

Middletown Community Conversations

Final Report



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Russell Library

Middletown, Connecticut

*To the residents of Middletown who made
their Middletown Community Conversations
the largest and most diverse
Inauguration Day conversation in Connecticut.*

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Please note that all original venue reports are available with the Russell Library's copy of the Middletown Community Conversation Report.



Photo compliments of Ed McKeon

INTRODUCTION

On January 20, 2009, the citizens of Middletown came together to engage the entire community in local discussions to address problems and challenges facing individuals, organizations, government and our society today. The focus of this initiative was to learn what problems have common themes in our community and to determine if solutions can be identified. It was especially important to foster “ownership” to help solve problems we are now facing. The concept for a local day of conversations originated from President-Elect Barack Obama’s call for action by individuals and communities to help determine “What comes next?” following the results of the November, 2009 election. Many supporters of the Obama campaign wanted to continue with their goals of creating change in our country to solve the pressing and critically important problems facing our country.

1.1 Origin of Middletown Community Conversations

The concept for a local day of conversations was given birth on November 25, 2009 during a celebration of Sybil Patton and dedication of renovations to the children’s department at Russell Library. During this event, Ron Klattenberg and Lisa Santangelo became involved in a conversation of President-Elect Obama’s call for change and his supporters’ question, “What Comes Next?”. With the inauguration several weeks away it seemed to both that Middletown could rally together to work on pressing issues facing our local community. The discussion soon included Grady Faulkner, who immediately joined in the planning. Together they approached Library Director Arthur Meyers, who immediately embraced the idea and offered to have the Hubbard Room become a key hub for this event.

Within several days, planning and organizing for the event became a steam roller. Organizations throughout Middletown were contacted to ask for participation, venues were identified as suitable for large community gatherings, and meetings with interested parties soon took place. On January 5, 2009, the Middletown Common Council passed a resolution designating January 20, 2009 “Community Conversations Day” in the City of Middletown (see Figure 1). On January 20, 2009, Representative Matthew Lesser and the Middletown delegation introduced General Assembly official citations that were passed by the Legislature in recognition of the “*work producing the Middletown Community Conversations on Inauguration Day 2009, which invited the people of Middletown to come together to focus on the issues important to the Middletown area in this time of change and great opportunity*”.



Photo compliments of Ed McKeon

Listed below, in alphabetical order with affiliations noted, are the principal organizers and participants in the planning, organizing, facilitating, and implementation of the Community Conversations in Middletown:

Planners / Organizers for Community Conversations:

Barbara M. Arafeh, American Association of University Women, Middletown
Commission on the Arts

David P. Bauer, City of Middletown Common Council

Justin M. Carbonella, City of Middletown Youth Services

Cynthia H. Clegg, Middlesex County Community Foundation

Heidi E. Erb, The Connection, a human service and community development
agency

Grady L. Faulkner Jr., City of Middletown Common Council

Cheryl D. Jackson, NAACP of Middlesex County

Ronald P. Klattenberg, City of Middletown Common Council

Frank Kuan, Wesleyan University Office of Community Relations

Edward M. McKeon, *Middletowneye News Blog*

Arthur S. Meyers, Russell Library

Philip J. Pessina, City of Middletown Common Council, Lions Club of
Middletown

Robert P. Santangelo, City of Middletown Common Council

Elizabeth N. W. Santangelo, Citizen

Audrey J. Scotti, Citizen

James B. Streeto, City of Middletown Common Council

Dortha Cool Willetts, *The Chronicle, a free monthly community newspaper*

Jonathan A. Willetts, Citizen

Facilitators for Community Conversations:

Barbara M. Arafeh, American Association of University Women, Middletown
Commission on the Arts

Donna E. Bank ski, American Association of Retired Persons

Lydia W. Brewster, North End Action Team

Susan Bysiewicz, Secretary of State

Edward J. Dypa Jr., American Association of Retired Persons

Genevieve M. Dypa, American Association of Retired Persons

Heidi E. Erb, The Connection and Eddy Shelter, a homeless shelter

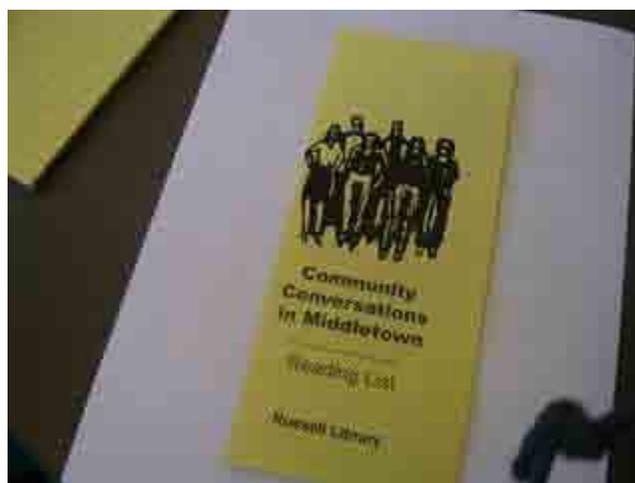
Grady L. Faulkner Jr., City of Middletown Common Council

