.

**Figure 2: Middletown Population Estimates, 2010-2017**



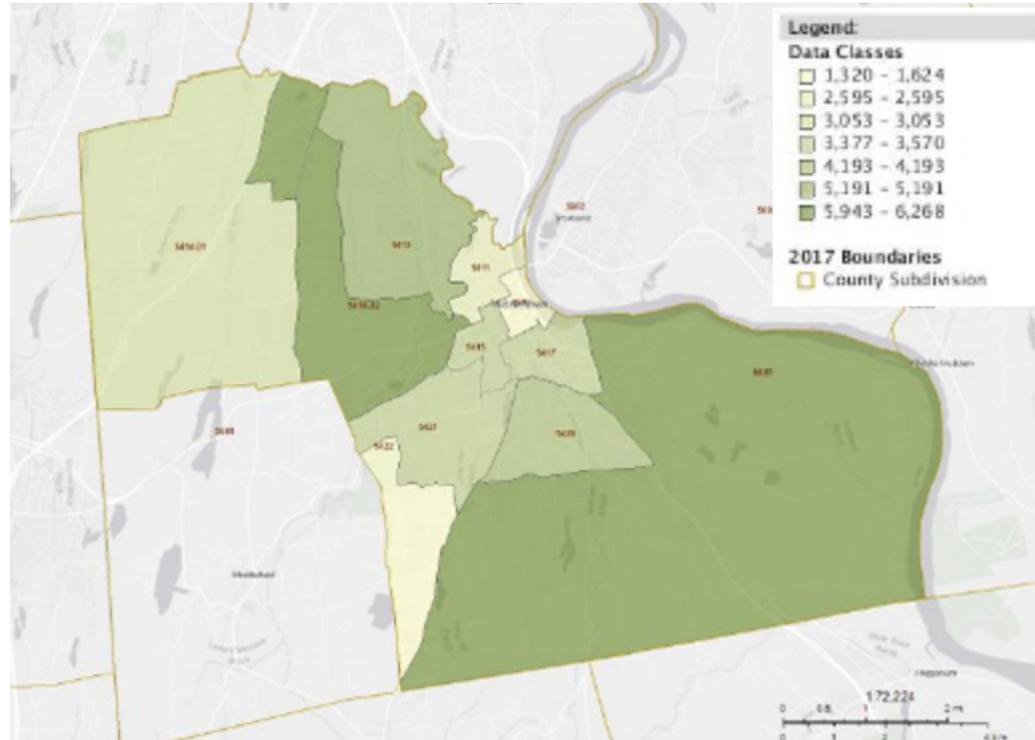
**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

**Figure 3: Middletown, Middlesex County, and Connecticut Percent Population Change from Previous Decade, 1970-2010, and Projections, 2020-2040**



**Source:** Connecticut Secretary of State, Population of Connecticut Towns 1900-1960 and Population of Connecticut Towns 1970-2010; Connecticut Data Collaborative, Population Projections by Town;

**Figure 4: Middletown Population by Census Tract, 2017**



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

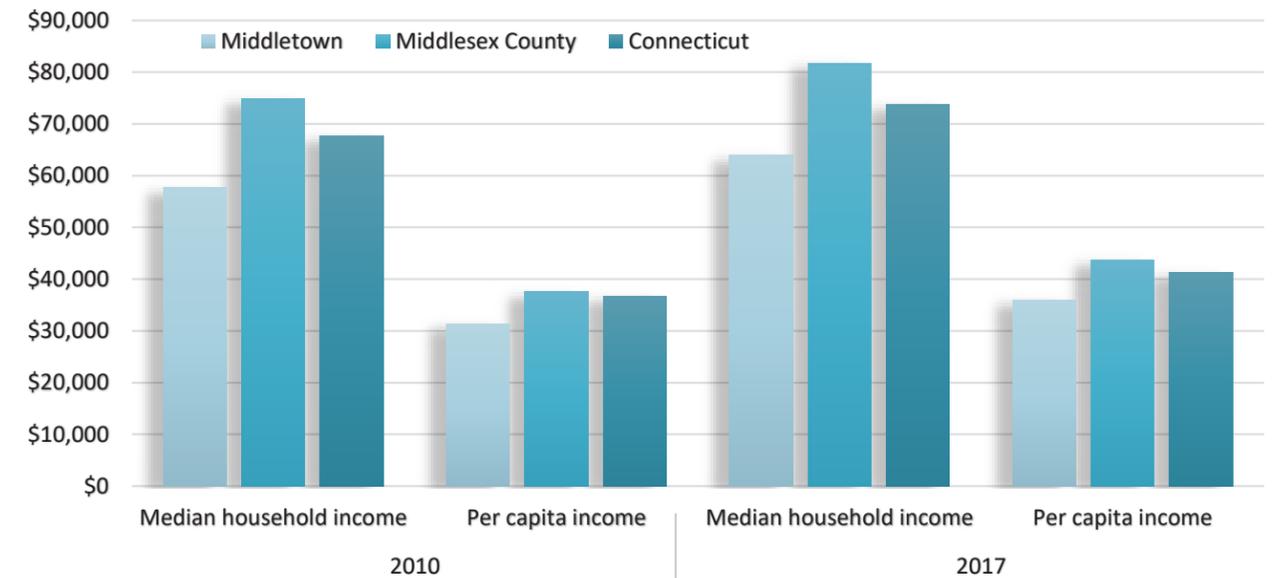
As can be seen in Figure 4, Middletown’s population is not evenly distributed across the city. Census tract 6802, which is the southernmost tract in Middletown with its eastern border is defined by the Connecticut River, had the largest share of population (6,268 residents in 2017). This tract contained over 13% of the city’s total population. Tract 5413, which sits on the city’s northern

border between Interstate 91 and State Highway 21, had the second largest share of population in the city (6,192), despite its much smaller size. The downtown Census tracts, including 5411, 5415, and 5416, are some of the smaller tracts in Middletown by population, with 5416, which is also along the Connecticut River, the smallest tract by population (1,320 residents) in 2017.

# INCOME

Median household income in Middletown was estimated at almost \$64,000 in 2017, an increase from \$57,655 in 2010 (Figure 5). Per capita income in Middletown also increased during that time, from \$31,348 to almost \$36,000. However, both median household income and per capita income in the city were less than household and per capita incomes in Middlesex County and in the state overall, both in 2010 and 2017.

**Figure 5: Median Household and Per Capita Incomes in Middletown, Middlesex County and Connecticut, 2010 and 2017**



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.



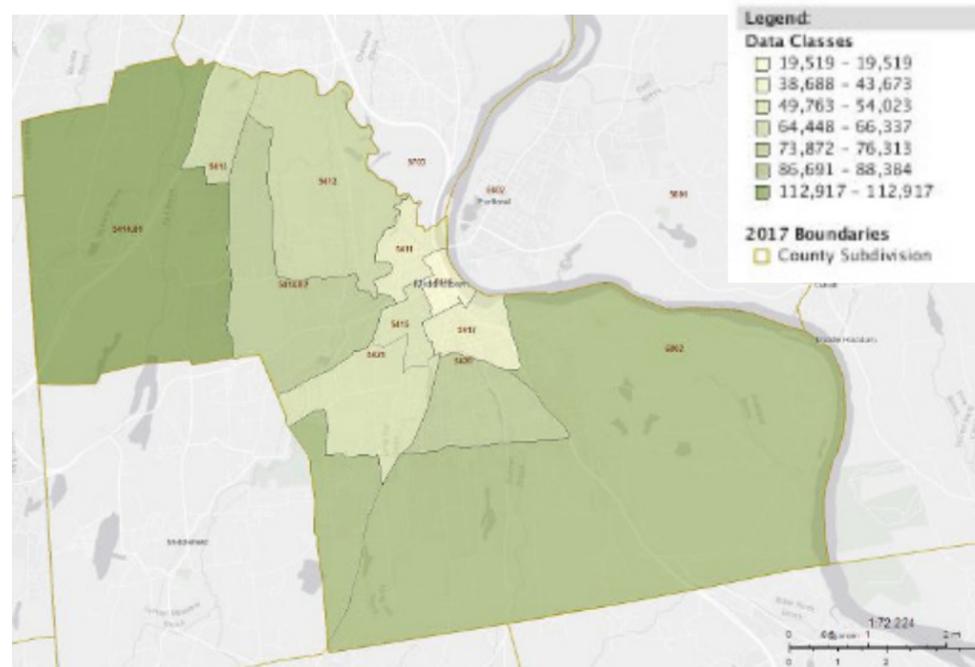
Incomes also varied widely within the city as well. In 2017, the smallest estimated median household income was less than \$20,000 in Census Tract 5416, an area of downtown centered on Main Street and bordered in the north by the Arrigoni Bridge and in the south by William Street (Figure 6).

In comparison, household incomes in Tract 5414.01, in the northwest corner of the city, was almost \$113,000, a difference in household incomes of over \$93,000 per year. Three other Census tracts also had household incomes below \$50,000: Tract 5411 with median household income of \$38,688; Tract 5417, with median household income of \$43,673, and Tract 5421, with median household income of \$49,763. Both Tracts 5411 and 5417 are in the downtown Middletown area, while Tract 5421 is centered on Wadsworth Street.

The distribution of incomes in Middletown and compared to the county and state are reflected in the poverty rates. In 2017, over 11% of individuals in Middletown were below the federal poverty line (Figure 7). This was a decrease from the poverty rate in 2010, which was 12%. The city's estimated poverty rate was higher than in Middlesex County (7%) and Connecticut (11%). A notable finding here is that the city's estimated poverty rate declined from 2010 to 2017 even as the rate was growing in the county and the state.

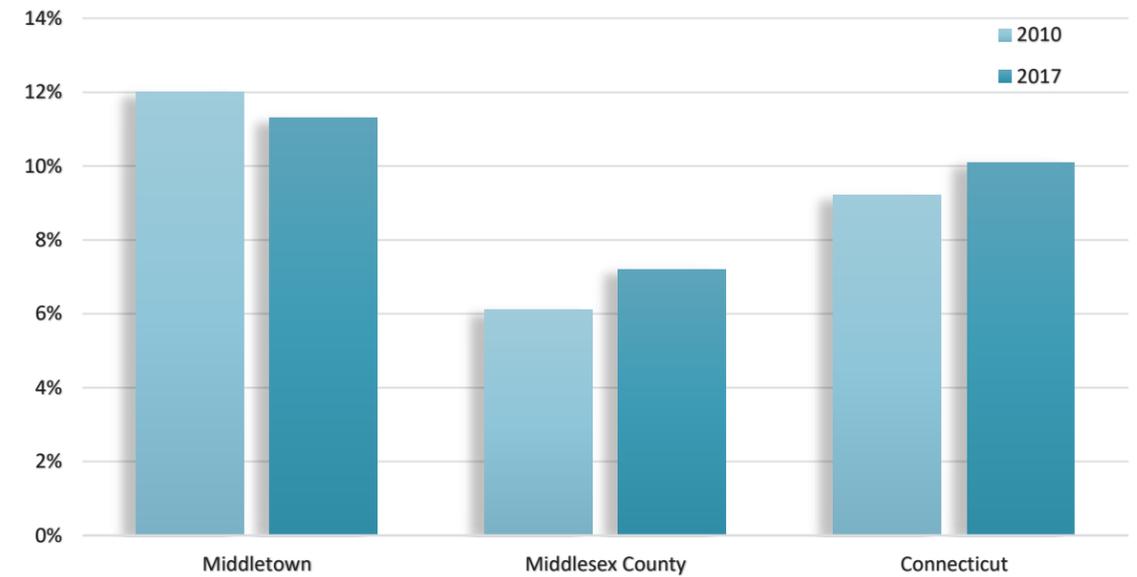


Figure 6: Median Household Incomes in Middletown by Census Tract, 2017



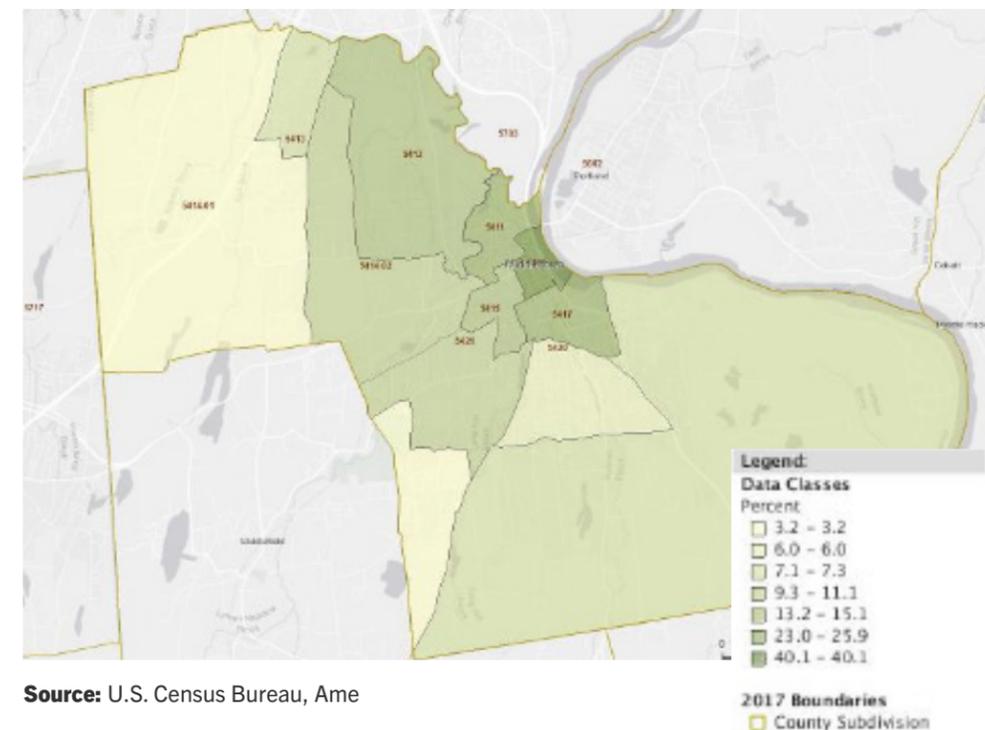
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

