

15.0 FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



MIDDLETOWN PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT

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15.1 Key Principles

The preparation of this Plan of Conservation and Development has been guided by several key principles which have helped to shape the future vision for the City of Middletown. These principles are in part based on the findings of the resident's survey carried out during the initial stages of the planning effort. They also reflect and build on the recommendations described in the 1990 Plan and in subsequent studies such as the 1993 Open Space Plan prepared by the Conservation Commission and the Vision 2000 report prepared for downtown Middletown.

The key principles used to guide the future strategic plan are summarized below:

Limit the Sprawl of Low-Density Housing. With over 6,000 acres of undeveloped land zoned for residential use, Middletown must restrict the spread of low density housing in order to retain its prevailing rural character that exists in much of the southern and western sections of the City and to control the high cost of community services associated with residential development.

Encourage Infill Development. New development should be channeled to infill sites which are currently served by public water and sewer. This principle reflects 'smart growth' policies that are designed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of road and infrastructure systems.

Attract Office/Light Industry. Promote economic development by attracting office, light industry, and research and development firms within existing office/industrial zones. Ensure that development proceeds in an environmentally sensitive and aesthetically pleasing manner.

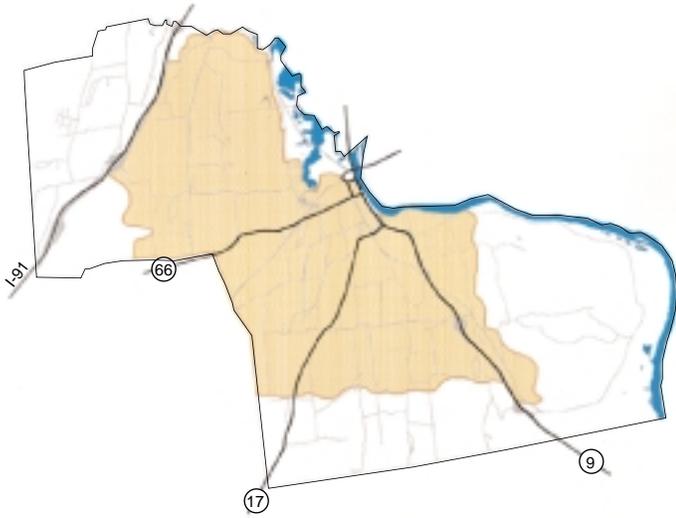
Protect Natural Resources. The City should continue its efforts to protect natural features such as watercourses, wildlife habitats, farmland and important undeveloped areas. Priority should be given to protecting those areas that expand on existing dedicated open space, in order to establish a connected network of open space.

Emphasize Downtown as the Community Focal Point. The City should continue its efforts to create a lively, mixed use downtown that should focus on strengthening its cultural and entertainment facilities and programs.

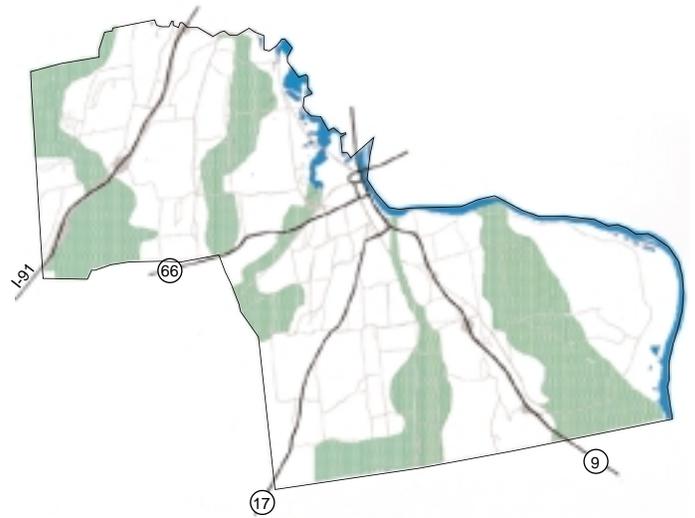
Increase Access and Use of Riverfront. Expanded public recreation and open space areas should be established along the Connecticut River waterfront. Additional pedestrian and vehicular links are also needed to connect the city to the river.