Carmela E. Gagnon, Heritage Commons, a retirement community

Izzi Greenberg, North End Action Team



Photos compliments of Ed McKeon



Rev. John Hall, First Church of Christ/Jonah Center
Cheryl D. Jackson, NAACP of Middlesex County
Ronald P. Klattenberg, City of Middletown Common Council
Carline A. Krause, Village at South Farms, a retirement community
Frank Y. Kuan, Wesleyan University Office of Community Relations
Donna K. Marino, Middletown Public Schools, Parent Resource Coordinator
Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, Middlesex Community College
Philip J. Pessina, City of Middletown Common Council
Christine W. Pinunsky, American Association of Retired Persons
Robert P. Santangelo, City of Middletown Common Council
Elizabeth N. W. Santangelo, Citizen
Audrey J. Scotti, Citizen
Robert Spencer, Northern Middlesex YMCA
Robert L. Sweeney, American Association of Retired Persons
Lorraine M. Weinzimmer, Village at South Farms, a retirement community

1.2 Community Conversations in American History

In the 18th century, colonial towns provided opportunities to talk about events and ideas. A politically informed citizenry, one that was equipped to evaluate public policy, was seen as vital for the well-being of the state and the liberty of its people. A deeper conception of citizenship emerged, with the Revolution democratizing American thought, and intellectual life becoming common to all people. George Washington said that being informed was a necessary part of citizenship and called for the “diffusion of knowledge.”

In the 19th century, the broadening of democracy brought a wide range of public lectures, with common people expressing a desire to know, so they could share more fully in the life of the mind. A comprehensive vision, referred to as the *democratic spirit*, made knowledge readily accessible to people.

In the 20th century, the Open Forum lecture movement was a remarkable new direction. It was a decentralized, locally planned, non-partisan, non-sectarian assembly of citizens discussing matters of public interest, always under the guidance of leaders but with full audience participation. Each program consisted of a lecture by a knowledgeable person, and included a probing audience question period afterwards. The movement brought together a wide range of people to discuss the vital concerns and intellectual advances of the day, and the core beliefs and values in their lives. The movement was a remarkable model of participatory democracy, public learning, and freedom of speech. It was a form of “deliberative democracy”.



Photos compliments of Ed McKeon



On January 20, 2009, the citizens of Middletown, Connecticut, continued this long history through Community Conversations.

1.3 Objectives and Goals

- To engage the widest diversity of interests and points-of-view in conversations throughout the City and to focus on local issues to the extent possible.
- To facilitate all conversations in the fullest and non-partisan manner that ensures openness, participation and inclusion, and allows all voices to be heard.
- To promote “ownership” in problem solving and encourage all participants to answer “what can I do?” to lead to positive changes for problems identified.
- To record and collect all conversation information into a comprehensive report that documents what the people of Middletown feel are priorities for our City. This report will be made available to all Conversation participants.



COMMON COUNCIL RESOLUTION

Whereas, the 2008 Presidential Campaign raised the national consciousness for change and the critical importance that change can bring to improve our nation, and

Whereas, the Presidential Election resulted in one of the largest voter turnouts nationally, in the state, and locally, and

Whereas, President-Elect Obama has called upon communities, groups and private citizens to hold Community Conversations to begin discussion of what comes next to make the changes needed to improve our country and

Whereas, over 4,000 Community Conversations have been held in 2,000 cities throughout the United States, and

Whereas, a group of Middletown citizens have organized Middletown Community Conversations to take place in the city on Inauguration Day, January 20, 2009 at the Russell Library and other locations throughout the city, and

Whereas, the Middletown Community Conversations are non-political, non-partisan events to bolster the energy of the election, focus the attention for change at the grassroots level, and liberate creative ideas to help identify changes needed in our community, and

Whereas, Middletown Community Conversations will organize facilitators, provide forms and coalesce results and assemble a document so that everyone interested in change will have a greater sense of direction, purpose and goals,

Now Therefore Be It Resolved By The Common Council of the City of Middletown:

That it names January 20, 2009,

Middletown Community Conversations Day

and asks all community groups, education and service organizations, private citizens and government leaders to participate in one or more Community Conversations to let their voices be heard and make this an unprecedented and historic grassroots event to identify and find creative solutions to problems facing the city in the true spirit of change.