Figure 7: Percent of Individuals Below Federal Poverty Line in Middletown, Middlesex County, and Connecticut, 2010 and 2017



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

Figure 8: Percent of Families Below Federal Poverty Line in Middletown by Census Tract, 2017



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Ame

Individual poverty rates by Census tract display a similar pattern as the data on household incomes. This highest estimated poverty rate in 2017 was in Tract 5416, the downtown tract, with 40% of individuals below the federal poverty line, while the lowest poverty rates were in Tract 5414.01 and 5422, in the southwest part of the city (Figure 8). In both these suburban tracts, the poverty rates were 3.2%.

# ECONOMICS

In 2017, Middletown had an estimated 28,757 jobs, an increase of over 1,600 jobs (5.9%) since 2010 (Table 1).

The largest share of jobs in the city was in Health Care and Social Assistance (5,911 jobs), which includes jobs at the hospital and associated medical offices. This industry also saw faster than average growth, with an increase in jobs of almost 15% from 2010. The next largest share of jobs was in the Government industry (4,613 jobs), although this industry has seen a contraction during the most recent decade.

The next largest share of jobs was in the Manufacturing industry (4,410 jobs). Manufacturing saw an increase in jobs in Middletown between 2010 and 2017. The smallest industry in Middletown was Information, which includes wired and wireless telecommunications jobs as well as jobs at the movie theater.



## Transitions in Healthcare

According to the Connecticut Department of Labor, Health Care and Social Assistance is expected to increase by 11.3% from 2016-2026 statewide.

Within that 2-digit industry, the largest increases are projected to be in: Outpatient Care Centers (32.3%); Home Health Care Services (30.4%); and Continuing Care Retirement Communities and Assisted Living Facilities for the Elderly (28%). There will also be increases in Ambulatory Health Care Services (19.1%), Other Ambulatory Health Care Services (17.8%), Offices of Physicians (12.6%), and General Medical and Surgical Hospitals (3.0%), which are likely relevant to Middletown. In the United States, a number of larger industry trends will affect how businesses anticipate consumer demand, profitability and competitiveness. Employers and health plans are offering more convenient options to their consumers by providing more ways to receive care. Telehealth, the ability to talk with a

healthcare provider at any time, is starting to take hold in the industry. Another trend involves mergers among providers, so choices are becoming concentrated. There is also consolidation among doctor groups, practicing as employees of hospitals or health systems, which tends to increase prices. Some other trends that are improving patient quality of life, yet driving up costs in the short term, are advances in medical technology and innovation, along with the introduction of specialty drugs and gene therapies. Analysts expect in the short-term for healthcare prices to increase, although improvements will also be seen in patient outcomes and overall health.<sup>3</sup> The CVS-Aetna deal is also an indicator of the restructuring of the healthcare delivery system in the state and across the country.

Table 1: Number of Jobs in Middletown by Industry, 2010-2017

Industry	NAICS	Jobs, 2010	Jobs, 2017	Average Earnings per Job, 2017
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	11	0	0	\$0
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	21	0	0	\$0
Utilities	22	118	138	\$228,010
Construction	23	709	901	\$75,710
Manufacturing	31	3,862	4,410	\$123,471
Wholesale Trade	42	1,149	1,028	\$92,157
Retail Trade	44	1,547	1,629	\$41,744
Transportation and Warehousing	48	435	487	\$44,811
Information	51	199	125	\$75,684
Finance and Insurance	52	1,095	689	\$108,203
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	53	189	192	\$60,800
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	54	961	1,223	\$92,271
Management of Companies and Enterprises	55	336	490	\$104,123
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	56	541	653	\$40,678
Educational Services	61	3,271	3,292	\$48,589
Health Care and Social Assistance	62	5,143	5,911	\$68,718
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	71	207	214	\$25,555
Accommodation and Food Services	72	1,336	1,791	\$28,834
Other Services (except Public Administration)	81	911	963	\$37,441
Government	90	5,145	4,613	\$91,546
Unclassified Industry	99	<10	<10	Insf. Data
<b>Total</b>		<b>27,154</b>	<b>28,757</b>	<b>\$76,799</b>

Source: Emsi, 2019.1.

## Transitions in Manufacturing

According to the Connecticut Department of Labor, Manufacturing is expected to increase by 6.5% statewide between 2016-2026.

Transportation Equipment Manufacturing is expected to grow by 21.9%, including growth in one of its subindustries (Aerospace Product and Parts Manufacturing, 18.4%) and Machine Shops; Turned Product; and Screw, Nut, and Bolt Manufacturing is expected to grow by 12.0%. The other subindustries will see growth less than 10% or a decline in employment. At the national level, this industry projects strong growth

driven by increasing commercial aircraft production due to passenger travel demand. Also, demand from the federal government reacting to geopolitical risks will boost the number of aircraft, Black Hawk helicopters, submarines and other weapons systems produced.<sup>4</sup> Pratt & Whitney, a maker of jet engines and part of United Technologies Corporation, is currently working through a backlog of 8,000 next-generation engines.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.pwc.com/us/en/health-industries/health-research-institute/assets/pdf/hri-behind-the-numbers-2019.pdf>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.defense-aerospace.com/articles-view/reports/2/198308/2019-global-aerospace-%26-defense-industry-outlook.html>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.courant.com/business/hc-biz-coun ty-economies-20181212-story.html>

The average earnings per job in Middletown was almost \$76,800 in 2017, which was above the average earnings in Middlesex County (\$67,147) but below the average earnings in the state (\$80,273).

Seven industries in Middletown had average earnings per job above the city-wide average earnings, and these seven industries combined employed almost 13,000 people, or 44% of total workers in the city.

The educational attainment of Middletown's adult residents (those age 25 or older) is relatively similar to educational attainment of adults in Middlesex County or the state, with differences limited to three percentage points or less (Figure 9). For example, in Middletown, 8% of adults did not graduate from high school, compared to 6% of adults in the county and 10% in the state. Similarly, Middletown has slightly higher shares of the adult population that have a high school degree or equivalent (30%) or some college (18%)

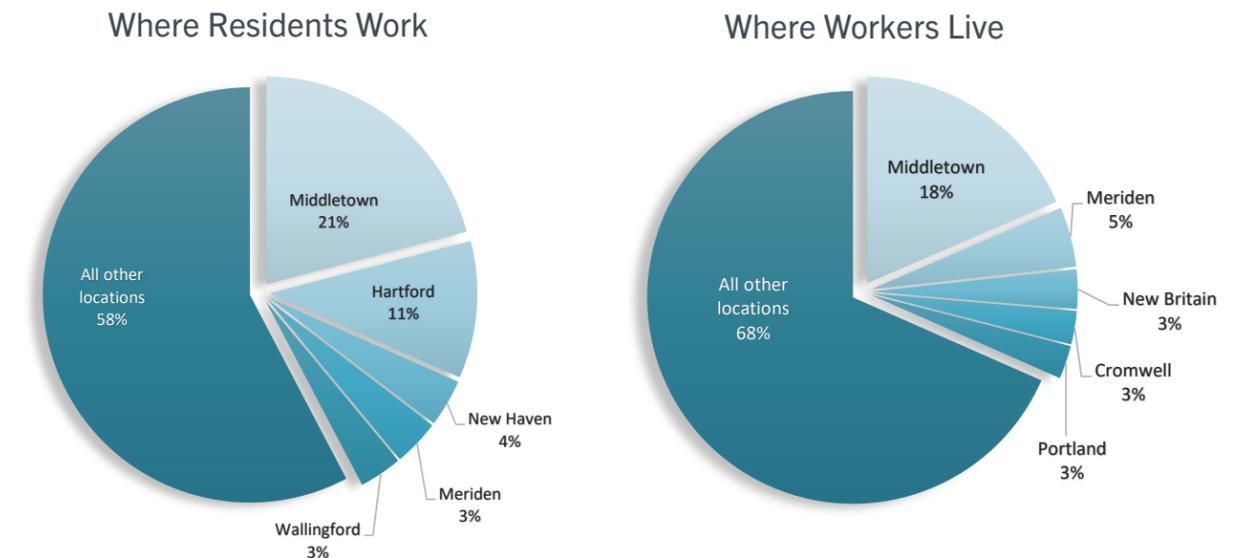


than in the county or state, while 8% of city residents have an Associate's degree, which is the same as in the state while 9% of county residents have obtained this credential. Slightly less than 20% of city residents have a Bachelor's degree, and 17% have a graduate or professional degree; in comparison, 23% of county residents have a Bachelor's and 18% have a graduate or professional degree, while 22% of state residents have a Bachelor's degree and 17% have a graduate or professional degree.

Over 20% of employed Middletown residents worked in the city in 2015 (Figure 9). Another 11% worked in Hartford, 4% in New Haven, and 3% each in Meriden and in Wallingford.

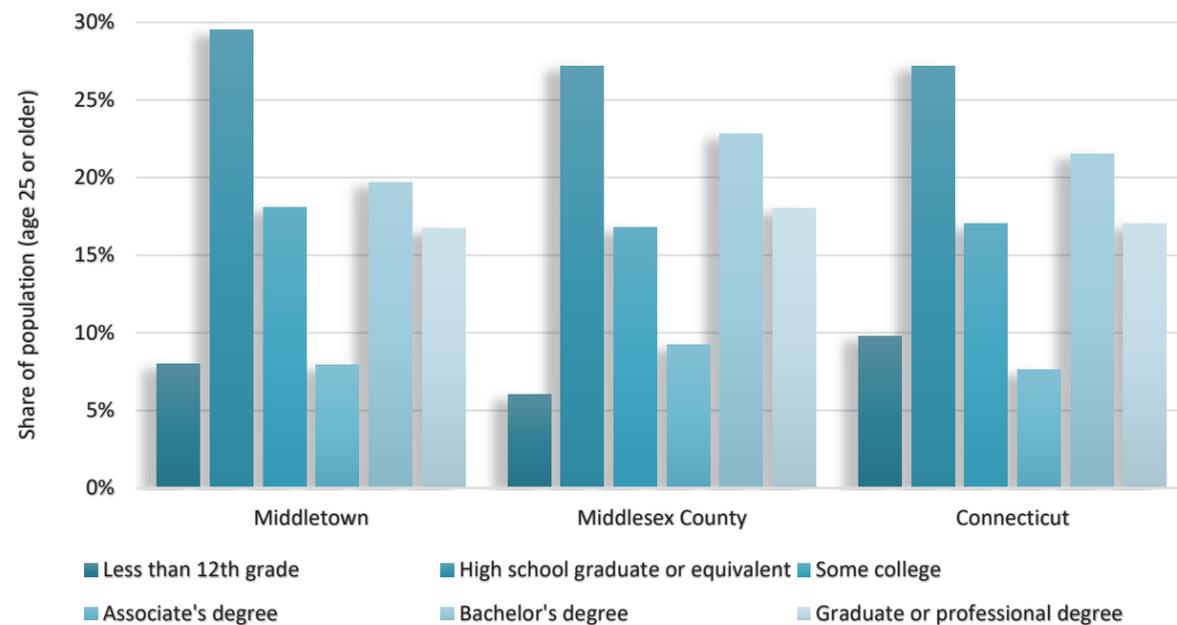
This suggests the importance of the I-91 and the other north-south highways in the central part of the state, which enables Middletown residents to reach jobs in other cities. Looking at commuting patterns by workers, rather than residents, 18% of employed workers in Middletown also lived in the city, while 5% lived in Meriden and 3% each in New Britain, Cromwell, and Portland. (Less than 2% of workers live in Hartford, while approximately 1% live in New Haven.) This suggests workers in Middletown may be looking for jobs and residences near one another for shorter commutes.

