

Middletown Government Participation Guide



Version 2.0
February 2025

Table of Contents

Learn the Basics of Middletown's Government	Engage with the Common Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn about the City's Charter• Understand the difference between the Common Council, committees, commissions, and task forces• Browse the City's website• Read agendas, minutes, meeting recordings, and documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn about the Common Council• Reach out to Council members• Attend a Council meeting• Speak at a Council meeting• Attend a Common Council Community Public Meeting• Learn about how the Common Council makes decisions
Attend Committee Meetings	Get Involved in Committees
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can the public attend committee meetings?• Where do I attend a meeting?• How formal are meetings?• How long are meetings and how often do they happen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify a committee of interest• Connect with a committee• Attend meetings• Assess committee suitability• Engage in a project• Join a committee
Appendix	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Select committee and commission list by focus area• Terms and acronyms to know• Acknowledgements	

1. Learn the Basics of Middletown's Government

Middletown's government is responsible for making decisions that have a direct impact on residents and the community at large. This guide is designed to assist residents in understanding effective ways to engage with local government in the City of Middletown, CT. Whether actively participating in Middletown's numerous committees and commissions or expressing opinions at a Common Council meeting, individuals can contribute meaningfully to the City's decision-making processes.

A) Learn about the City's Charter

middletownct.gov/DocumentCenter/View/18589/Middletown-Charter---Nov-2020-PDF

What is the Charter?

The Charter is a comprehensive framework that governs the City's operations. Each chapter in the Charter addresses vital aspects of governance, including the structure of elections, the delineation of the duties and powers of elected officials, the establishment of City departments, municipal offices, financial management protocols, and more.

Note that certain aspects of local governance, such as building codes, are not solely governed by the City's Charter but are also dictated in part or entirely by state statutes.

How can I use it?

For residents seeking clarity on local governance or newcomers interested in understanding Middletown's civic structure, the Charter serves as a reference, providing the basis for transparency and accountability within the City's administration. The Charter also extends its scope to include detailed information on various commissions, committees, task forces, and similar entities. These sections of the Charter provide a clear understanding of how these groups function and their composition, objectives, and the roles they play in Middletown's governance.

B) The Role of the Mayor

The Mayor, elected for four-year terms, is the City's chief executive officer, responsible for the execution of all ordinances and laws. The Mayor chairs Common Council meetings, but cannot cast a deciding vote in the case of a tie. While the Mayor can veto certain actions by the Council, vetoes are rare, and the Council can override them. The Mayor is a member ex officio, with one vote, of every board, commission, and committee whose members the Mayor appoints. The Mayor has the right to remove or discipline department heads for cause, and can initiate a process for removing members of commissions and committees.

C) Understand the difference between the Common Council, Board of Education, committees, commissions, and task forces

The **Common Council** is Middletown's primary legislative body, the equivalent of a City Council or Board of Alders, with members elected to 4-year terms. The Common Council possesses the authority to enact ordinances and resolutions, set the City's budget, and impose taxes, among other responsibilities. [Learn more about the Common Council in section 3 of this document.](#)

Committees, boards, commissions, and task forces are advisory and established by Common Council ordinance. More information is available at ecode360.com/38087661.



Attendance at a Common Council meeting
Source: NBC Connecticut

<p>Boards and Commissions (ex: Urban Forestry Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals)</p>	<p>Can make recommendations to the Common Council. Some commissions include only Council members (ex: Finance & Government), others have Council and appointed citizen representation, while some have elected members (ex. Planning and Zoning Commission).</p> <p>Middletown Public Schools are overseen by a 9-member elected Board of Education, which also oversees its large budget, which is about 50% of the City's annual budget.</p>
<p>Councilmanic Committees and Commissions (ex. Public Safety Commission)</p>	<p>Made up entirely of Council members</p>
<p>Committees (ex. Complete Streets Committee)</p>	<p>Typically consist of citizens and have less recommendation-making power</p>
<p>Task Forces (ex. Anti-Racism Task Force)</p>	<p>Officially limited in duration but some have existed for a decade or more. More information is available at ecode360.com/13122119.</p>

These entities will henceforth be collectively referred to as “committees” in this guide. [Learn more about committees in sections 4-5 of this document.](#)

Details on Middletown's boards, committees, and commissions are available in the City's code at ecode360.com/8362960#8362960.