Improve Design Quality of Development. Over the past two decades the City has recognized the value of its historic buildings in downtown and has increased its efforts to improve the visual quality of the downtown area as a whole. This interest should be extended to other urban areas of the City, including the commercial strip areas that are located on the key approach roads leading to downtown.

These key principles are illustrated within Figure 15.1 on the following page.



1. Restrict sprawl of residential development by containing the public sewer service area



2. Expand dedicated open space as connected linear parks that protect natural resources



3. Create new employment opportunities for high-tech industries and research offices within designated industrial zones



4. Focus on improvements and redevelopment within inner neighborhoods and infill sites



15.2 Future Land Use Plan Elements

The Future Land Use Plan map presents a general, graphic interpretation of the key principles laid out in the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). It outlines the major land use components that will shape the development of the City over the coming decade.

Residential Uses. The Future Land Use map divides the residential areas into two general areas: low-density housing (the R-45 and R-60 zones along the City's southern and western perimeter) and medium- to high-density housing in the central portion, corresponding with the R-30, R-15, and RPZ zones. The Plan recommends different policies for these densities so that they retain their separate characteristics.

The R-45 and R-60 zones retain a rural character due to the large, undeveloped portions of land as well as the existing, active farms. It is this rural atmosphere that the Plan of Conservation and Development is trying to protect by limiting further expansion of denser residential development along the western and southern edges of the city. The Plan encourages the retention of existing active farms in the area, purchasing open space parcels, and limiting the expansion of public water and sewer service to the area to minimize pressure to convert the land to large housing developments.

The Plan of Development encourages building additional units within the central, developed portion of the City through the use of "in-fill" developments. The Plan's Future Land Use map targets a wide area for in-fill development – from I-91 along the west to the Maromas area on the east and south below Route 155. This area corresponds to the denser zones – R-30, R-15, and RPZ. These zones have extensive residential developments that have already shaped the character of the landscape. Encouraging additional construction within the area of the city that has the most growth provides a number of benefits. These zones already have water and sewer service connections in place, reducing costs to extend pipes and minimizing connection fees. Bus routes become more feasible as more people live within an area, providing transportation alternatives. New construction can also provide new investment to strengthen and support existing neighborhoods near the CBD.

The Future Land Use map highlights North End neighborhoods for revitalization, though other neighborhoods will benefit as well from new construction and strengthening of the urban fabric. The Future map envisions small-scale developments that fit into the context of the local neighborhood. In some sections, such as the North End, grant money for new construction may be available. Financing that attracts new homebuyers to these neighborhoods, rather than rental properties, is preferable over the long-term.

Future Population. The residential survey conducted by the Planning and Conservation Department indicates that residents wish to see only moderate population growth, to around 50,000 people. However, existing land use regulations would allow the population to expand to 65,000 residents. The Plan of Conservation and Development promotes alternative land uses and regulations that would effectively lower that number.

First, the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) advocates Middletown’s current policy of acquiring additional open space acreage. This can be accomplished through outright purchases, buying development rights, or acquiring easements over the land. The State of Connecticut has created a target of setting aside 21% of state land from development. Middletown has currently preserved approximately 14% of its land. In order to reach the 21% benchmark, the City will need approximately 1,800 additional open space acres.

Second, the POCD recommends protecting the city’s natural resources. Wetlands, steep slopes, and other areas that are sensitive to building impacts should be protected from development pressures. Because the land around these areas is generally not buildable, the City could discount the acreage so that 50% of the land that is determined to be wetland or in steep slopes counts towards the lot total, rather than 100%. More land is therefore needed per building unit, reducing the overall density of the development.

Third, the City may wish to rezone some areas to require larger lot sizes. One option would be to create a new zone, an R75 zone, requiring 75,000 square feet per lot. This new zone would be appropriate in the more environmentally sensitive areas of the City, such as the Maromas area east of Route 9. The following table illustrates how these three techniques can effectively reduce the potential number of additional building units in the city, reflecting resident’s desire to limit future growth.