Figure 10: Commuting Patterns of Middletown Residents and Workers (Top 5 Cities or Towns), 2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap.

Figure 9: Educational Attainment in Middletown, Middlesex County, and Connecticut, 2010 and 2017

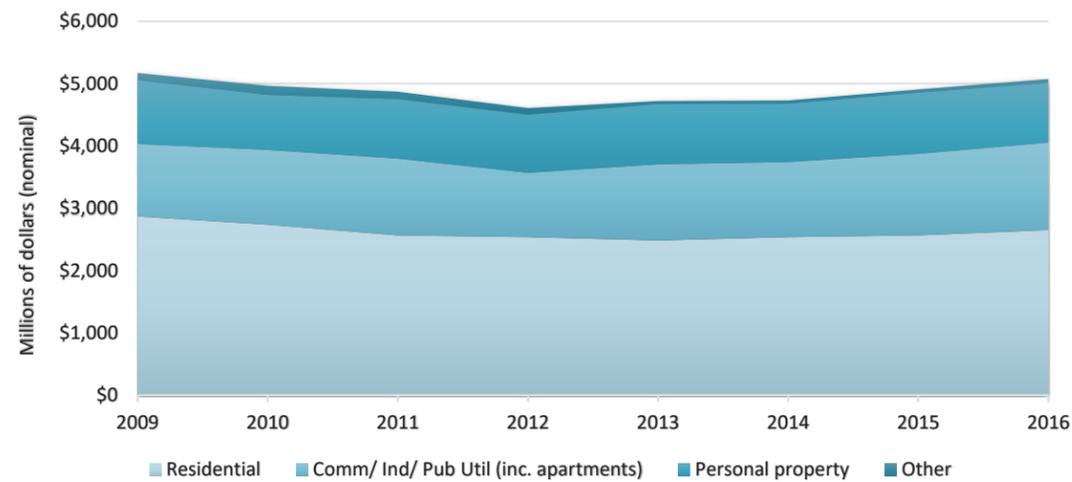


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

Middletown's Equalized Net Grand List (ENGL), or the total taxable property in the city adjusted for comparison with other cities and towns, was valued at over \$5.17 billion in 2009 (Figure 10). It has yet to recover to this value as of 2016 (the most recent data), when the total ENGL was \$5.07 billion. This \$100 million loss in taxable property in Middletown is even greater once the figures are adjusted for inflation.



**Figure 11: Total Equalized Net Grand List in Middletown by Component, State Fiscal Years 2008-2016**



Source: Connecticut Office of Policy and Management, Equalized Net Grand List by Town.

Residential property represents just over half of Middletown’s ENGL, although the total value of taxable residential property in Middletown has declined from \$2.87 billion in 2008 to \$2.65 billion in 2016. The total value of taxable personal property in the city has also declined, from just over \$1 billion in 2008 to \$956 million in 2016. This represents a 6.6% decline in value. The value of commercial/ industrial / public utility property increased 20% from 2008 (\$1.17 billion) to 2016 (\$1.41 billion).

As with many other cities in Connecticut, Middletown also struggles financially with the amount of nontaxable property within its borders. These properties include nonprofits such as Wesleyan University or Middlesex Hospital as well as publicly-owned facilities including Connecticut Valley Hospital, City Hall, and city and state agencies. Although the city is eligible for Payment in Lieu

of Taxes (PILOT) funds from the state to compensate for these nontaxable properties, the formulas for these funds have been changing in recent years, and the gap has been growing between the value of the PILOT and the value of the nontaxable property, while the city still needs to provide services to these properties including fire and rescue, police, and road maintenance and plowing.

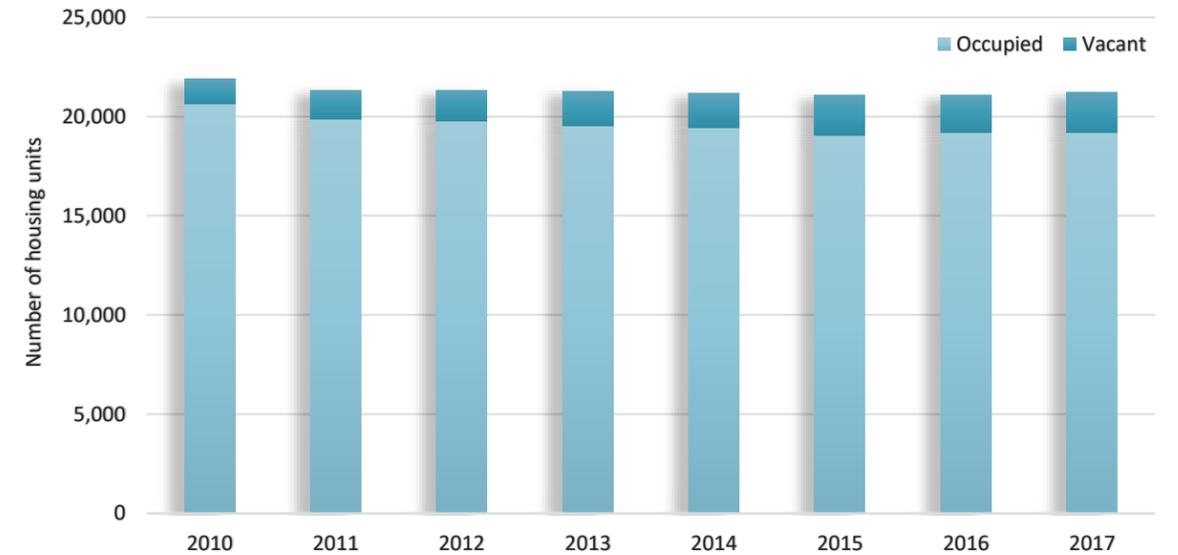
# HOUSING

As Middletown’s population has remained generally consistent since 2010, the estimated number of housing units has declined from 21,875 units in 2010 to 21,223 units in 2017 (Figure 12).

During this time, there has also been a decrease in the number of occupied housing units (over 1,400 units) and an increase in vacant units (almost 800 units). However, from 2000 to 2010, the Census identified an 11% increase in the number of housing units in Middletown, as the population rose only 10%.

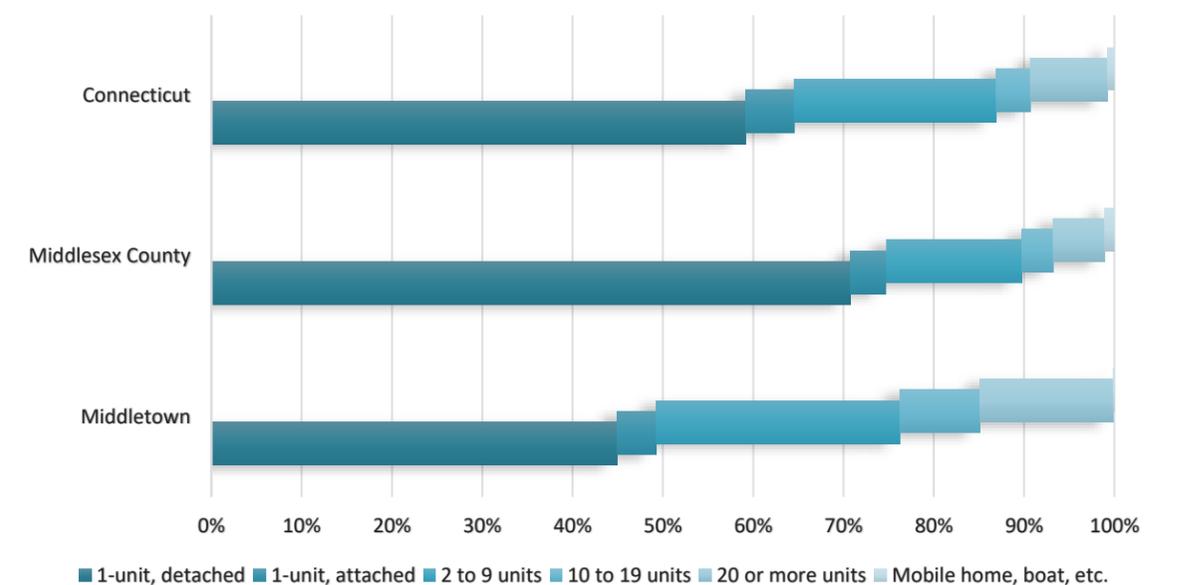
The largest share of housing in Middletown in 2017 was comprised of single-unit housing, either detached (45%) or attached (4.3%) of total housing (Figure 13). However, single-unit housing represented a much smaller share of housing in Middletown compared to Middlesex County (75%) and the state (65%). Instead, the city had a much larger share of housing that has 20 or more units (15%) compared to 6% in the county and 9% in the state. In addition, duplexes comprised over 8% of Middletown’s housing and tri- or fourplexes were over 7% of housing in the city.

**Figure 12: Estimated Number of Housing Units in Middletown, 2010-2017**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

**Figure 13: Percent of Housing by Type, Middletown, Middlesex County, and Connecticut, 2017**



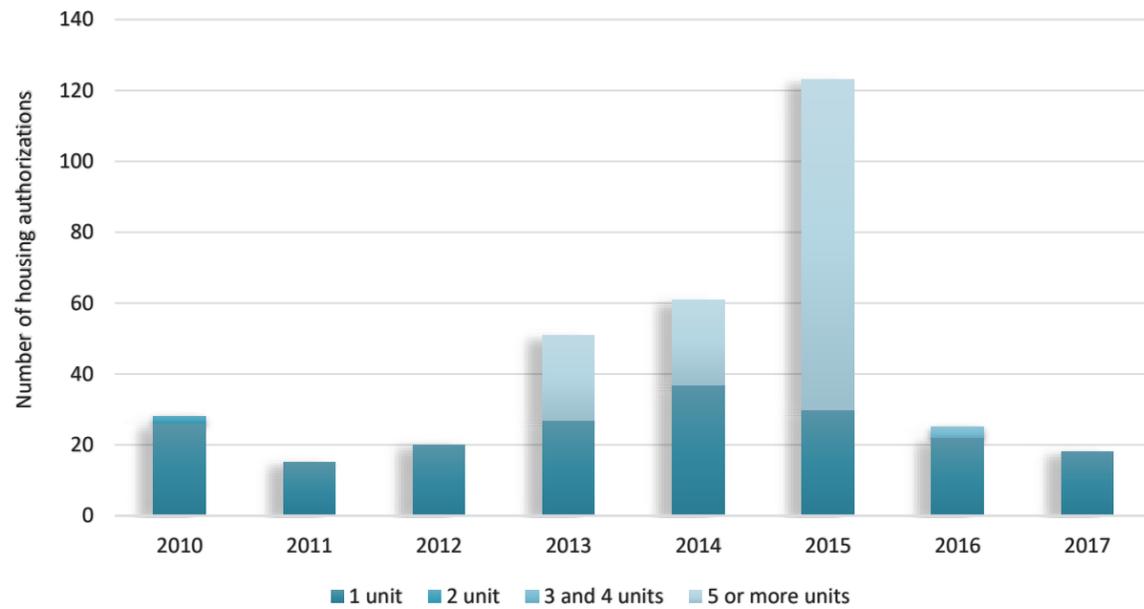
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

Since 2010, there have been over 300 authorizations for new housing issued for Middletown (Figure 13). Over half of these authorizations were for single-unit housing (195 authorizations, 57%). Another 41% of the authorizations were for housing of five units or more (141 authorizations), so there were very few authorizations for two-, three-, or four-unit housing. This suggests that the focus of housing in Middletown

for the near term will continue to be single-family units or larger multi-family complexes.