D) Browse the City's website

While the City's official website gives an overview of various aspects of municipal governance, it's important to note that the information provided on departments, commissions, and committees may have some limitations. Accordingly, individuals seeking more in-depth understanding or specific guidance on the workings of these bodies may need to consult additional sources or reach out to relevant City officials for clarification.

To get in touch with relevant City officials, follow these steps:

1. Visit middletownct.gov/
2. On the homepage, locate the white menu bar and navigate to the "Government" section
3. Scroll down and select the specific board or commission you are interested in
4. Scroll down to see relevant information such as the chair's contact information, the commission member information, and agenda/minutes/meeting recordings

E) Review agendas, minutes, meeting recordings, and documents

To access agendas, minutes, meeting recordings, and other documents related to the boards and commissions of Middletown, visit middletownct.gov/agendacenter. Another alternative is to navigate to the "Government" section and scroll down to select the specific board or commission you are interested in. For public meeting videos, return to the "Government" section and choose the relevant board or commission. Scroll down to the bottom of the page, where you will find the "Public Meeting Videos" link on the left. Please note that not every board or commission in Middletown may have every type of document or meeting video available online. If you are interested in a committee, speak to or email the staff or chair and attend meetings. Learn more about committees in sections 4-5 of this document.

F) Sign up for City updates with NotifyMe

The City of Middletown uses a platform called NotifyMe to send out email and text alerts for City emergency alerts; committee, commission, and Common Council updates; departmental updates; job alerts; calendar updates; and press releases. This is the most timely way to get updates from the City and the best way to find out if meeting times change.

To subscribe, visit middletownct.gov/list.aspx?Mode=Subscribe. Provide your email address and/or cell phone number and select the envelope and/or cell phone icons next to the lists to which you wish to subscribe/unsubscribe. To confirm each subscription, you must click on the confirmation link you will receive in your email or text message.

G) Familiarize yourself with Robert's Rules

“Robert's Rules of Order” define a formal process that sets guidelines for conduct in meetings and for introducing, discussing, amending, and passing legislation. Here are some key aspects of Robert's Rules:

1) Participation

The chair presides over the meeting and ensures the rules are followed. They facilitate discussion, recognize members to speak, and manage voting procedures. Members of the group have the right to speak, debate issues, make motions (proposals), and vote. Non-members cannot vote and can participate only when permitted by the chair.

For a meeting to be official, there must be a quorum, meaning that more than 50 percent of the current membership is present. If a meeting does not have a quorum, no official actions can be taken.

2) Motion Proposals and Voting

During the “New Business” section of the meeting, members can introduce new topics or proposals for the group to consider, which is referred to as a “motion.” Each motion typically follows this process:

1. A member makes a motion.
2. Another member seconds the motion.
3. The chair states the motion.
4. Members discuss the motion. During this discussion, amendments to the motion can be proposed.
5. The chair puts any amendments to a vote, followed by the main motion. Votes require a majority to pass. If the group is not ready to decide, a member can move to table the motion, postponing the decision to a future time.
6. The chair announces the results of the vote and what action will be taken.

3) Key Phrases

- “I move to...”: Proposing action (ex: “I move to table the motion,” “I move to amend the motion,” “I move to adjourn”)
- “I second”: Indicating support for a motion/proposal
- “Point of Order”: Calling attention to a possible procedural irregularity
- “Point of Information”: Seeking topic clarification
- “I call the question”: Proposing to end debate and proceed to voting

2. Engage with the Common Council

A) Learn about the Common Council

The Common Council serves as the legislative body of the City of Middletown. Its responsibilities include enacting ordinances and resolutions, formulating the City budget, and imposing taxes. In Middletown, the structure and function of the Common Council are distinct from those of larger cities in Connecticut that are divided into wards or districts. This difference is primarily reflected in the way council members are elected and how they represent the City.