Reduction in Future Building Units			
Zone	Future Open Space Acquisitions	Discount Env. Sensitive Lands	Rezoning
R1/RPZ/R15	580	525	
R30	435	240	325
R45/R60/R75*	1124	334	415

*possible new zone

The above measures could reduce the number of additional building units in the city by almost 4,000. That translates into 9,150 fewer Middletown residents, lowering Middletown’s future build out population from approximately 65,000 residents to 56,000. Population growth is the biggest issue facing the City of Middletown today. How the City accommodates future growth and where the growth occurs will define the community’s character and quality of life into the future.

Additional residents mean additional classrooms, recreational facilities, and city services. An additional 21,000 residents would overwhelm the school district, exceeding total capacity and necessitating the construction of new schools. The 1999 *Community Facilities Report* indicates that the City currently has room for expansion, but only to about a total population of roughly 55,000 people. At that level, schools would reach their effective total capacity, assuming 11% of the population is enrolled in the public schools.

Downtown. The Plan of Conservation and Development supports maintaining the downtown area as a strong focal point for the city and the region. Other studies have been completed recently for the downtown area, including Downtown Vision 2000, which is a part of this POCD. Although the central business district (CBD) has its roots in commercial activity, many commercial establishments have moved to locations along the major arterials. The CBD has recently seen investment as an entertainment and cultural destination, as witnessed by the recent movie theater, the opening of new restaurants, and museums like KidCity.

The Future Land Use map highlights the downtown area together with its surrounding assets: Wesleyan University to the west, development and investment opportunities in the North End and the Industrial Revitalization Area (IRA) district, a burgeoning medical corridor, and undeveloped land along the riverfront to the southeast. Connections with Wesleyan could be improved. These opportunities include commercial possibilities that cater to the student body as well as improved cultural and entertainment options. The development opportunities that exist in the North End may even be combined with increasing ties to Wesleyan. Vacant storefronts could exhibit student art, or provide other creative outlets for the student body. Strengthening the downtown area as a focal point for the community will result in a more vibrant and secure city center that is active twenty-four hours. Now that Wesleyan owns the Long Lane property, the City should work with Wesleyan to plan the area to maximize its potential. The University is currently undertaking a study of the area to determine how best to utilize the site. Potential uses could include research and high technology and an array of other institutional, age restricted residential, educational and recreational uses to serve the school and the larger community, and other compatible uses.

The Future Land Use map also illustrates a growing corridor for medical providers, supplies, and related activities. This corridor is anchored at its northern connection with the downtown area by Middlesex Hospital. The hospital's outpatient facility and new cancer treatment facility, medical offices, two new assisted-living facilities, and other services have recently located throughout the corridor, centered along Saybrook Avenue. The map encourages growth of services within this corridor, such as the city owned property on Standpipe Road, to create a health care cluster.

The area to the southeast in need of redevelopment is an underutilized asset of the CBD. Although it currently contains the city's wastewater treatment facility and is the site of a former oil storage area and brownfield properties, redevelopment would help to reclaim the ties between the downtown and the riverfront. Future development here could consist of a mix of uses, though the POCD calls for a strong commitment for public access to the riverfront and a direct connection to the downtown.

Access and Use of Riverfront. One of the hindrances to revitalizing the downtown area has been the lack of good access to the Connecticut River. The present tunnel under Route 9 is awkward to walk to and perceived to be unsafe. The only vehicular connection is found at the southern end of downtown, along Union Street. Route 9 represents an effective barrier between the riverfront and the downtown, separating and dividing the two activity areas so that no synergy between the two can develop. The Plan of Conservation and Development supports greater connection between the two, with additional convenient and attractive access to the riverfront and additional passive and active riverfront recreation.

The undeveloped riverfront area, between the downtown and the Maromas area, represents an enormous potential benefit to Middletown residents. The Future Land Use map envisions passive uses such as picnic facilities with active uses such as a possible boat launch, marina, and maybe a new boathouse for local crew teams. Recreational development of the waterfront would be in conjunction with new mixed uses, including office space, residential units, and commercial activities to create a lively, destination-oriented project. Such a development would build on the positive aspects of the river while providing public access to the riverfront and incorporating the area into a coherent plan that complements Middletown's existing urban pattern.