Submitted by:	Councilman Serra	Councilman Loffredo
	Councilman Klattenberg	Councilman Santangelo
	Councilman Daley	Councilwoman Kasper
	Councilman Bibisi	Councilman Faulkner
	Councilman Pessina	Councilman Streeto
	Councilman Bauer	Councilman Roberts

Figure 1



Photo compliments of Arthur Meyers



Photo compliments of Ed McKeon

2.0 PROCESS

The planning and organizing for the Community Conversations turned out to be more complicated than originally conceived. The Planning Committee wanted all conversations to focus on local issues to the fullest extent possible. It was felt state or national issues would result in the Conversations becoming too broad, making it hard for participants to find local solutions. They wanted the process to be open but to minimize being overly critical and negative so that conversation would foster problem solving, innovative thinking and ownership. It was important to the Committee that positive problem solving within diverse discussion groups would result in a process that all can follow. It was also very important that the results of Community Conversations create a roadmap for positive change that would be beneficial to the Middletown community.

To promote the Community Conversations, the committee utilized every form of media available to them. For print media, Dortha Cool Willetts, a free lance reporter for *The Chronicle*, was an important member of the committee and did a wonderful job in covering the entire conversation process. Committee members Grady Faulkner, Ron Klattenberg and Lisa Santangelo generated press releases for the local papers and radio and television stations. Arthur Meyers, Ron Klattenberg and Lisa Santangelo discussed the upcoming Conversations with Don DeCesare on his “Best of the Valley Shore” radio show. Thanks to General Manager Benjamin Michael, Wesleyan’s radio station WESU posted the event on their Community Calendar and created a wonderful public service announcement. David Bauer, host of the Bauer Hour on WESU also gave it air time on his shows. Ed McKeon was not only an important member of the planning committee providing great coverage on *The Middletowneye*, but also created a wonderful blog to encourage communication, post community conversation information and provide community conversation forms and contacts. The blog can still be seen at:

<http://middletowncommunityconversations.blogspot.com/>

To help in establishing a uniform process for all Community Conversations, Justin Carbonella, Youth Services Coordinator for the City of Middletown, was contacted. He has been trained in use of the CAFÉ model to promote problem solving in discussion groups. Mr. Carbonella was invaluable in his assistance to the Committee to formulate the process to be followed for Middletown Community Conversations. The following is a description of the CAFÉ model process with the integrated set of design principles displayed on the next page.

“As a conversational process, the World Café is an innovative yet simple methodology for hosting conversations about questions that matter. These

conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, or community. As a process, the World Café can evoke and make visible the collective intelligence of any group, thus increasing people's capacity for effective action in pursuit of common aims.

The integrated design principles have been distilled over the years as a guide to intentionally harnessing the power of conversation for business and social value. When used in combination, they provide useful guidance for anyone seeking creative ways to foster authentic dialogue in which the goal is thinking together and creating actionable knowledge."



Reprinted by permission from The World Café Community Foundation at www.theworldcafe.com. The foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit educational organization and contributions are tax-deductible for citizens of the United States.

In addition, Justin Carbonella furnished the community with the following Guidelines for Sharing so that we would remember those rules we were taught in kindergarten.

GUIDELINES FOR SHARING

- SHARING IS VOLUNTARY.
 - WE WANT TO CREATE A SAFE, LOVING, AND RESPECTFUL ATMOSPHERE.
 - SHARING IS ABOUT ONE'S OWN FEELINGS, EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS, ETC.
 - WE ARE NOT ALWAYS GOING TO AGREE, OR SEE EVERYTHING THE SAME WAY, AND THAT'S OKAY.
 - EACH PERSON HAS A RIGHT TO AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS OR HER OWN FEELINGS, THOUGHTS AND BELIEFS.
 - IT IS IMPORTANT TO AVOID CRITICISM OR JUDGMENT ABOUT ANOTHER PERSON'S SHARING AND POINT OF VIEW OF HIS/HER FEELINGS.
 - AVOID DEBATE AND ARGUMENT. IT RARELY CHANGES ANYTHING OR ANYONE, AND TENDS TO ULTIMATELY INHIBIT THE SHARING.
 - ALL IDEAS ARE VALUABLE.
 - REFRAIN FROM SINGLING OUT ANY INDIVIDUAL AS "REPRESENTING" HIS OR HER GROUP.
 - IT IS IMPORTANT TO GIVE FULL ATTENTION TO WHOEVER IS TALKING.
 - FEELINGS ARE IMPORTANT.
 - NO CROSS TALKING OR DEBATE.
 - NO TALKING TO PERSON NEXT TO YOU WHILE SOMEONE ELSE IS TALKING TO THE GROUP.
 - HOPEFULLY, WE WILL LEAVE THESE MEETINGS WITH A DEEPER SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND A RENEWED HOPE FOR THE FUTURE OF MIDDLETOWN.
-



Photo compliments of Ed McKeon

3.0 FINDINGS AND ISSUES RAISED

On Tuesday, January 20, 2009, the country paused to inaugurate the 44th President of the United States, President-elect Barack Obama. It also became the best time for the people of Middletown to come together and focus, as a community, on the questions most important to the greater Middletown area in this time of change and opportunity. This was not a political event but rather a grassroots initiative to identify the needs of our community in difficult times. We recorded reactions and prioritized ideas that will help Middletown proactively contribute to and take advantage of the inevitable change that was coming. Community organizations were contacted to contribute sites for conversations, obtain assistance to facilitate each conversation, distribute information and/or help in any way to make this an engaging and exciting community success. Facilitator training was provided to all participating organizations.