**As a more urban jurisdiction, Middletown has a higher share of housing that is renter-occupied (47%) compared to the state (33%) and, especially, Middlesex County (26%; Figure 14).**

**Figure 14: Housing Authorizations by Number of Housing Units in Middletown, 2010-2017**



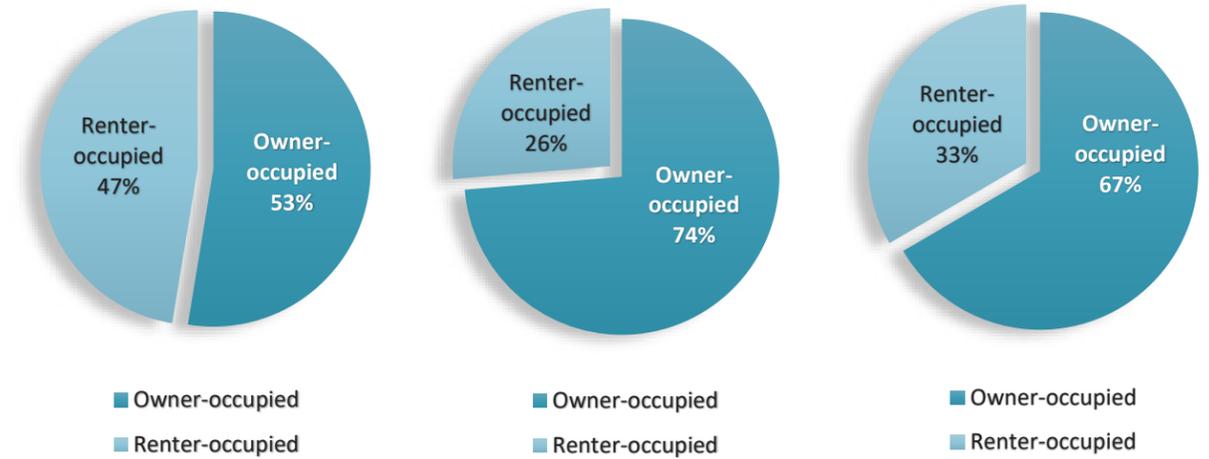
**Source:** Connecticut Department of Housing and Community Development, Connecticut New Housing Authorizations by Town.

**The value of owner-occupied housing in Middletown tends to be lower than in the county or the state (Figure 15).**

In 2017, almost three-quarters of owner-occupied housing in the city was valued under \$300,000, compared to 55% in the county and 58% in Connecticut overall. As such, Middletown also had a smaller share of owner-occupied housing valued over \$500,000 (2%), compared to the county (11%) and the state (16%). The median owner-occupied home value in Middletown (\$228,500) was also lower than in the county (\$283,700) and state (\$270,100).

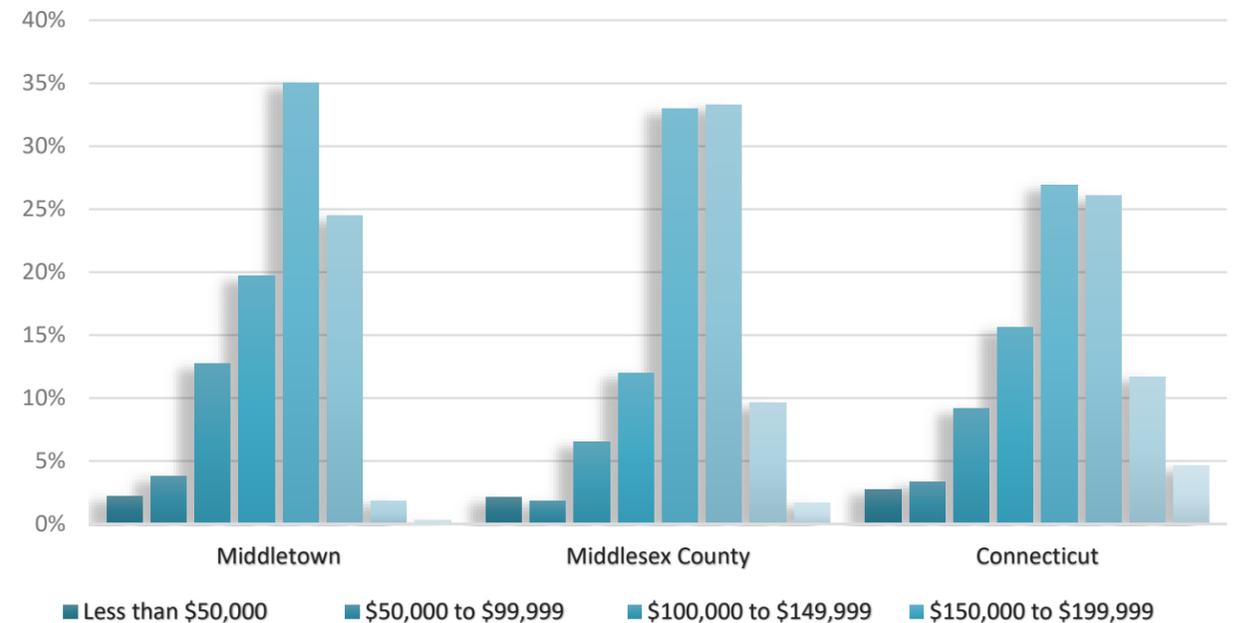
The median value of owner-occupied housing in Middletown was highest in Census Tract 6802, the southernmost tract in the city (Figure 16). This was the only tract in the city where owner-occupied housing has an average value over \$300,000. Housing in six of the other tracts was between \$200,000 and \$299,999, while the value of housing in the downtown tracts tended to be under \$200,000. Census Tract 5413 had the lowest median value of owner-occupied housing, which was \$121,800.

**Figure 15: Share of Housing that Is Owner vs Renter-occupied in Middletown, Middlesex County, and Connecticut, 2017**



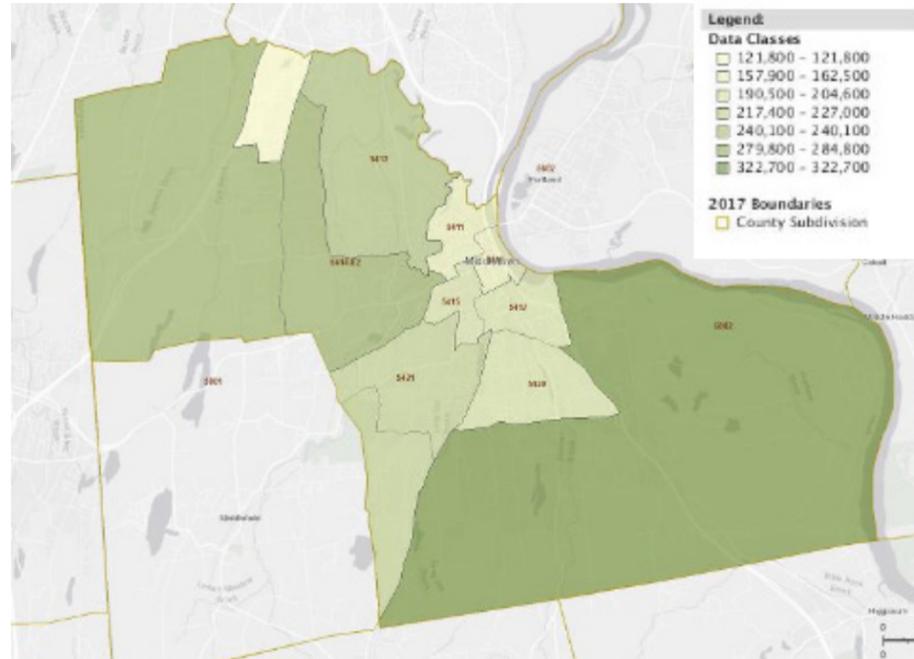
**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

**Figure 16: Average Value of Owner-Occupied Housing, in Middletown, Middlesex County, and Connecticut, 2017**



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

**Figure 19: Middletown Gross Rent by Census Tract, 2017**



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

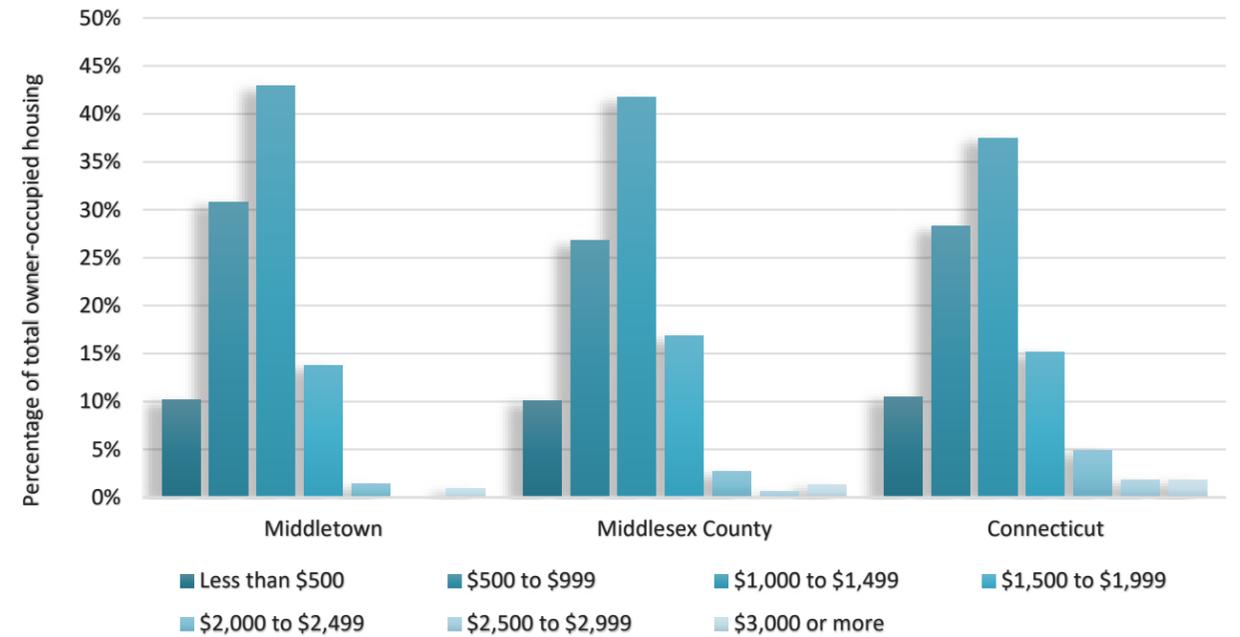
The price of renter-occupied housing in Middletown was slightly lower than in Middlesex County or Connecticut as a whole (Figure 17). In Middletown, 84% of gross rents were under \$1,500, compared to 79% of rents in Middlesex County and 76% of rents in the state. Moreover, the share of rents between \$500 and \$999 and between \$1,000 and \$1,500 were larger in Middletown than in the county or the state. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, median gross rent in Middletown was \$1,094 in 2017, lower than median rent in Middlesex County (\$1,132) and the state (\$1,123).

Median gross rent was lowest in Census Tract 5416, a downtown Census tract where median rent was \$779 (Figure 18). Median rents were also below \$1,000 in three other tracts: 5411 (\$947), 5417 (\$873), and 5421 (\$877). Median gross rent was highest in Census Tract 5414.01, the tract on the northwest side of the city.

Almost 20% of homeowners with a mortgage and just over 12% of owners without a mortgage in Middletown spent more than 35% of their income on housing in 2017 (Figure 19). These homeowners could therefore be classified as “housing burdened,” suggesting concerns about housing affordability in a community. These were smaller shares of homeowners than in the state, however, in which 25% of owners with a mortgage and 18% of those without a mortgage spent over 35% of their income on housing. Renters typically spend a greater share of their income on housing, and this holds for Middletown as well, although renters in the city also tended to be less housing burdened than those in the state as a whole – 36% of renters in Middletown and 43% of renters in Connecticut paid over 35% of their income on housing.