Recreation. Increased access and use of the Connecticut River is a principle theme of the Plan of Conservation and Development. But Middletown residents have expressed a desire for greater recreational opportunities throughout the city, not just for water-related activities. The Future Land Use map shows a number of park and recreational opportunities that the Plan would like to see implemented over the next ten years.

The map extends the existing bicycle/pedestrian trail in the northwestern part of the city with the downtown, residential areas, schools, parks, and employment areas. Extending the trail southward from the Westlake neighborhoods will connect Newfield Meadows open space, Lawrence Elementary School, and Pillarella Field. Continuing south the trail will split to enter the downtown area, running along or near the existing railroad tracks, while another branch of the bike trail proceeds along the Coginchaug River into Veteran's Park, the Long Lane area, the Snow Elementary, and other city and state parks. The downtown trail will run along the riverfront, connecting new developments south and east of the CBD. This trail would ideally tie into larger trails, providing connections to surrounding towns and offering bicyclists a pleasing and safe travel alternative, off of the major arterials.

Additionally, the map highlights Veteran's Park for future improvements. Perhaps the most central park in the city, these 41 acres represent a grossly underutilized asset for residents. Although the terrain is not conducive to providing sports fields, the park could accommodate more picnic facilities and small-scale activities like volleyball, shuffleboard, and bocce.

Open Space. The Future Land Use map also illustrates passive recreational possibilities that the City can invest in over the coming decade. The map shows five linear parks generally running in a north-south direction. The recreational opportunities available from these linear park areas include hiking, bird watching, etc. As the map suggests, these linear parks could coincide with an expanded network of pedestrian and bicycle trails to provide access to key recreational facilities within the city. The linear parks depicted as green swaths through the

city would serve dual roles, providing passive recreational pursuits, but also securing natural resource areas from further development.

The Future Land Use map reflects the importance of protecting Middletown's natural resources through the proposed park and trail system. The map combines the two into connected networks throughout the entire city. The proposed linear parks and trails are planned to result from the future acquisition of open space areas, dedicated to remain undeveloped. The future land use map identifies five major linear park routes: an area extending throughout the Maromas area, open space linkages that protect the Sumner Brook, Cuginchaug River and Mattabassett River, and a linear open space band that incorporates traprock ridges, brooks and streams along the city's western boundary.

These five areas incorporate Middletown's prime natural assets. The need for linked corridors reflects the awareness of the natural systems and the interconnected ecosystems between meadow, forest, and riverine environments. The trail corridors do not correlate with individual property boundaries. The corridors shown are illustrative only. These should be used as a guide for future decision-making activities such as open space acquisition and land use development such as proposed subdivisions.

Industrial Activity. The Plan of Conservation and Development supports additional industrial growth within the City, the need to expand the industrial tax base, and the goal of providing jobs for residents. The Future Land Use map identifies those areas in the City that are zoned for industrial uses but remain vacant or underdeveloped. These areas frequently have existing industrial, research, or office uses already in place, so development represents expansion of existing uses.

The Future Land Use map encourages the expansion of light industrial, research, and corporate office space along the Interstate 91 corridor. This area already contains an existing industrial park, Aetna, and other industrial users. Location here minimizes truck traffic along local roads, provides visibility, and is a compatible land use adjacent to a heavily traveled interstate. Industrial zones at this location include the Interstate Mixed Use, Interstate Office Park, and Interstate Trade zones.

Just north of the central business district lies the Industrial Revitalization Area (IRA) zone. The future Plan encourages the revitalization of this older industrial area. Although it lacks good highway access, the area retains rail access and is viable for a number of uses. Existing structures on the site are not marketable for the current needs of many industrial users, though the structures could be modified to offer incubator space or serve as distribution centers. The Future Land Use map encourages the interconnection of development of the IRA zone with increased investment in the North End and inner neighborhood revitalization strategies.