On January 20, 2009, and several days before and after, Community Conversations took place at 17 venues. Several venues had two scheduled conversations. In all, a total of 21 moderator-facilitated conversations took place involving more than 300 citizens of Middletown. This was unprecedented in Middletown and the fact that so much was able to be coordinated in seven weeks was considered a major accomplishment.

Overall, at the Community Conversations venues over 250 issues were raised spanning many areas of concern. The subjects of local, state and federal governance were the topic of greatest concern with a third (34%) of all conversations involving this topic. Indeed, issues related to local government (22%) was the most talked about topic across the City. The next most discussed theme was that of local schools (14%). Coupled with federal and state education, the subject matter of education resulted in the second most frequent area of discussion (22%).

Transportation, volunteer services and crime each comprised 5%, while housing/food/shelter and commerce each covered 4% of issues raised. While the economy and war were headline issues nationally, in Middletown, these subjects made up only 2% and <1% respectively. This may be the result of facilitators asking that the “community conversations” focus on local concerns.

Other matters raised during the discussions included the arts, energy, the environment, health insurance, and youth but these were not a major focus. This may have been because as a community we are more content with these subject matters.

It appears that the community feels we have the most to change regarding local government. However, while there was much discussion about issues related to local government, the focus seemed to be on the problems rather than the answers to “What can we do?” and “What can I do?”. Residents were asking their elected officials and



public servants for more transparency, accountability, communication, responsibility, efficiencies, and long range planning. Given our current economic times, it was not surprising that the area they asked for improvement were most often focused on taxes and expenditures. Residents wanted the status of projects and more information posted on the city web site, city meetings be more participatory and conducted more effectively (around town vs. always at City Hall), city meeting dates and times included on their tax bills or other mailings and Middletown being designated a regional center. They asked for district representation rather than an “at large” council. They suggested both longer terms of office and shorter terms of office. They asked for employee evaluations and budget accountability. They asked for fair taxes and enforcement of existing laws.

Some of the issues expressed regarding local government were echoed in the local school issues as well, e.g. communication, evaluations and responsibility. Unlike the local government conversations, school related conversations often came with problem solving ideas. The major theme for these solutions was community involvement in our schools. They asked for not only parent involvement but involvement by mentors and coaches and tutors. They also asked for more science, art, sports, music and fiscal accountability. They had many concerns regarding school facilities, new and old. They decided that the No Child Left Behind program has not worked but that it could be addressed by pooling resources, adding volunteers, involving children, and supporting teachers.

The fact that quality of life issues were not at the top of these discussions does not mean they are not important but rather that we have fewer “issues” with them. There were requests for more public transportation off the major routes, better connection to Hartford and New Haven transit systems, improved bus signs, and an improved bus station. Cyclists requested more bike paths, bike racks, buses able to carry bikes, and bike friendly streets.

To address crime prevention and teen pregnancy, it was suggested that there be more low-income housing, less absentee landlords, and more teen employment. It was suggested that collaboration between the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce, Middletown Adult Education, Middlesex Community College and Vinal Technical High School could result in job development. Children asked for a “no tolerance” stand on abuse of our children, spouses and animals. They said “NO DRUGS, CIGARETTES, STEROIDS!”.

Even before health insurance issues became an everyday event for the media, we were discussing the lack of affordable health care. We suggested that doctors provide pro bono services, as does the legal community. We also determined that if we come together, we could make an effective lobby group.



Photo compliments of Dortha Cool Willetts



Photo compliments of the Middlesex County Community Foundation

As for food, clothing and shelter, our children recommended more homeless shelters and adults recommended that we donate to the food banks and organizations that provide clothing to those in need. We even suggested that more community gardens and personal gardens could be used to increase food for the food pantry.

Regarding the environment – REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE! Support legislation that works to keep our air, land and water free of hazardous materials.

Our seniors would like a senior center and to have more opportunities to volunteer, especially in the schools.

4.0 What's Next?

The following topics (bold, underlined) were used to collect related issues (bulleted items) from the Community Conversation venue notes returned to the committee. In order to ensure the integrity of our reporting process, Community Conversation issues and their related answers are being reported EXACTLY as submitted. Where the group addressed the issues with solutions in response to the two questions, "What can we do?" and "What can I do?", responses are noted. Where the issue was left without solution, none is noted but the community is encouraged to discuss these issues at future Community Conversations. To facilitate future Community Conversations, not only can groups utilize this report, but all forms and instructions used in these Conversations are included in the report Appendices. In addition, if the committee knew of a resource that may be able to address the issue, it is included in *italics*.