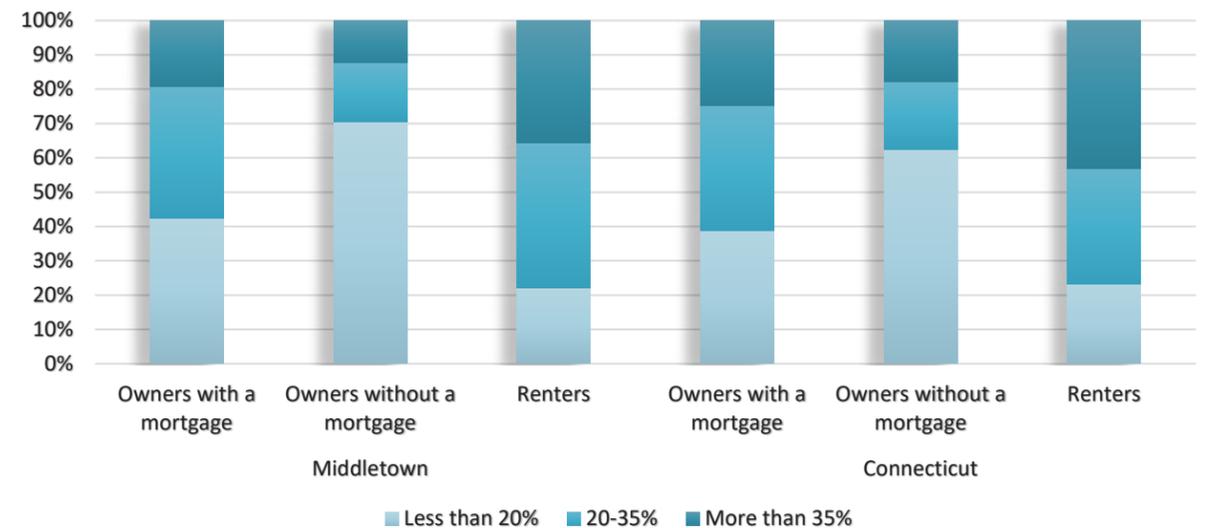


**Figure 18: Gross Rent in Middletown, Middlesex County, and Connecticut, 2017**



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

**Figure 20: Housing Affordability in Middletown and Connecticut, 2017**



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five Year Estimates.

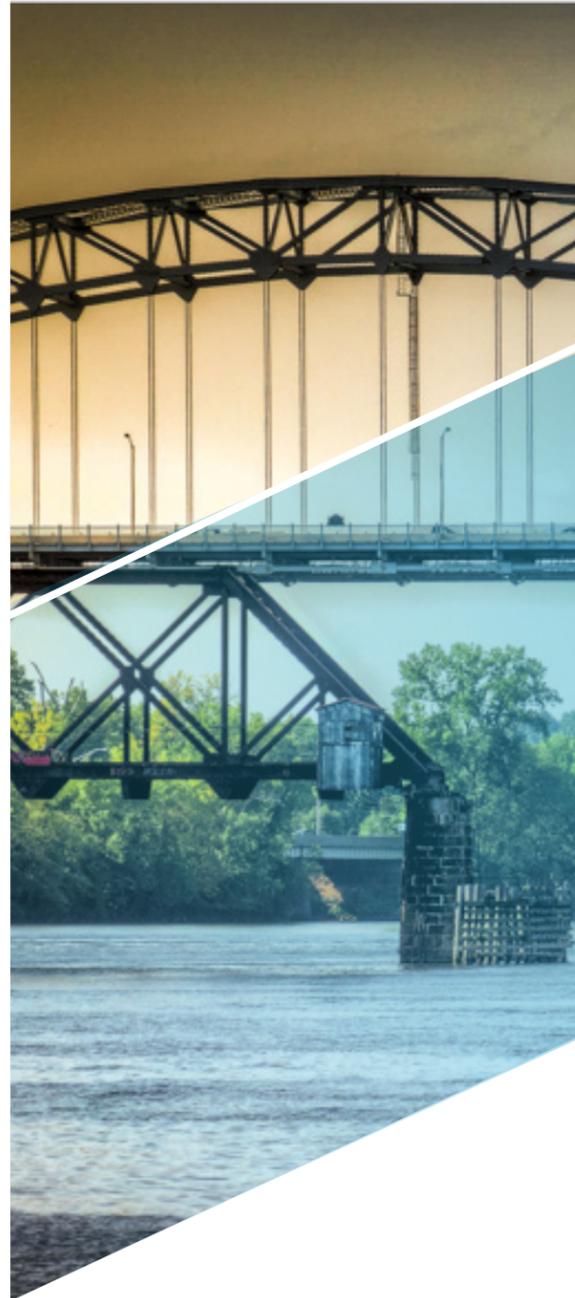
# CONCLUSION

Middletown's recent past and near future suggest a continued pattern of uneven growth across the city that varies slightly from what is occurring in Middlesex County and in Connecticut. The key findings about population, income, economics, and housing in Middletown are:

- 1.** Middletown's population grew 43% from 1960 to 2010 and is projected to continue growing through 2040, although population estimates from 2010 to 2015 show a generally flat population level and slight declines in 2016 and 2017.
- 2.** Median household income and per capita income in Middletown were less than median household and per capita incomes in Middlesex County and Connecticut.
- 3.** Middletown has seen an increase in the number of jobs in the city from 2010 to 2017. The largest industry was Health Care and Social Assistance, and this industry also saw faster than average growth in the number of jobs during that time.
- 4.** The educational attainment among adults age 25 and over in Middletown was approximately the same as in the county and the state, with only small variations at each attainment level.
- 5.** Middletown residents tended to work in cities and towns to the north and south of Middletown, while workers in the city tended to reside in towns and cities near Middletown.
- 6.** Middletown's equalized net grand list has not recovered to its pre-Great Recession value, with losses in the value of both residential and personal property. The value of taxable commercial/ industrial/ and public utility property has increased.
- 7.** As with many cities in Connecticut, Middletown has a substantial amount of nontaxable property, which increases fiscal stresses on the city's budget.
- 8.** The amount of housing in Middletown has risen slightly faster than population growth, and most of the city's housing tends to be single-family units or large multi-family complexes.
- 9.** The value of owner-occupied housing and the price of renter-occupied housing in Middletown were lower than in the county or state, although both owners and renters were less likely to pay over 35% of their income on housing compared to owners and renters in the state as a whole.
- 10.** Middletown's population, income, and housing have not been distributed evenly across the city's Census tracts. In general, the tracts further from downtown tend to have smaller populations, lower incomes and higher poverty rates, and lower owner-occupied housing values and lower median gross rent for renter-occupied housing.



# VISION STATEMENT



## WE ENVISION A MIDDLETOWN THAT IS **CONNECTED.**

Our neighborhoods and our neighbors will be tied ever more closely together through improvements to our multi-modal transportation networks, roadways, sidewalks, trails, and bike paths. Our government and our institutions will increase engagement within the community and communicate through numerous media to encourage participation, input and feedback. Our public services and infrastructure will be improved and designed to function in a manner that promotes access and works to enhance the overall quality of life for the people of Middletown.

## WE ENVISION A MIDDLETOWN THAT IS **SUSTAINABLE.**

Our City will be a leader in sustainable energy, resources, and development, committing itself to both environmental conservation and social equity. We will prioritize our network of parks and public spaces, with a focus on celebrating and protecting the Connecticut River and other waterways and watershed areas. Our farmlands and open spaces will grow as environmental and cultural assets. Redevelopment, re-use of existing resources, and a concentration of investment on areas of existing infrastructure will be prioritized.

## WE ENVISION A MIDDLETOWN THAT IS **GROWING.**

We envision a Middletown that is GROWING. Our community will strive to assist our businesses to prosper and expand, and to welcome a wide variety of new businesses to our core commercial and industrial areas. Our City will continue to be a champion of culture and commerce, becoming an ever-more important innovative regional center. The City will strive to maintain the Historic Character of its Main Street while increasing economic development within Downtown, as well as extending growth opportunities throughout the City and along the Riverfront. A diversity of new housing opportunities will welcome new residents, including young graduates and families, empty nesters and retirees, along with that an ever-brighter tapestry of cultures.

## WE ENVISION A MIDDLETOWN THAT IS **HEALTHY.**

The City will focus on policies and practices that ensure its residents enjoy clean air, clean water, and pollution-free streets and public places. Access to healthy and affordable foods will be enabled by strengthening our community services, supporting our agricultural sector, and focusing on all aspects of the food system. Ensuring that all residents have the opportunity to exercise, seek wellness, and remove obstacles to physical and mental health is a critical mission for the City.

## WE ENVISION A MIDDLETOWN THAT IS **VIBRANT.**

We envision a Middletown that is VIBRANT. Our City will be a treasured home for our current and future residents and a beacon of culture, resources, and activity that draws visitors from around the state and region. Through partnerships between the City, residents, anchor institutions, and private businesses, we will, our parks, schools, libraries, and community facilities will be accessible, welcoming, inclusive, and responsive to the community's needs. Our government and community will join to partner with our business leaders to maintain a friendly and lively Main Street and Riverfront, while working to expand important extensions to neighborhood commercial areas.



# MIDDLETOWN IS GROWING

While a community can control growth around the margins, through things like residential density controls in Zoning Regulations, the great majority of the growth or contraction of a community is guided by national and even global markets. The greatest municipal Plan of Conservation & Development ever written in Connecticut probably did not move the needle a great deal in terms of attracting (or discouraging) new residents or businesses, while the most poorly constructed Plan would not have slowed the tide of residents and jobs in a meaningful way. What a good Plan can do, however, is help a community define and refine its self-identity, tell a story to the outside world about its priorities, and help organize a series of actions that can shape the community's response to the market winds that are likely to blow. With that as a framework, it is important to establish that Middletown is a thriving small city with a broad and diverse economic portfolio.



»» 04

## WHERE ARE WE?

At the crossroads of and reflecting Connecticut, it is a mix of development densities from a highly urbanized downtown to lightly settled residential areas and broad swaths of unbroken forest blocks. In a demographic era in which the population of Connecticut is projected to be relatively flat and the population of Middlesex County is likely to continue a gradual decline, Middletown is likely to grow. As noted in Figure 3 of the Demographics and Trends chapter, population estimates by the Connecticut Data Collaborative anticipate that Middletown's growth will be steady (if not dramatic) over the next decade and will likely top 50,000 residents within the next five years. Similarly, the growth of jobs in Middletown has been steady and positive, and at a much higher rate than both Middlesex County and Connecticut in general.



The wide market and demographic trends over the next decade will be shaped dramatically by two key cohorts – broadly defined as the Baby Boomers and Millennials. Baby Boomers, those Americans born between 1945-1964, make up nearly 80 million people, and by the end of the next decade, will represent the single largest group of senior citizens and retirees the nation has ever seen. At the other end, the Millennial generation (1985-2004), also approximately 80 million strong, will quickly make up the largest cohort of the working population, and will be establishing families and moving into leadership positions. The decisions made by these two cohorts will affect the fates of communities like Middletown. It seems clear from recent trends that these groups are embracing more compact, active urban settings with a vibrant diversity of experiences and cultures, outdoor amenities, a reduced dependence on cars, a variety of housing choice, and the opportunity to make a difference locally. These trends are not universal, nor are they permanent. Over the next decade, however, there are few communities in Connecticut that are better positioned than Middletown to appeal to and welcome these potential residents, visitors, and workers.

The 2010 Plan of Conservation & Development contained a great deal of analysis and discussion about population growth, based on a future build-out scenario that projected an ultimate population of approximately 65,000 residents. The final Plan, based on public sentiment, recommended a slower, tighter pace of growth that did not encourage changes to regulations that would encourage higher densities of residential development. That Plan was largely developed in the days prior to the Great Recession of 2009-11, when Connecticut's growth trajectory was markedly different, and in a demographic environment where the interests and lifestyle preferences of Millennials and retiring Boomers was quite as evident. This next decade will be quite different from the last. Middletown can and should grow, but it must encourage and guide this growth carefully and equitably. It the goal of this Plan to both embrace and prepare for this growth, creating a Middletown that embraces its diversity of experience, landscape, and culture.

# WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING?

Stakeholder and public input gathered at the PoCD charrette, survey, and listening sessions focused on various aspects of the Downtown experience. Middletown is seen as a vibrant and diverse regional asset that has not yet realized the significant development and activity potential that most of the public perceives.

Stakeholder and public input gathered at the PoCD charrette, survey, and listening sessions focused on various aspects of the Downtown experience. Middletown is seen as a vibrant and diverse regional asset that has not yet realized the significant development and activity potential that most of the public perceives.