The I-3 zone along River Road in the Maromas area represents a major opportunity for significant industrial growth. The usable amount of industrial land has been estimated at 800 acres. Pratt and Whitney (P&W) is already located here, as is the NRG power plant. The State has already provided \$8.8 million to construct a sewer extension into the area to connect to P&W. This sewer line will have the capacity to serve additional developments as well. Once this additional infrastructure is in place, the map envisions further development of the area over the upcoming ten years.

The Future Land Use map does illustrate light manufacturing/office/ research uses next to dedicated open space areas within the Maromas area. The future plan envisions light manufacturing/office/research uses that will construct buildings that respect the unique environment of the area. The area is serviced by Route 9, which connects to Interstates 84, 91, and 684. Many of the potential parcels have vistas that overlook the Connecticut River, while other sites offer secluded settings. The Plan of Conservation and Development calls for careful site review and architectural design review of any building to be constructed within the Maromas I-3 zone. Additionally, the somewhat antiquated Special Industrial (I-3) zoning should be reviewed to eliminate undesirable uses that are currently permitted.

Improve Design Quality. The Plan of Conservation and Development recommends increased design review for new commercial and industrial development, and new signage. The commercial development that exists along the principal gateway streets into Middletown – Route 66, Route 17, and Newfield Street (Route 3) – represent highly visible examples that impact residents’ and visitors’ impressions of the City.

The commercial area along Route 66 is a relatively short stretch of road, but one that creates a negative visual impression of the City. The Plan of Conservation and Development notes that the area has uncoordinated signage, little to no landscaping, multiple curb cuts, and no pedestrian amenities. The Future Land Use map identifies this area for change over the next ten years. The City should pass a signage ordinance for the area and require compliance within a fixed time period. Landscaping should be mandatory as part of any building permit, including parking lots as well as the street frontage. Similar issues occur within the commercial districts along Route 17.

Newfield Street (Rt.3) also needs greater attention to design. The area was rezoned to provide for neighborhood commercial businesses, but the growing number of signs, curb cuts, and the heavy volume of traffic will require additional regulations in the near future. The road needs better pedestrian amenities, more landscaping, and a coordinated signage plan to regulate the location and size of signs along the street.

15.3 Goals: 2000-2010

Implementation of the various land use recommendations contained in this report will be guided by the planning principles set out at the beginning of the chapter. The degree to which the city can meet these objectives will depend on a variety of factors including those beyond Middletown’s control, such as the regional economic climate, future state policies, etc. Despite this, the 2000 POCD sets out the following specific goals for the ten-year period 200-2010 as a means of establishing targets by which the Plan can be assessed at the time of the next update.

Employment

Middletown should gain approximately 2,500 to 5,000 new jobs. Although job gains will be strongest in the service industries, a target of between 850 and 1,500 jobs should be generated within the IT, IOP, and I-3 zones. Approximately 49% of Middletown residents live and work within the city (Table 7.1). The city should promote increasing that percentage to 50% so that more residents live and work in the city. Additional jobs for residents can reduce commuting

times, promote the use of mass transit within the city, and encourage walking and bicycling as transportation alternatives, potentially reducing the number of cars on the roadways. Middletown's employment to population ratio was a strong 0.67 in 2000. The city should set a goal of maintaining that ratio over the next decade. The city's unemployment rate has been below 4% for many years, the city should try to maintain an unemployment level less than 4%.

Housing

The POCD has predicted an increase of approximately 3,033 residents over the next decade. This should result in an additional 1,318 new housing units. Adding 300 residents per year represents an annual growth rate of 0.7%. In order to achieve this level and maintain a healthy, functioning housing market, between 150-250 new units, depending on the annual number of demolitions and stock replacements, need to be constructed annually between now and 2010.

Industrial

Table 5.5 presents a breakdown of labor force trends for Middletown by industry sector through 2008. Middletown's goal should be to add 150 industrial jobs/year and increase its industrial square footage by approximately 80,000 square feet/year.

Retail/Office

Retail and office projections are also included within table 5.5. If Middletown can add 350 jobs/year in commerce, retail, and other service industries, then Middletown will be accelerating its employment share with respect to other towns in the region. An additional 350 workers annually would translate into 120,000 square feet of additional floor space per year. The city should set a goal of increasing the average value of its commercial and industrial properties approximately 2% per year.