Please note that issues related to multiple themes will be repeated under each theme heading so that they can be addressed appropriately in their respective arena, e.g. voter registration may be addressed via legislation and advertising on the national and state level but could include hands-on voter registration drives at the local level. As John Hall, First Church of Christ and Jonah Center, so eloquently noted:

"The issues were not viewed in isolation from each other, but for their potential to be combined and to generate creative solutions. For example, we can use the arts to address both energy/environmental issues and enrich early childhood education. Locally grown food is good for the environment and reduces energy needs, and it can feed the hungry and create work opportunities that can be exchanged for housing. Outdoor recreation and education enhances support for the environment and improve health. Biking and walking reduces energy use and improves air



Photo compliments of Arthur Meyers



Photo compliments of Carmela Gagnon

quality, but also reduces traffic congestion, improves health and mental functioning, and reduces medical costs of society.”

We are looking forward to further Community Conversations not only to generate solutions to issues raised, but not addressed in the Community Conversations; also this would confirm that a situation and its solution, raised as an issue for one venue, is supported by the community. Community Conversations are ideal for finding common ground when different opinions are raised.

Finally, let us be inspired by some quotes from the students who participated at the Woodrow Wilson Middle School’s 21st Century Community Learning Center:

“Don’t judge.”

“Be productive.”

“Be thankful for what you have.”

“Community service for everyone.”

“Nothing is handed to you, you work for it.”

“You can’t just come, sit back and do nothing.”

“Do something good and it will come back to you.”

Middletown Community Conversations

Arts

- Arts help the economy.
- Programs that help the arts are very important.
- There should be more art in the schools and in our community.

Resource: Middletown Arts and Culture office produces a monthly Arts Calendar which is on-line at www.cityofmiddletown.com/CurrentEvents/current_events.htm and select the current months Art Calendar or a hard paper copy can be obtained by either visiting the office at 100 Riverview Center, suite 140 or calling 860-343-6620 ext 201.

Two other great sources of information regarding arts in Middletown are:

Wesleyan's monthly arts calendar, which can be found at <http://events.wesleyan.edu>.

Russell Library's Russell Reminder which includes all the upcoming scheduled events and programs at the library. A pdf can be found at http://www.russelllibrary.org/news_events/reminder.html

We are very fortunate to have a great community partner in Wesleyan University. Their campus is full of activities that are open to the community. The Center for Community Partnerships offers to send a weekly e-mail calendar on Sunday listing Wesleyan events for the following week. The events are either free or the cost of a ticket. If interested, please contact Frank Kuan (860-685-2245 or fkuan@wesleyan.edu) or Cathy Lechowicz (860-685-2841 or clewchowicz@wesleyan.edu) at the Center for Community Partnerships at Wesleyan University.

Commerce

Federal bail out issues:

- Cap CEO salaries.
- No CEO salaries for companies in bail out.
- Require plans to correct company problems before bail out monies are given.
- Publish periodic reviews as to bail out progress.
- Restructure mortgage requirements, e.g. larger down payments.
- Limit access to credit cards.
- If limit is reached on one card, stop credit on all others.

What can we do?

Write to the President and Congress to express your opinions. Vote for those who share your opinion.

What can I do?

Conduct business with companies who mirror your philosophy.
Vote for those who share your opinion.

Resource: Here is some contact information.

Locally:

Office of the Mayor: mayor@cityofmiddletown.com or 860-344-3400

General Information: questions@cityofmiddletown.com

Common Council: Council@cityofmiddletown.com

State:

Office of the Governor: Governor.Rell@ct.gov or 860-566-4840

Connecticut General Assembly: www.cga.ct.gov

Federal:

Federal Government General Information Web Site: www.usa.gov

Office of the President: www.whitehouse.gov

Comments: 202-456-1111

Switchboard: 202-456-1414

Congress:

House of Representatives: 202-224-3121/www.house.gov

Senate: www.senate.gov

Middletown

- Entice more retail stores to Middletown (Kohl's, Target).

What can we do?

Petition your favorite store and ask them to come.

- How do we get more people to come to downtown?

What can we do?

Make Main Street more visible between car and store, increase downtown residents and install more pedestrian walkways.

What can I do?

Frequent the stores downtown. Take friends and family downtown for events.

Require businesses to carry insurance.

Resource: Middlesex Chamber of Commerce: info@middlesexchamber.com or 860-347-6924

Communication

Media

- Middletown needs a monthly newsletter that can provide community information such as; town meeting agendas, social activities and organization volunteer needs. This information is no longer covered in the newspapers.
- Fewer newspapers decrease the transparency of government.
- City needs investigative reporter looking at City operations and activities.