According to the Charter of the City of Middletown, the Common Council has twelve members.

Voters from the entire City, not just from specific wards or districts, elect these members. This Citywide election approach ensures that each Council member represents the interests of the entire City rather than a specific segment.

The Charter specifies that no political party can nominate more than eight candidates for the Common Council at each election.

A significant aspect of the Charter, particularly relevant to political representation, is the requirement for minority party representation. Specifically, the Charter mandates that at least four candidates from the minority party must be seated on the Council. This provision is designed to maintain a level of political diversity and balance within the Council.

B) Reach out to Council Members

The Common Council's website provides photos of the 12 members with their titles, email addresses, and phone numbers: middletownct.gov/458/Common-Council.

A list of Council members' committee assignments can be found at middletownct.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5115/Committee-Assignments---2023-2027PDF. Residents can write to all Council members at the same time at the address council@middletownct.gov.

C) Attend a Council meeting

The Council meets on the first Monday of every month (unless the first Monday is a holiday), at 7 PM. The annual meeting schedule is posted at the start of each year at middletownct.gov/DocumentCenter/View/18908/Common-Council-meeting-calendar---2024-PDF.

At 6 PM before every Council meeting, a session known as "Questions to Directors" takes place. Council members call on department directors to ask questions. The public is welcome to attend but cannot participate.

Members of the public are encouraged to attend Council meetings, simply to observe or to speak.

- **In-person:** City Hall Council Chambers at 245 deKoven Drive, 1st floor
- **Virtually via WebEx:** Visit webex.com and download the WebEx app suitable for your device (Windows/Mac/Android/iOS) and follow the installation instructions. Open the WebEx desktop or mobile app. To join a scheduled meeting, click on the 'Join' button next to the meeting you wish to attend. You can find the meeting link on the City website or in the meeting invitation received via email.
- **Livestream:** Visit middletownct.gov/755/Granicus to see upcoming meetings and view past meeting videos.

Agendas, meeting minutes, and additional information are available at middletownct.gov/AgendaCenter/Common-Council-14.

D) Speak at a Council meeting

Public comments are restricted to the designated public hearing segment (usually starting within the first 30 minutes of the meeting) and must be specific to items on the meeting agenda. Each speaker is allotted 5 minutes. Provide your full name and address for public record purposes (Wesleyan students may use their campus address). Public comments usually alternate between in-person attendees and virtual attendees. You can choose to stay after you give your public comment, but this is not required.

- **In-person:** Stand in line and speak at the podium when it is your turn.
- **Virtually via WebEx:** Use the "raise your hand" feature. You will be unmuted when it's your turn. Note that video display and the share screen feature are not available in Council meetings for attendees.

Effective Communication Tips

Aim for brevity and clarity in your remarks.

Prepare your comments in writing to enhance your preparedness and confidence.

You may note support or disagreement with previous speakers as a part of your remarks.

E) Attend a Common Council Community Public Meeting

The Common Council holds quarterly community-wide public meetings for "non-agenda" items on the 2nd Thursday of January, April, July, and October in the Common Council Chamber. During the Community Meeting, the public can raise issues of concern. Members of the public who wish to speak at the Community Meeting are given 10 minutes each to raise issues to the Council. The Council members and Mayor listen but do not engage in back-and-forth with the speakers. If the Common Council determines that an item can be handled by a committee or department, it will be forwarded to the appropriate entity for a timely response and/or action.



Swearing-in of Common Council members
Source: Hartford Courant

F) Learn about how the Common Council makes decisions

The Common Council can make 2 types of decisions: a **resolution**, which is a formal expression of the opinion or will of the legislative body; or an **ordinance**, which is a rule or law adopted by the City. More information on resolutions and ordinances can be found at middletownct.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5279/Common-Council-Rules-of-Procedure-2023-2027-PDF. Mayoral appointments, hiring decisions, sales and purchases of property, and certain contractual obligations require confirmation by the Council.