Open Space and Recreation

The City should add from 750 to 1000 acres to its existing total of approximately 4,000 acres of dedicated open space. New recreational facilities and other improvements will be completed at Veterans Park and a new, centralized soccer/baseball complex will be developed. The City should monitor the per capita open space figure and ensure that additional open space purchases outpace residential growth so that the ratio improves.

The 2000 Census shows Middletown with 18,554 households. At its present level of approximately 4,000 acres of committed open space, the City has an open space:household ratio of approximately .22 acres/household. Table 4.5 indicates that Middletown is likely to gain 1,318 households over the next decade. In order to maintain the same ratio as today, the city will need to add 370 acres of open space. If Middletown can add 1,000 acres and it gains 1,318 households, the ratio will increase to .25 acre/household, which should be the goal for 2010.

Downtown

Construction of the fiber optic loop will be complete, spurring the development of at least one “smart” office building for speculative use. In addition, downtown will have strengthened its role as the City’s focal point through development of a hotel and expanded cultural and entertainment facilities.

Redevelopment Sites

New or continued redevelopment efforts will have occurred at the following key areas of the City:

- The 85-acre riverfront area southeast of downtown
- The Ferry/Green redevelopment area
- The Miller-Bridge redevelopment area
- The Long Lane site
- The Remington-Rand building

15.4 Implementation

The Plan of Conservation and Development will be implemented through changes to the zoning and subdivision regulations and other land use controls, necessary capital improvements, changes to administrative procedures, cooperation with other governmental agencies, and further study. As the recommendations are realized and the Plan is put into effect, Middletown will need to take further steps to refine and update the plan so that it remains an effective and contemporary planning guide.

There are five major categories of actions that Middletown should undertake to implement the Plan:

Capital Programming

The process of preparing a capital plan, reviewing and prioritizing projects, and allocating money to specific projects are important tools in implementing the Plan of Development. Every year, Middletown should review its capital programming budget, in light of recommendations made in the Plan of Conservation and Development, to determine if conditions and priorities warrant particular projects. The ways that Middletown invests its public resources – water and sewer projects, roads, schools, and recreational facilities – impact the POCD and different neighborhoods within the City. A sustained capital improvement effort allows for a continuous update of municipal needs without allowing the revision process to stall the improvement planning and scheduling.

Grants and Loans

Numerous grant programs are available from the state and federal government, as well as non-profit organizations. These grant programs can assist first-time homebuyers, provide money for transportation projects, buy open space land, and provide economic development assistance.

Middletown has effectively used grant money in the past and efforts should continue to monitor and apply for grant money to facilitate projects that fulfill the objectives of the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Land Use Regulations

Certain recommendations in the POCD can be achieved by modifying existing zoning and subdivision regulations. For example, regulations covering signage, parking, and landscaping may be revised so that the overall design quality is improved. Cluster zoning could be required within the R-45 and R-60 zones, reducing the visual impacts of low-density housing while providing additional open space. Also the use of the Village District could be extended to other parts of Middletown. Some of these actions, particularly the design improvements, were among the most widely supported by the resident survey completed last summer. Action on these issues that are fresh in resident's minds will show progress on the Plan, provide purpose and context for the document, and demonstrate the usefulness of public input and participation.