Current Resources: The Chronicle (www.rarereminder.com) comes out once a month and carries a tremendous amount of local events and information. On line, the Middletowneye (<http://middletowneyenews.blogspot.com>) blog covers local events and their reporters attend and report on not only public events but also City Hall meetings. In addition, the two local newspapers, Hartford Courant and The Middletown Press, can also be found on-line at www.courant.com and www.middletownpress.com. As for the air waves, Wesleyan's radio station WESU 88.1fm and WLIS/WMRD 1150am also cover Middletown news. In addition, the Center for Community Partnerships offers to send a weekly e-mail calendar on Sunday listing Wesleyan events for the following week. The events are either free or the cost of a ticket. If interested, please contact Frank Kuan (860-685-2245 or fkuan@wesleyan.edu) or Cathy Lechowicz (860-685-2841 or clewchowicz@wesleyan.edu) at the Center for Community Partnerships at Wesleyan University.

Middletown residents can also be seen on Comcast's public access station 15.

Interpersonal

- People should be more vocal, attend meetings, write letters and serve on committees.
- More engaged residents.
- Better connection between different sections of town on various social issues.
- Better communication between parents, teachers and the community at large.
- Open discussions about prejudices, e.g. race, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and religion, etc

Resource: Check out web site: www.americantowns.com/ct/middletown-make-a-difference and www.middlesexunitedway.org.

Crime/Law

- No weapons.
- Stop violence.
- Reduce crime.
- No tolerance for child abuse.
- Make cigarettes illegal.
- No steroids!
- No drugs!
- Tougher laws for injuring animals.

Resource: Resources: Report animal abuse to the City Animal Control Officer 344-3298.

- More severe sentences.
- Fewer laws.

- Crime prevention and related issues, teen pregnancy (children raising children), drug problems.

What can we do?

Provide low-income housing, more effective police work, keep young people occupied, job-training, keeping resources downtown.

- Crime as a result of irresponsible ownership and property management standards. Current economic conditions will make matters worse.

What can we do?

Increase homeownership, block-by-block network and drug market interventions, crime watch, real estate perception and practices, community policing.

- Graffiti has to stop.

Resource: A great resource is the publication Programs That Help People in Connecticut published by Connecticut Light and Power and CT Association for Human Services (CAHS). This publication can also be found on-line at www.cahs.org/publications.

Economy

- Donate money to churches and organizations.
- People need to live below their means.
- Better jobs for young people.
- Keeps jobs in USA.
- Lower prices so everyone could catch up.
- Increase jobs and job development in North Main Street.

What can we do?

Have Economic Development, Chamber, Community College, Adult Education and Vinal Tech convene a collaboration of partners to discuss job development in the North End. North End neighborhoods can plan activities to draw in residents from other neighborhoods.

What can I do?

Visit and make purchases in the North End. Tell neighbors and friends about the North End. Participate in North End activities.

Resource: A great resource is the publication Programs That Help People in Connecticut published by Connecticut Light and Power and CT Association for Human Services (CAHS). This report can also be found on-line at www.cahs.org/publications.

In addition, the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce has several committees that assist the small business entrepreneur, e.g. Side Street to Main Street and the Middletown Small Business Development Center (MSBDC). Contact the Chamber at 393 Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457 or Phone: (860) 347-6924 |

Fax: (860) 346-1043 or e-mail them at info@middlesexchamber.com or visit their web site <http://www.middlesexchamber.com> .

Education – National

- Make education more affordable.
- Cap tuition rates.
- Eliminate race and color quotas.
- Educate about intolerance.
- Create “green” schools.
- Learn and teach the tools of democracy.
- Be able to vote on issues.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has not worked.
- Advance academic schedule to be more competitive, especially with Asian countries.
- More emphasis on science.
- Better education for teachers.

Education – State

- Green schools.
- Lower college costs.
- Evaluate positions in system. Do we need all those assistants?
- Important to learn the tools of democracy.
- Be able to vote on issues.
- Advance academic schedule to be more competitive, especially with Asian countries.
- More emphasis on science.
- Educate about intolerance.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has not worked.
- Better education for teachers

Education – Local

- Evaluate positions in system. Do we need all those assistants
- How does the Board of Ed make up the budget? Just accept what is given them? Are they pressured by special interest groups e.g. PTA? Involve Senior Residents in the process.
- Schools cost too much and employees don’t care about costs. What can we do? Make school employees accountable for cost of operation.
- Are there problems with the High School that are not being disclosed, e.g. lack of gym seating, pool too small to hold meets, vandalism, lack of equipment? High school is a disaster and will be until it sinks. School should be broken in two.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has not worked.
What can we do?

Pool resources, volunteer, parents need to be responsible/accountable, create a resource building, support teachers and encourage children to become involved.