Middletown has 7 councilmanic committees and commissions, which are made up exclusively of 3-5 Council members. Many of these commissions hear matters discussed in non-councilmanic committees and advance resolution and ordinance language and recommendations to the Council.

Non-councilmanic committees and commissions hear public opinions, work with City employees, do their own research, and discuss potential changes to the City. They then present these findings with a recommendation on how to proceed to a Councilperson, councilmanic commission, or the Common Council. A Councilperson must be the one to submit a resolution or ordinance and put it on the agenda for Council action, where they will debate the idea and choose to table it, send it to other committees for further review, or pass/not pass the motion.

3. Learn About the City's Budget

A) The Budget Process

By January 1 of each year, the Mayor solicits annual budgetary requests from all departments, then, by April 1, submits a budget proposal to the Common Council that includes all expenses and revenues. The budget and an explanatory message from the Mayor are published on the City website. Large items such as building or renovating a school must be approved by the voters in a referendum.

Once a budget is proposed, the Council schedules a series of budget workshops. By the end of April the Council holds a hearing at which any residents and taxpayers may comment on details of the proposed budget. The Council's deadline for adopting a final budget is May 15. If the Mayor vetoes changes the Council has made to the original budget, two-thirds of the Council must vote to override the veto.

4. Attend Committee Meetings

Note: "committee" in this section refers to committee, commission, and task force meetings.

A) Can the public attend committee meetings?

All meetings are open to the public. Agendas are published online ahead of time, though not always with the state-mandated lead time. If you know what committee meeting you are interested in attending, visit that committee's page on the City's website for more information. Otherwise browse the City calendar: middletownct.gov/calendar.aspx.

Email the chair of each entity with any questions. If the chair's email is not published, questions can be addressed to the City employee who staffs the committee or to an administrative assistant in the relevant City department. A full roster of committee members is available at middletownct.gov/DocumentCenter/View/16804/Boards-and-Commissions-Roster-PDF.

B) Where do I attend a committee meeting?

Some committee meetings are held virtually only, others in-person only, and others in both formats. In-person meetings are frequently held in the Council Chambers, City Hall Room 208, or in other municipal locations.

Some meetings can also be viewed via livestream. Visit middletownct.gov/755/Granicus to see upcoming meetings and view past meeting videos. Note that not all meetings are recorded.

If a meeting allows virtual attendance, follow these instructions:

1) Download and Install WebEx: Visit [webex.com](https://www.webex.com) and download the WebEx app suitable for your device (Windows/Mac/Android/iOS) and follow the installation instructions.

2) Join a Meeting: Open the WebEx desktop or mobile app. To join a scheduled meeting, click on the 'Join' button next to the meeting you wish to attend. You can find the meeting link on the City website or in the meeting invitation received via email.

3) Meeting Controls and Speaking: Once in the meeting, you can mute or unmute your microphone to manage background noise. You have the option to turn your video on or off. Use the 'Share Screen' feature if you need to present information during the meeting.

C) How formal are committee meetings?

Most meetings follow Robert's Rules. Each committee varies in how strictly it follows the procedures for public comment (ex: participation only during the comment period vs. participation throughout). Individuals can reach out to the chair about meeting procedures in advance.

D) How long are meetings and how often do they take place?

Most meetings occur monthly on a regular basis (ex: 2nd Tuesdays). Meetings vary in length, with committee meetings generally 1-1.5 hours in length. Arriving at the beginning of a meeting is recommended if you plan to speak; individuals are free to come and leave at any time during a meeting.



Members of the Planning & Zoning Commission
Source: Connecticut Public

5. Get Involved in Committees

Contributing to a committee can take various forms, depending on your interest and time availability. The City of Middletown encourages residents to participate in its committees.