There was a great deal of discussion and attention to the issue of parking in the Downtown core, but the opinion was not unanimous in one particular direction. While the public clearly did not like the large swaths of surface parking, there was still a clear sentiment that the availability of convenient public parking was a priority. Moving away from surface parking to

structured parking, and developing a clear plan for parking demand, location, and management was a popular approach.

The details of the downtown experience were also of high priority. Focusing on cleaning up and improving tenancy in vacant and under-used buildings, investing in the streetscape and gateway intersections, supporting arts and culture, and the pedestrian environment were all closely related suggestions. Installation of a municipal broadband network, improving circulation via sidewalk upgrades and transit connections, and working with neighboring communities to improve the heart of Middletown as a “regional downtown” were also mentioned.

s Public access life families trails proximity eat shops Centrally located also state options  
 unique Everything One thing cultural walks life rural scene Wesleyan events  
 open space surrounded many real parks one areas love living culture  
 around diverse walk Diversity people urban businesses  
 Wesleyan University community library love close  
 downtown spaces restaurants Diversity population  
 diversity need Main Street small town feel  
 people walkable Location great restaurants city good  
 Middletown variety town Lots great interesting Main St  
 variety restaurants feel stores River etc things nature live time mix Sense community  
 schools Arts community downtown area dining options residents combination  
 Russell Library Central location food places home within character Focus opportunities  
 small activities improving neighborhoods



Supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs, connecting with Wesleyan as a business-development engine, and adding a variety of entertainment options that would extend the hours and variety of activity were all noted as ways to boost the vibrance of the downtown environment.

There was significant agreement on the need for additional housing downtown, of many types. Several residents mentioned the City’s study of targeting an additional 1,000 housing units downtown, discussing how the increased population would drive demand for services, restaurants, and retail, creating a more stable downtown economy. Others focused on the need for these housing units to be affordable, attractive to millennials and young professionals, and provide walkable access to recreation and commercial amenities.

Both for housing and for general commercial development, there was a strong focus on reuse and redevelopment of historic resources. While there were several comments about the relative unattractiveness of the gateways to Middletown, particularly from Route 9, there was agreement that more efforts and resources should be put into revitalization of existing buildings and brownfield properties, that reflect the historic fabric of the City rather than focusing on building from scratch. The variety of opinions and approaches to use and access to the Riverfront closely reflected the variety of ways the City has used the Connecticut River over the centuries. Whether the use is commercial, recreational, residential, or institutional being advocated, there was near-unanimity about the need to improve access to the River, for all users. The plans to revise Route 9 should include a strong, convenient, pedestrian-focused bridge connecting Downtown with the waterfront. **Existing roadway access points, particularly Union Street, should be strengthened and made more welcoming, particularly as a pedestrian corridor.** Refining and drawing from the multiple riverfront studies that have been conducted over the past decade, the City, the public believes, should take an incremental approach and increase access and activity at the River gradually but steadily.



# WHAT ARE THE BIG IDEAS?

## 1. The nature of the changes to Route 9 are critical to how Middletown grows.

As the primary artery connecting Middletown with the rest of Connecticut, Route 9 has played an outsized role in how the City is perceived to visitors, potential residents, and investors. With the Connecticut River on one side, and an awkward collection of uses and the back-sides of buildings on the other, this “gateway” to Middletown leaves much room for improvement, even without consideration of the long-ago decision to forego traditional divided-highway interchanges for traffic lights. The long-discussed plans by the Connecticut DOT are nearing the point where final decisions will need to be made, and the direction of the renovations to Route 9 through the core of Middletown will dramatically impact the City’s trajectory for growth over the next two decades. The City and its key stakeholders must be active in ensuring that the Route 9 plans both facilitate connection to the Connecticut River and increase efficiency of travel to and through Middletown.



Currently, congestion from the traffic lights creates an undesirable condition that negatively impacts economic productivity, environmental degradation, and a significantly negative perception of traveling to and through Middletown. While elimination of the lights and conversion to a more traditional interchange approach will require some adjustment and hardship for the new offramp/access areas, including displacement of some residential areas, the greater good of Middletown will be served through this reconfiguration. The City’s leaders will need to speak with as much unanimity as possible to work with the DOT and the neighbors to ensure that this decision and transition is handled appropriately and that environmental justice concerns are front-and-center. At the same time as the highway improvements to Route 9 will make accessing Middletown neighborhoods and businesses a more pleasant and efficient process, this infrastructure investment represents the most significant opportunity to integrate

Middletown’s Downtown core with the Riverfront in many decades. The addition of a broad, expansive pedestrian plaza spanning Route 9 and creating a well-designed, friendly, and active connection can function as a focal point and opportunity for reinvention of the perception of Middletown for residents, businesses, and visitors alike. The anchor institutions and stakeholders in Middletown can simply not waste this key opportunity.

## 2. Build on a strong foundation of anchor institutions to drive growth.

The “Innovation Places” program as established and defined by the quasi-public institution Connecticut Innovations focuses on the power of anchor institutions to drive economic and community development through creative collaboration and fostering of innovation. The permanence of anchor

institutions creates an environment of stability and genuine investment in the success of the community, but only through close partnership can that investment result in City-wide benefits. Middletown, perhaps more than any other community of its size, has a wealth of highly-committed anchors, led by the City, Wesleyan University, Middlesex Health, Pratt & Whitney, Liberty Bank, and the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce. Linking these institutions closely together in a shared mission of investment and improvement in Middletown can lead to substantial development gains.

Beginning with continued high-level conversation between decision-makers at all of these institutions, a coordinated investment can be made in the Downtown area, locating jobs and housing that will drive activity and growth in related sectors such as retail and restaurants. Shared interest in amenities such as recreation facilities, trails, boathouses, and cultural centers can result in substantial public-private

investments. From a business-growth standpoint, the Middletown Entrepreneurial Workspace Plus (MEWS+) initiative has already demonstrated the strong potential of this partnership in fostering start-ups and encouraging young entrepreneurs. While headquartered at the Chamber of Commerce property, the MEWS+ partnership has already successfully incubated businesses that have grown and taken over larger spaces in the Downtown area. Building on this approach, the Chamber and the City, backed by the other key anchors, should continue to work closely to equally split economic development efforts between recruitment of new business for infill and new development and fostering of growth and expansion among existing business community.

Finally, engaging the creative and vibrant atmosphere of Wesleyan in particular is key to continue positioning Middletown as an attractive, vibrant small city.



### 3. Focus on matching available development or redevelopment sites with increasing demand.

While Connecticut’s overall business environment has been slower than other states in its economic recovery following the “Great Recession” begun in 2008, development in the City of Middletown has been relatively strong. Input from the City and the Chamber of Commerce has indicated that Middletown has actually been supply-limited for larger commercial and industrial sites over the last several years.

The conversion of the former Aetna campus off Industrial Park Drive, which in many similar communities in Connecticut would have been an idle burden, to the FedEx distribution facility is emblematic of Middletown’s appeal to businesses seeking prime sites. The central location of Middletown, its access to major highways and transportation corridors, its business-friendly reputation, and the prior availability of development land has served it well.

There seems to be a range of housing including apartments, houses and supported housing.

—Anonymous Middletown Resident

The challenge of the next decade in this sector is to seek to both maximize the remaining commercially- and industrially-developable land and to minimize the conversion of this land to residential development. The focus on development in specific areas will also have the likely result of relieving development pressure on other, environmentally sensitive property, including portions of the Maromas area that could be preserved as open space and forest land.



### Several areas of the City should be focal points for increased development and redevelopment capacity-building.

While it is also a gateway to some of the important natural and environmentally sensitive areas of Middletown, the Saybrook Road (Route 154) corridor, south of Brooks Street and the Summerhill Apartments, holds significant potential for redevelopment. It is currently marked by disconnected and marginal land uses that could be both upgraded to more vibrant and better-connected uses. The Saybrook Road corridor is within the existing/proposed sewer service area nearly all the way to Airport Road. Ensuring that there is both capacity in this system and sufficient water utility provision will help facilitate the expansion of commercial uses along this corridor.

Land between River Road and Silver Street, primarily owned by State of Connecticut, could be a very important mixed-use redevelopment property that should be master-planned, perhaps in association with public-private partnership with a highly-qualified developer. The City should be in regular contact with the State about potential future disposition. Similarly, the City should work with property owners of existing and potential development sites along Middle Street in the Westfield section of the City. While there are numerous productive sites along this important commercial corridor, there remain several smaller properties that could be coordinated and, in some places, combined to create attractive destinations for new construction.

Middletown is home to two of the State’s fewer than 75 federally-designated Opportunity Zones. These areas, Census Tracts 5416 (Downtown) and 5411 (North End) are eligible to participate in this program that provides capital gains tax relief to encourage investment in development and redevelopment. The City should act quickly and decisively to assist in the establishment of an Opportunity Zone Investment Fund, but should also act as a strong guiding force, both through participation in decision-making and through Zoning Regulation control. There is no benefit to the City to simply chase investment funds without agreeing that the specific type of investment and development project is appropriate for the neighborhood in which it may be proposed.



#### 4. The focus for new housing development should reflect desired development patterns.

A few factors are at work that all point to a certain type of housing development: There is a general sentiment that areas for larger-scale commercial and industrial development should not be converted to residential property; Sewer and water lines that would be necessary for higher-density residential development should not be extended much (if at all) beyond existing limits; Infill development and redevelopment is highly desirable in the City's Opportunity Zones, particularly in the North End; **Additional housing downtown would increase the attractiveness and stability of new retail and restaurant development, as well as adding vibrance; and Suburban and low-density areas of Middletown should be generally preserved.**



Where prior PoCD recommendations focused on limiting the population growth of Middletown, with a target of 50,000-55,000 residents, there is now a general sentiment that growth is welcome, so long as it is properly managed. The focus of this housing growth should be a blend of higher density market-rate units and affordable units, particularly in the North End, Downtown and Riverfront areas where public infrastructure is available to support it.



**The management of this housing growth includes a number of factors: There should be a focus on public amenities or access to City parks, trails, and resources, and Zoning Regulations should reflect these elements.** In other words, Zoning processes and Regulations should be streamlined, but with a focus on good design and a permitted development density reflective of the specific capacity of the targeted neighborhoods; The City, while encouraging housing growth in core areas, should not be too eager to provide public subsidy or tax relief to potential developers. Market demand should provide the majority of the incentive for development projects; Housing development should be mixed-income, and mixed-use where appropriate to encourage re-use of existing buildings; and Continued support should be given to existing neighborhoods in lower-density areas with remaining development capacity to ensure that any additional development fit into the community context and be provided with sufficient amenities and safe access to recreational and civic resources.



#### 5. The Riverfront is the best opportunity to demonstrate a balance between conservation and development.

The Riverfront is the best opportunity to demonstrate a balance between conservation and development. As pointed out in the 2014 Project for Public Spaces (PPS) report, "A Placemaking Plan for the Middletown Riverfront," the Middletown riverfront is at an important turning point. After decades of industrialization, neglect, and the blockade created by Route 9, the City is rallying around the realization that the Connecticut River is one of the most important resources to the future self-definition of Middletown. The potential realignment of Route 9, the decommissioning of the wastewater treatment plan on River Road, the increased focus on recreational and environmental amenities, and the natural

economic appeal and resource of the extraordinary shoreline available to Middletown have converged. The result is the rare and important opportunity to leverage the Riverfront as a turning point. It is critical that the City build upon and coordinate existing and developing plans to affect access to the River and take advantage of this transformational window.

The City must actively ensure that Route 9 realignment plans include a strong and friendly pedestrian connection between the Riverfront and Downtown. The ideal scenario would be a pedestrian overpass, with a high level of on-bridge activity (plantings, kiosks, vendors, public art).

With the active development of the downtown area over the last 15 years, there should be concern and action for more parking to help these businesses continue to succeed.

A secondary option would be to enhance and expand the existing tunnel to improve the connections to and through with signage, landscaping, lighting, artwork, security, and maintenance. The broad accessibility to bicycle, pedestrian, disabled, and transit-dependent users of the River across Route 9 is critical, as parking availability will be a significant limitation to development.

**Beyond the primary connection between Downtown and the Harbor Park area, the City should focus on improving existing access points.** Union Street, Walnut Street, Eastern Drive, and River Road itself are all neglected resources, particularly where pedestrian and bicycle access are concerned. As plans for Riverfront development proceed, the City should focus on improving the roadway access, including signage, sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, and other wayfinding enhancements to encourage visitors and residents from different areas to conveniently arrive along the River.