- More funding for schools.
- More art in schools.
- More emphasis on science.
- More sports in schools.
- Further knowledge taught at schools.
- Make learning fun.
- Healthier food in schools.
- More learning centers.
- Create competition between schools by providing school choice.
- Teachers are overworked, afraid to speak out and under physical and emotional distress.
- Teachers spend too much time on paper work and not enough time teaching.
- Create better communication between parents and teachers.
- Improve teacher relations with students.
- Better education for teachers.
- More male teachers and tutors.
- Non-profit after school programs could be brought in to help the school during the day.
- Engage retirees and other generations in the children's education.
- Parents need to work with and educate other parents.
- Important to learn the tools of democracy.
- Be able to vote on issues.
- Educate about intolerance.

What can we do?

Create a "Citizen's Academy" to help citizens learn about government.

Resource: The Middlesex United Way supports The Healing Racism Coalition whose mission is "Helping individuals change their hearts in a safe environment through understanding." They can be reached at either www.HealingRacismCoalition.org or 860-346-8695.

- How to get to college.
- Achievement gap is huge. Students are not graduating with a good education.

What can we do?

More Community Conversations. More thoughtful redistricting. Additional resources/support are required for the needy schools.

- Schools should have dress codes.
- International students.
- Energy efficient schools.
- Schools should recycle.
- Fewer bus stops.
- Green schools.
- Increase access to education and job training.

- Felons need help getting education.
- *Resource: The Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) seeks to enable parents to become leading advocates for children. The corner stones of the program are respect, validation and a belief that when the tools of democracy are understood the public will actively engage in civic life. They can be reached at either www.mxcplti.com or 860-638-1462.*

Employment

- We create more jobs when we attract more businesses to our town by communicating our assets, e.g. educated workforce, great city to raise a family, etc.
- Felons need assistance in finding jobs.
- There was a gang in Chicago that started a labor source for felons.
- Lower paychecks for people with a lot of money and higher minimum wage.
- More, better paying jobs.
- Experience jobs you aspire to have.

Energy

- Don't idle cars and buses while waiting.
- Be more energy efficient to cut fuel costs.
- Lower heating bills.
- Lower gas prices.
- Raise price of gas because it will help us make greater energy development.
- Invest in other energy sources.
- Use renewable energy.

Resource: Middletown Clean Energy Task Force is involved in many energy related issues including clean renewable energy. Meetings are held the 4th Wednesday of the month at 12:30 in City Hall room 208.

Environment/Recycling

- More open space.
- Preserve farmland.
- No more cutting down trees.
- Find opportunities to connect to our waterways for recreation and education.
- Reduce pollution.

What can we do?

Don't idle cars and buses while waiting. Pick up garbage.

- Support legislation to enhance recycling.

What can I do?

Purchase reusable dishes. Recycle as much as you can. Donate your eyeglasses to Lions Club. Recycle old florescent light bulbs. Compost. Recycle batteries. Use cloth bags for grocery shopping.

- Get energy saving light bulbs, hybrid cars, use different energy sources.

Government – Federal

- Engage in long term planning.
- Has there been any analysis to see if all positions are actually needed or are they there to justify administrative positions?
- Implement pay freeze and expense limits.
- Salaries should be lower at the top and higher at the bottom.
- Two-term limit for elected positions.
- Monitor energy profits. Crude oil prices are down but gas prices don't show it.
- Enforce existing laws.
- Protect those who work to make money.
- Government must put in protections in all bailouts so that we get the most for the money our grandchildren will pay.
- Corporate greed, financial mismanagement need to be punished with jail time.
- Investigate corruption so that monies can be recouped.
- Bankers need to give back their bonuses, now.
- We have been kept from advancement in curing disease by the limits on stem cell research.
- Clean oceans.
- More funding for schools.
- Build better more efficient schools.

Government – State

- Engage in long term planning.
- Has there been any analysis to see if all positions are actually needed or are they there to justify administrative positions?
- Implement pay freeze and expense limits.
- Two-term limit for elected positions.
- Install tolls on state highways as Connecticut is a “pass thru” state.
- Don't increase gas prices to balance budget.
- Tax abatement should be used strategically.
- Restore State funding credits for solar.
- Enforce existing laws. Judges should be less tolerant with drug dealers and users.
- Bureaucracy and regulations deter people from helping.
- State has too many towns, mayors and officials.
- Consider Regional Governments.
RESOURCE: At a Chamber Legislative breakfast, Speaker of the House Donovan said that all the Connecticut small towns are the very feature that makes Connecticut unique for tourists and keeps people involved. Rather than adding another layer of government, legislature is looking at regionalizing services and other solutions to cut down on cost. Regionalization would help cut costs without losing this small town connection.

- Mandatory training for bartenders in CT. They serve drunks who go out and kill people.
- Build better, more efficient schools.
- More funding for schools.