A) Identify a committee of interest

Visit the City's website at middletownct.gov, then navigate to "Government" > "Boards & Commissions." Delve into committee descriptions, agendas, and minutes to gain insights into their activities. Members of the public can attend all committees except the Board of Ethics, which meets on an ad hoc basis. Most committees can be joined by volunteer members of the public, while others are made up of elected members ([Board of Education](#), [Planning & Zoning Commission](#)), and others have only Council membership ([Finance & Government Operations Commission](#), [General Counsel Commission](#), [Public Safety Commission](#), [Public Works & Facilities Commission](#), [Insurance & Claims Committee](#), [Economic Development Commission](#), [Technology Advisory Committee](#)).

B) Connect with a committee

Contact the committee chair or associated City staff member using details from the committee webpage. Express your interest in attending a meeting and ask about the meeting format(s) and location, as well as the degree of formality so you know what to expect ahead of time.

C) Attend meetings

Verify the meeting date on the City calendar: middletownct.gov/calendar.aspx. During your first couple of meetings, focus on understanding the committee's projects. Observing initially is appropriate. For clarifications, ask questions during designated times or request a post-meeting conversation with the chair or members. At subsequent meetings, attend, listen, present opinions, and provide insights. Your input on relevant topics is valuable, whether through regular attendance or participating in specific discussions. Your perspectives may also be shared with the Common Council to influence broader decision-making.

D) Assess committee suitability

Evaluate your experience and decide if ongoing participation in the committee aligns with your interests. Attending multiple meetings is recommended, as each session can offer varied perspectives and insights. Additionally, contact the committee chair or staff member to subscribe to the committee's email list and sign up for notifications in NotifyMe if you wish to stay updated on current issues and opportunities for involvement: middletownct.gov/list.aspx?Mode=Subscribe.

E) Engage in a project

Committees often undertake specific projects or action plans, forming subgroups for these tasks. Participation in these subgroups allows focused contribution to particular initiatives, offering an opportunity for more hands-on involvement. Once you feel comfortable, you are encouraged to propose new projects or initiatives to committees. Your ideas are welcome, regardless of membership status. Resources like Sustainable CT provide frameworks and ideas for potential projects: sustainablect.org.

F) Join a committee

Various roles are available for those who are ready for more substantial commitment, including membership positions (elected, appointed, or student-specific). This level of involvement allows significant contribution and decision-making capacity. Before committing, engage with the committee to understand its dynamics.

Contact the Mayor's office, the chair of or staff to the committee, commission, or task force of interest to learn more about how to join that group. The City does not currently have a standardized approach to recruiting citizens to participate in commissions, committees, and similar entities. Residents must come forward on their own or be already involved to be recruited for a committee. This can lead to the underrepresentation of groups that are less engaged with governmental processes.

If you are interested in getting involved, fill out the City's volunteer form, specifying your areas of interest or the committees you'd like to serve on: middletownct.gov/FormCenter/Contact-Us-4/City-Government-Volunteer-Information-Fo-56. Once you submit the form, the Mayor will review your application and may appoint you to a committee, subject to confirmation by the Common Council. If appointed, you will be notified and asked to visit the Mayor's Office to be sworn in as a member of the committee.

6. Appendix

A) Selected committee and commission list by focus area

For a complete list of all municipal committees and commissions, visit middletownct.gov/27/Government. For contact information, meeting schedules, and more details on each committee, navigate to that entity's webpage.