While the PPS report provides an excellent and appropriate template focused on increasing public access and activity at numerous points along the River, **the City should seek to engage the involvement of both its anchor institutions and private developers to create the ultimate plan for redevelopment of the Riverfront.** Opportunities for public/private partnerships, including new boathouses, marinas, shared parking, and public amenities within private development projects, should be prioritized. While the most direct access to and along the River itself should be maintained for the general public, development and redevelopment of near-River areas (including the soon-to-be decommissioned wastewater treatment facility, OMO site, Jackson Corrugated site, and State-owned land southerly of Riverfront Park, should have a strong private investment component. Both refining the final recommendations of the PPS report, including conversion of some of the public-space recommendations into hard engineering plans, and establishing the policy and regulatory framework to enable private investment are key next steps.

## 6. Parking Downtown is a management issue, not a supply issue.

In any busy central business district, parking availability is one of the most frequent concerns of the restaurants, retail shops, and other businesses located along the Main Street. Downtown Middletown is no exception, and a focus on parking was an oft-repeated theme of the public process for this Plan.

Upon investigation, it appears that the perceived dearth of publicly-available parking is one of perception, not reality. Current parking availability within a short walk of all Downtown destinations is sufficient, but wayfinding and management are not appropriate to alert visitors to proximate parking and present a pleasant walk between parking and destination. Appropriate, well-designed wayfinding signage and enhanced walking pathways will encourage use of slightly more distant spaces. As activity in the Downtown area increases, there will be a naturally heightened demand for even more distant parking. A Downtown circulator trolley would allow for the use of remote parking areas, particularly for full-time employees of Downtown businesses and free up more central parking areas. This trolley could also include stops at Wesleyan, Middlesex Hospital, and

the Riverfront to knit together multiple parking- or vehicle-limited areas. Parking decks, as a compromise between full garages and expanded surface lots, could help add capacity at a more reasonable cost to existing parking areas. Finally, the next decade will see the first opportunity for autonomous vehicles (AV) to impact the way in which people travel and use long-term parking areas. It is possible, though far from guaranteed, that even as activity grows in the Downtown core, parking demand may actually decrease because of AV usage will allow shared vehicles to be used instead of parked. The City, along with Middletown Transit, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Department of Transportation should monitor this growth closely and develop a rational and phased approach to plan for future scenarios.



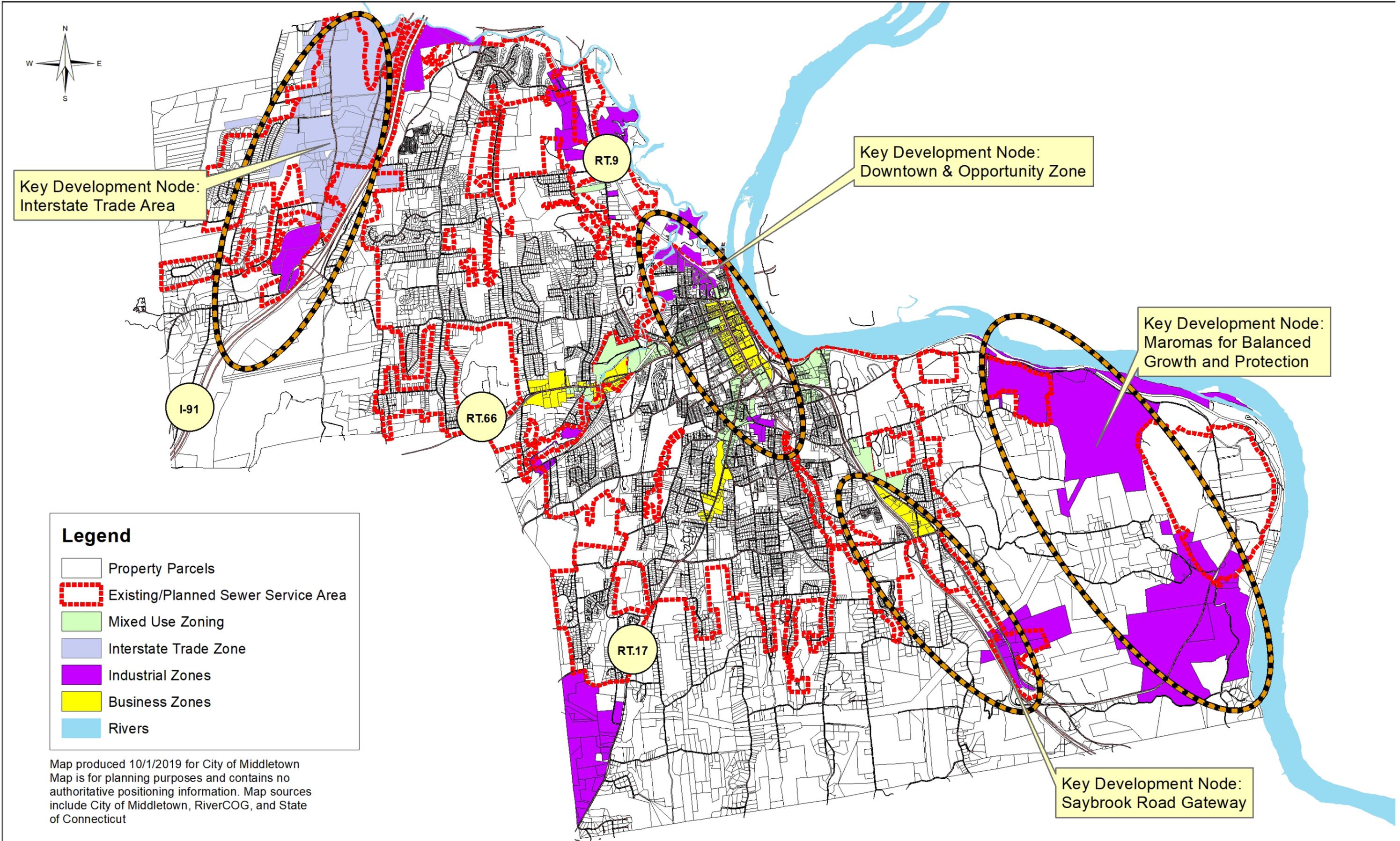
# WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

The following recommendations will allow the City to implement its vision for a Growing Middletown.



- a. Actively engage the CT DOT and Middletown stakeholders on final designs for realignment of Route 9, seeking to improve access to Downtown and the Riverfront, increase efficiency of travel through Middletown, and minimize displacement and environmental justice concerns;
- b. Develop plans for enhancement and maintenance of pedestrian crossing (bridge or tunnel) of Route 9 to ensure a high-quality, welcoming experience;
- c. Convene and participate in extensive public engagement and outreach to explain and assist in implementation of final plans for Route 9 realignment;
- d. Review Zoning Regulations for areas affected (accessed or compromised) by Route 9 realignment to encourage compatible development or redevelopment;
- e. Formalize regular communications between City and key anchor institutions, facilitated through the Chamber of Commerce, to align and coordinate on major goals and investment plans;
- f. Build upon MEWS+ and develop additional templates for public-private partnership for business growth and public resources;
- g. Work with anchor institutions and Downtown Business District to maintain a focus on promotion of businesses, redevelopment of underutilized properties, and enhancement of public amenities and infrastructure in Main Street area;
- h. Balance economic development efforts between recruitment of new businesses and retention/expansion of existing businesses;
- i. Work with Middlesex Health and Pratt & Whitney to encourage the location of complimentary health care, wellness, engineering, and technology businesses in Middletown, including expanded housing opportunities for employees;
- j. Develop in-depth understanding of available properties for development and redevelopment in key commercial/industrial corridors and nodes, including preparation of development prospectus and informational assistance to potential developers and siting professionals;
- k. Review Zoning Regulations in key Business and Industrial areas to ensure a streamlined permitting pathway for appropriate uses and developments;
- l. Review Zoning Regulations to ensure development density, including housing and mixed-use creates a vibrant level of activity in the core, within existing sewer-service areas, and is supportive of Downtown;
- m. Maintain existing extent of public sewer and water infrastructure and continue investments in improvements of these public utilities;
- n. Review Design Standards within Zoning Regulations to ensure development and redevelopment is harmonious with the existing neighborhood context and provides strong connections to public amenities and bicycle/pedestrian resources;
- o. Convene regular schedule of community conversations with neighborhood groups to ensure that public investment and regulatory systems are supportive of maintenance of high quality residential areas;
- p. Participate in efforts to fund and promote Opportunity Zone Investment Fund while maintaining strong vision for appropriate development within the City's two Opportunity Zones;
- q. Advance the vision of the PPS Riverfront Placemaking Plan by developing engineering-level drawings for public parks and development of a public-private partnership approach to the redevelopment of the former wastewater pollution control plant;
- r. Enhance, through bicycle/pedestrian improvements and wayfinding, existing access points to the Connecticut River;
- s. Actively partner with developers of historic brownfield properties, seeking assistance for cleanup, regulatory relief, and preservation of key architectural features;
- t. Revise Zoning Regulations to encourage and enable redevelopment of historic industrial properties in the Riverfront area to focus on residential, mixed use, and public amenities;
- u. Engage in coordinated discussions between City, Middletown Transit, Chamber of Commerce, key employers, and DOT on remote parking and Downtown Circulator Trolley;
- v. Develop wayfinding and parking pathway signage program to improve access to alternative parking areas in Downtown core.

# City of Middletown Plan of Conservation & Development 2020: Middletown is Growing



## Legend

-  Property Parcels
-  Existing/Planned Sewer Service Area
-  Mixed Use Zoning
-  Interstate Trade Zone
-  Industrial Zones
-  Business Zones
-  Rivers

Map produced 10/1/2019 for City of Middletown  
 Map is for planning purposes and contains no  
 authoritative positioning information. Map sources  
 include City of Middletown, RiverCOG, and State  
 of Connecticut



# MIDDLETOWN IS HEALTHY >>>

We envision a Middletown that is **HEALTHY**. The City will focus on policies and practices that ensure its residents enjoy clean air, clean water, and pollution-free streets and public places. Access to healthy and affordable foods will be enabled by strengthening our community services, retaining the productive capacity of our agricultural sector, and focusing on all aspects of the food system. Ensuring that all residents have the opportunity to exercise, seek wellness, and remove obstacles to physical and mental health is a critical mission for the City.



CLEAN AIR & WATER

POLLUTION CONTROL & MANAGEMENT

AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

PUBLIC HEALTH

PHYSICAL & MENTAL WELLNESS



>>> 05

- » Access to a local downtown grocery option (grocery store)
- » Fresh produce locally (regional farmers market)
- » Better connectivity for pedestrians (work with complete streets committee)
- » Maintain air quality
- » Prioritize and maintain water quality
- » Develop a Coginchaug River greenway  
(Develop standards for parcels within these areas to protect that waterway?)

# WHERE ARE WE?

In recent years, there has been a dramatic shift to encourage the overall wellbeing of residents within Connecticut and the United States. State and local agencies are working to promote healthy and active lifestyles and general mental wellbeing in part, because studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between physical health and mental wellness. But these campaigns have not been developed without demand. Multiple components must be cobbled together to ensure that residents in the City have the tools necessary to live a healthy lifestyle.



It is more important now than ever that residents and visitors to the City have the access and opportunity to walk, bike, run, swim or hike locally because Middletown has more to offer than simply driving downtown and leaving the vehicle in a parking space. It is also important that everyone should also have access to fresh and local food and be able to enjoy the City's air and water resources without concern.

Since the last Plan was developed, there has been a change in what people expect when they become members of a community. More and more, residents are seeking housing that allows for direct access to public amenities and the opportunity to leave their vehicles at home so they may walk or bike to their destination. This specifically presents a challenge as safe and complete access from residential areas to commercial nodes is not in place City-wide.

The Downtown core could be described as the most pedestrian friendly area within the City but there is much

work to be done to move the focus from automobiles to pedestrians. While significant improvements have been made to intersections and pedestrian "bump-outs," large sections of Main Street still include four travel lanes and two sets of angled parking stalls resulting in a road width in excess of 80 feet. The outcome is a Main Street where either side of the street is not integrated with the other. These qualities reflect historic planning trends in response to the demand that the automobile be prioritized. For many years, across Connecticut, the land use regulatory process focused on curb cuts, of parking counts, road widths, drive-throughs, and getting vehicles from point "A" to point "B" as fast as possible. While many of those components are still important when considering new development projects, the cumulative results of this focus are developments where pedestrian access and amenities, if they exist at all, feel like an afterthought. Bicycle racks behind buildings, benches that face the roadway and sidewalks to nowhere all contribute to an environment that has marginalized non-motorized users.