Natural Resource Protection

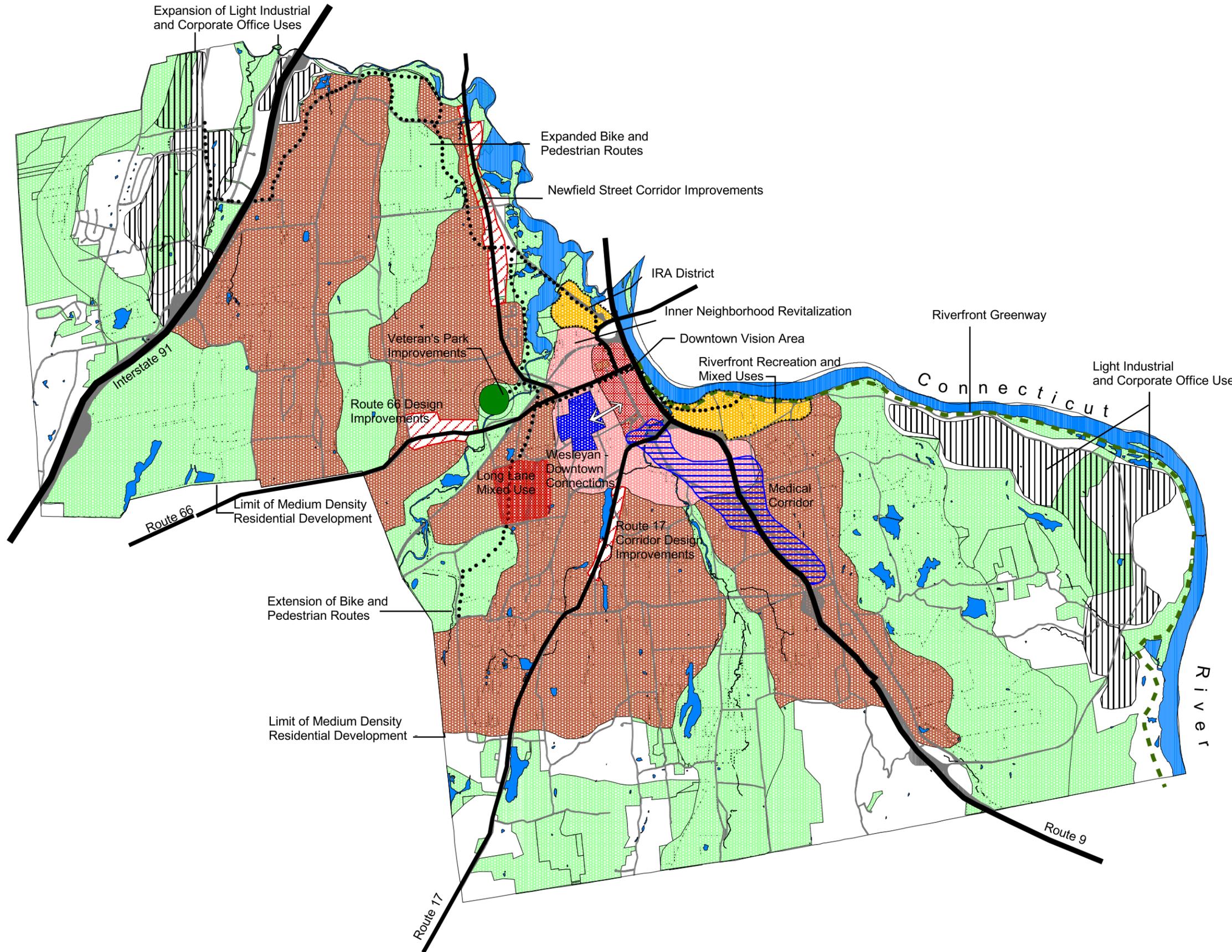
A significant component of the 2000 POCD has involved the planning and protection of natural resources. Citizens have voiced their concern that a high quality-of-life includes access to and preservation of environmentally sensitive areas. The City can work to ensure the protection of these areas through subdivision regulations and acquisition of the most important sites.

Continuous Planning

Continuous planning is an important component in implementing the Plan. The Town Planning and Zoning Commission should actively use this document in the review of development proposals. It should serve as a ready reference in developing decisions concerning land use, zoning, acquisition, capital programming, and business recruitment. The Commission should present this plan to the Mayor and Common Council and solicit their cooperation in implementing the plan. The Commission and the Council should review all capital projects in order to insure conformance with the Plan.

City of Middletown

Figure 15.2 Future Land Use Map



- Riverfront Greenway
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail
- Medium-Density Residential
- Linear Parks
- Commercial Strips
- Special Study Areas
- CBD
- Greater Downtown Area
- Medical Corridor
- Low Density Residential



This map is not a substitute for on-site inspection

October 2000

Buckhurst Fish Jacquemart