1) City Planning, Development, and the Arts

Middletown Commission on the Arts	Complete Streets Committee	Economic Development Commission	Planning and Zoning Commission
Maintains programs to encourage interest and participation in the arts.	Encourages safe, convenient, and equitable biking, walking and transit on Middletown streets for all users.	Plans and implements development projects using public funds.	Regulates zoning of buildings and activities and formulates the Plan of Conservation and Development.
middletownct.gov/434/Middletown-Commission-on-the-Arts-MCA	middletownct.gov/481/Complete-Streets-Committee	middletownct.gov/489/Economic-Development-Commission	middletownct.gov/502/Planning-Zoning-Commission

2) Racial Justice and Equity

Anti-Racism Task Force	Committee Concerning People with Disabilities	Human Relations Commission	LGBTQIA+ Commission
Works on issues regarding systemic racism within Middletown and its policies and practices to achieve racial justice and equality for all.	Monitors and reports on any complaints or violations regarding rights for individuals with disabilities and ensure that the needs of individuals with disabilities are met.	Advises the City to ensure that all City residents have equal access to economic, political, and educational opportunities, service protection, and accommodation in all business and public agencies.	Advises the Mayor and Common Council with the aim of improving the ability of the City of Middletown to serve, support, and promote the LGBTQIA+ community.
https://middletownct.gov/1240/Anti-Racism-Task-Force	https://middletownct.gov/456/Concerning-People-with-Disabilities-Comm	https://middletownct.gov/522/Human-Relations-Commission	https://middletownct.gov/529/LGBTQIA-Commission

3) Sustainability, Clean Energy, and Conservation

Commission on Conservation and Agriculture	Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Agency	Resource Recycling Advisory Commission	Clean Energy Task Force	Urban Forestry Commission
<p>Researches land utilization, indexes open areas, and recommends plans and programs for the acquisition, use, and stewardship of such areas.</p>	<p>Protects and preserves the wetlands and waterways in Middletown for future generations.</p>	<p>Assists with the development and implementation of Citywide waste management, resource conservation, and sustainability programs.</p>	<p>Researches and makes recommendations to improve energy efficiency and conservation and promotes renewable energy.</p>	<p>Regulates the planting, maintenance, and removal of trees and shrubs oversees City-owned forested areas.</p>
<p>middletownct.gov/483/Conservation-Agriculture-Commission-on</p>	<p>middletownct.gov/526/Inland-Wetlands-Water-Courses-Agency</p>	<p>middletownct.gov/554/Resource-Recycling-Advisory-Commission</p>	<p>middletownct.gov/454/Clean-Energy-Task-Force</p>	<p>middletownct.gov/567/Urban-Forestry-Commission</p>

B) Terms and Acronyms to Know

<p>Board of Education</p>	<p>An 9-member elected board that oversees the Middletown Public Schools and its large annual budget, which is about 50% of the City's annual budget. The Board of Education is required to comply with state statues regarding education.</p>
<p>Committee / Commission</p>	<p>Advisory in nature with both council member and citizen representation.</p>
<p>Councilmanic Commission</p>	<p>Advisory in nature and exclusively composed of council members.</p>
<p>Common Council</p>	<p>Middletown's primary legislative body with members elected to 4-year terms.</p>
<p>Ordinance</p>	<p>A rule or law approved by the Common Council.</p>

POCD / Plan of Conservation and Development	A comprehensive 10-year plan required by State statute on how a town wants to develop, covering economic development, natural resources preservation, housing, land use, public services, and culture.
Resolution	A formal expression of the opinion or will of the Common Council that is not binding.
Robert's Rules	A formal style of meeting procedures used in some capacity in all Middletown meetings.

C) Acknowledgements

This guide was created by Wesleyan students Cat Xi '21 and Shaya Tousi '22 in 2021 and revised by Tamira Le '26 and Laine Gorman '25 in 2024. The City of Middletown would like to thank the following individuals and groups who helped contribute to this guide, as well as the many others who provided feedback in its creation and revisions.

- City of Middletown: Mayor Benjamin Florsheim, Common Council Member Vincent Loffredo, Common Council President Gene Nocera, Recycling & Sustainability Coordinator Kim O'Rourke, and Public Works Intern Kate Gendrich
- Middletown Residents: Krishna Winston, Jennifer Kleindienst
- Wesleyan University: Sustainability Office, Bailey College of the Environment, Jewett Center for Community Partnerships, Cat Xi '21, Shaya Tousi '22, Tamira Le '26, Laine Gorman '25