## Access to Healthy Food

Currently, access to healthy food is also a barrier for many Middletown residents who make be seeking to live a healthier lifestyle. According to the 2016 Middlesex Health Community Needs Assessment almost 8,000 residents in Middletown struggle with food security. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food security as having direct access to safe and nutritious foods. This problem has many pieces. It is partly a function of transportation, and the ability to move from place to place safely. It is also a matter of proximity to a full grocery store.

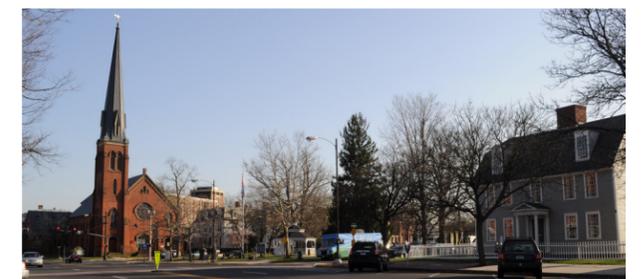
Across the Country there has also been an increase in the demand to be directly engaged in some way with the food we eat. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) along with the "Connecticut Grown" program have become immensely popular Statewide as more and more people become interested in where their food comes from. The demand for fresh and local produce will only increase in the coming years as the costs and uncertainty related to food imported from other areas goes up.

I've enjoyed watching the City improve over the last 25 years.



—Anonymous Middletown Resident

Development pressure throughout the City will never go away due to Middletown's unique function as a regional center. Because of this demand, it is increasingly important that air and water quality preservation, increased impervious ground coverage, and how specific development proposals promote or detract from Middletown's goal to maintain a healthy physical environment are considered.



# WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING?

Much of the input that was received throughout the visioning process relates back to a desire for future activities in Middletown to be planned at a more comprehensive level. Other portions of this plan outline and make recommendations related to land use applications, land acquisition and future development patterns. Some of the underlying themes based on what people feel is appropriate as part of those activities relate to a desire to foster a more healthy and complete lifestyle in Middletown.

Many of the comments made throughout the process tie back to a desire to have more local produce available directly from farmers if possible. There was a consensus between both listening sessions as well as the community charrettes that Middletown should work to turn portions of the City's existing parks into community gardens or small plot farming areas. The benefits cited for this activity during these sessions included fostering a sense of community, providing free access to fresh produce, economic development and reduced responsibilities on the municipal agencies that currently must maintain these areas.

Many participants prioritized Middletown becoming the host of a regional farmers market given that it already serves as a regional hub. Holding a weekly farmers market downtown would also help diversify the availability of fresh produce and groceries, specifically within the downtown area. Residents felt that in some cases, lack of complete and safe pedestrian connections to large groceries stores made access to healthier food options a barrier to those without personal transportation.

Pedestrian access was not only identified as something to be improved as it relates to local grocery options. It was also identified overall as something that become

a much larger component of development activities. Residents identified that it has become increasingly the case that patrons of restaurants, visitors to City parks and users of other Downtown amenities are choosing more frequently to travel to and from these locations on foot or via bicycle. In some sections of Main Street, the areas that have been delineated for pedestrians are not enjoyable and don't foster the interactions that the residents desire. As such, accommodations for all users and areas designed specifically for bicycles and pedestrians were of priority throughout the public input process. It was clear to residents that these types of improvements should be thoughtful and forward looking, not simply included when space and/or budget permitted.

Pedestrian access, specifically along the Riverfront was also of focus for many residents. It's not a new idea that many residents feel the area within Middletown along the Connecticut River is underutilized but specifically, many people felt that the River could be used to help foster, among other things, a healthier and more active lifestyle. Those who work in proximity to the River expressed a desire to walk during lunch or after work. Other residents felt that a bike trail currently planned elsewhere in Town could be moved to be routed along a portion of the River.



Regardless of the specific function of the River it was clear that pedestrian access for the purposes of outdoor recreation in some form was of unanimously important.

Be it for the Connecticut River or other water resources, across the board preserving water quality was unquestionably important. Respondents felt there were many things that should be done to achieve this including establishing River area greenway corridors, working to limit the discharge of runoff into area streams and rivers and promoting "no mow" areas

especially along roads without curbing to help filter roadway runoff. These efforts, however small were seen as necessary and important when it comes to Middletown doing its part to protect the resources within the City's limits.

Air quality was also of concern for many residents. Even with vast improvements over the last 10 years in reduced emissions and green energy solutions this area is still only considered to be a "moderate" ozone non-attainment area by the EPA (verify this). Residents reflected on the fact that the

previous PoCD did have a section related to air quality but some of the recommendations were very specific and not within the purview of the Planning and Zoning process so little progress was made. It was suggested that perhaps moving forward developments could be analyzed for their contribution to improving or degrading the air quality, and overall environmental impact. Rather than considering these applications for their economic benefits, we should also determine if they help to promote the Middletown residents' desire for a healthier community.

## What are People Saying?

Finally, another important comment that was made with the overall goal of improving the health of the residents of Middletown outlined the need for improved housing stock, especially in the North end of the City. Many of the housing units in that area are old, in disrepair and potentially unsafe. According to the State's 2014 Health Assessment, there is a strong correlation between housing that was built prior to 1960 and the likelihood its inhabitants will be subject to lead paint exposure. As of 2014, Middletown had between 4000 and 9000 dwellings units built prior to 1960.

Additional housing units was a topic that came up throughout many of the public input sessions. Some residents felt that additional housing units within close proximity to Main Street would help drive demand and increase business retention by creating a more stable population of customers within the Downtown core beyond just weekends. Included in those units should be housing that would be available to those residents currently living North of Main Street. It is important that all residents of Middletown have access to safe and healthy housing.

## What are the Big Ideas?

Decision makers should review development proposals first for access by non-motorized users and then for access by vehicles. Taking a stance that all new developments should first accommodate pedestrians will be easier said than done as it will require additional design and engineering however the long-term benefit will be well worth it as in many cases a City does not see redevelopment a site for multiple decades.

**Middletown can continue to be a regional center for good food.** Middletown is already known regionally as the place to go for food. On Main Street alone there are dozens of restaurants offering high quality, healthy food. However, more can be done to assure residents can gain access to fresh, high quality produce without having to go to a restaurant to get it. While the land directly adjacent to the Connecticut River contains immensely fertile soil, Middletown's developed nature doesn't provide much opportunity for large scale farming to occur here. However, what Middletown already does very well is serve as a regional hub for many of the lower Connecticut River Valley's activities.

# WHAT ARE THE BIG IDEAS?

**A healthy city includes businesses but more importantly residents.** Middletown is the City that it is today not only because of its vibrant and growing commercial sectors, but also because of the people who live there. The City should focus on and prioritize improvements to make Middletown healthier for its residents. Most importantly, prioritizing access for all non-motorized users throughout Middletown will be key in maintaining the City's commercial corridors. Through the development of a more complete pedestrian network, residents will have the opportunity to walk or bike to the places they wish to go rather than being forced to take a car or bus. This alone will help reduce emissions and traffic congestion while affording residents the opportunity to live healthier lifestyles.



Middletown is the City that it is today not only because of its vibrant and growing commercial sectors, but also because of the people who live there.

One activity that would drive economic vitality, promote regional agriculture and greatly improve the availability of fresh local produce would be for Middletown to become the host of a regional farmers' market. Due to the high costs related to growing and ultimately delivering fresh produce to buyers, farmers are eager to make this produce available in locations where they know it will sell. If the City were to work with Portland, Middlefield, Durham and Haddam or other area Towns to develop connections with local producers the City could host a farmers' market that would rival some of the largest already operating in Connecticut.

To further contribute to the accessibility of fresh and local produce the City can also promote a

community and small plot farming program. Some residents of Middletown do not have housing with available land for a small garden. Furthermore, there are areas within the City's existing parks that are underutilized and could be transformed into small community or neighborhood gardens. Many Towns in Connecticut have successfully developed these programs and they have served to help foster the participants sense of community while making fresh, local and low cost produce available nearby. Especially in a City such as Middletown where many of the housing units do not include access to an area suitable for a garden those residents would be well served to have access to this type of resource.

## What are the Big Ideas?

**The importance of clean air and water cannot be minimized.** Everyone knows that both air and water are finite resources that we can't simply make more of. While the entire State including Middletown is not in a position of being short on the availability of water there is certainly a lot more the City can do to be sure it's working toward maintaining and promoting improved water quality within the area's rivers and streams.



**A healthy lifestyle starts at home.** There is a large population of Middletown residents that live in old housing units that are in disrepair and potentially unsafe and in some cases blighted. There is a strong correlation, especially with young children (add data here) between the age and quality of the housing stock and the physical health of the inhabitant. Improving the quality of the housing stock in targeted areas will not only help to stimulate growth and investment, it will also increase the overall physical wellbeing of those residents currently residing in inadequate conditions. Through targeted redevelopment efforts the City can work with the property owners in this area to improve the living conditions of the dwelling units while also creating a more economically viable solution for owners.

The City, in this plan, will encourage the improvement of housing units, particularly those built prior to 1960, prioritize the preservation of water and air quality, promote access to fresh and local produce, facilitate increased pedestrian amenities and strive to ensure that no cohort of the Cities residents are underserved in these areas with the goal of ensuring that the physical environment of Middletown and those who live in it are healthy.



## Stormwater Management

One of the key ways this can be done is via managing stormwater. Any runoff generated by a property during a rain event if handled traditionally will eventually make its way into a small stream or river which will ultimately feed into the Connecticut River. The concern associated with this practice is that any pollutants that are picked up by that rainwater will eventually be transferred directly into the environment through the river. Furthermore, if specific site activities result in pollutants being deposited onto the ground the pollution to the areas resources will only be magnified. Luckily, the land use process can manage this. Through the development of protected greenways, the adoption and enforcement of Low Impact Development standards that specifically require the water to be renovated in some way before being released back into the ground will ensure that the City can do its part to help with this issue.

With each development application comes the chance to make an impact on the environment. While small scale residential projects don't necessarily produce as many emissions as large commercial or industrial operations there is still opportunity for these projects to contribute to Middletown's goal of making marked improvements to the local air and water quality. Land use approvals and regulations should reflect the importance of making sure land uses immediately adjacent to natural resources are compatible.

**A healthy city includes businesses but more importantly residents.**

**Middletown can continue to be a regional center for good food.**

**The importance of clean air and water cannot be minimized.**

**A healthy lifestyle starts at home.**

# WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

The following recommendations will allow the City to implement its vision for a Growing Middletown.

- a. Adjust the regulatory process so that site developments are required to be designed to accommodate all users including bicycles, pedestrians, and travelers via bus and car.
- b. Work with the Complete Streets Committee to prioritize key pedestrian connections that can be made to promote walkability.
- c. Work with the Commission on Conservation and Agriculture to start conversations with nearby Towns who might have local producers interested in participating in a regional farmers market.
- d. Consider the development of a Coginchaug River Greenway for official State designation
- e. Work with the City's Health Department and Middlesex Hospital to evaluate the benefits to creating a "Healthy City" Initiative
- f. Adopt the State Department of Health's "Health in all policies" approach to land use regulations to allow current and future Middletown residents the ability to live a healthy and active lifestyle.
- g. Expand upon the City's bicycle network by developing a standard procedure of including bike lanes any time a road is paved, reconstructed or re-stripped-provided road widths will support it.
- h. Work with the Commission on Conservation and Agriculture and City's Parks and Recreation Department to determine the availability and overall feasibility of creating multiple community gardens, particularly in lower-income and lower access areas.
- i. Incorporate into the zoning regulations that all new and substantially redeveloped commercial property reduce and/or eliminate stormwater runoff to the maximum extent practicable.
- j. Work with the City's Economic Development staff to promote and attract a new grocery store within Middletown's downtown core.
- k. Evaluate land use applications in close proximity to natural resources for overall compatibility and risk.
- l. Leverage proximity to downtown to promote and encourage the redevelopment of unsafe and/or unhealthy dwelling units, particularly in the Downtown area.