Government – City

- Engage in long term planning and focus on priorities.
- Position itself for regionalization.
- Make government accountable.
- Mayor/Council form of government is not accountable. Fire Mayor and Council.
- Come together at Town Meetings. Need a town commons.
- More transparency.
- There should be more meetings around town.
- Stream meetings on Internet.
- Greater WIFI.
- Monthly Newsletter.
- Put meeting schedules on tax bills.
- There should be reports on city projects.
- All city documents should be available on the Web.
- How can the public participate in meetings without prior understanding of the agenda?
- Council meetings – residents should be allowed to speak AFTER hearing Council discussion not BEFORE.
- Things are not brought out at city meetings – worked out in “back room”.

City Budget

- Residents should have more input and there should be a referendum to accept the budget.
- Make talks about spending money open to the public.
- What happened to the money for tearing down the Middle School.
- Reduce the cost of infrastructure in Middletown by avoiding the overhead of borrowing and reducing claims against the City.
- Build better more efficient schools.
- More funding for education.
- Do Departments spend all they have so they can ask for more next year?
- Department expenditures (over & under budget) should be published.
- Too much overtime allowed. (Plowed basketball court on Sunday?) Do snow removal during the daytime not overtime.

Elected Officials

- Two-term limit for elected positions.
- Expand term of city leaders to four years.
- Mayor should do the right thing even if he makes enemies.
- Council should not be “at large” but should represent districts.
- Positive campaigns; keep promises; more involvement; talk about issues.

- Commissions and Committees need to be more responsive to residents. They should have members who have expertise in area.
- Commission members should adopt a district.

Personnel/Payroll

- Agency & Dept Heads accountable for actions and evaluated. Their fiscal performance should be a part of their evaluation.
- Employees should get merit raises not contract raises.
- Employees should be evaluated and those who fail, dismissed.
- Has there been any analysis to see if all positions are actually needed or are they there to justify administrative positions?
- Increase the number of years before an employee is eligible for retirement.
- Implement pay freeze and expense limits.
- Limit accrued vacation and sick time... use it or lose it.
- Too many “buddies” in town politics and city workers. Council should police this issue.
- There are unqualified people in City positions. Stop crafting job descriptions allowing unqualified people to get job.
- Deputy Police Chief should really LIVE in town.

Police

- Enforce existing laws and ordinances (cell phone use, shovel sidewalks).
- Need for community policing model implementation - community and police need to step up.
- Revive Middletown’s anti-poverty program like the former CAGM (Community Action for Greater Middletown)
- Westlake area feels neglected by the City, concerned about Fire Department consolidation, area is not well protected, and want to feel more a part of the City.
- Lack of investment, interest in the North End. Resources aren’t always allocated appropriately to raise the neighborhood to the level like the rest of the City. There is a negative attitude from within and without.

What can we do?

Have more events and activities to draw people in the help change perceptions. Partnership with schools, police, etc. to raise money.

Educate about the history and value of the neighborhood.

- Need an ordinance about not idling cars and buses.
- Why is a business allowed to turn off the street light audible signal?
- Why doesn’t Public Works repair mailboxes they destroy?

Resource: If a resident reports said damage to Public Works, the mail box is replaced at City expense.

- There is a need for more and properly placed street signs as well as “No Outlet” signs.

What can we do?

Neighborhoods can inventory their street signage and report the results to the City.

What can I do?

Organize your neighborhood and raise money for the signage.

Taxes

- Freeze senior resident taxes across the board with no income limits. They don't have children in the schools. Some seniors can't keep up with inflation and tax increases.
- Taxes are TOO high.
- We can't sell our houses for what they are being taxed.

Vehicles

- City should have fuel-efficient fleet.
- Vehicles should not be taken home.
- Take city cars away. Not all directors need cars.

Health Insurance

- Affordable medical insurance (one group did not want a Canadian health plan). The Social Security increases are eaten up by Medicare and supplemental insurance premiums.

What can we do?

We can advocate together. The power of many is an effective lobbying method. Groups can combine to approach the insurance company.

Resource: Speaker of the House Donovan has noted that they are trying to enable municipalities and others to join the same insurance plan the Legislature and other State employees now enjoy. This would be a great savings for municipalities and small businesses. When presented in 2009, House Bill # 6582 was vetoed by the Governor. While the Governor's veto was over-ridden by the House, it failed in the Senate. If people would like to see this change in Health Insurance Legislation, they should contact their State Senator and the Governor's office.

- Medicare should pay for preventive medical exams (physicals and tests).
- Health care costs are either too high or unavailable.

What we can do?

Provide pro bono services by health care professionals as with attorneys. Perhaps they would be aided by tax incentive.

Resource(s): The Community Health Center at 635 Main Street, Middletown offers primary health care at affordable costs. They can be reached at 860-347-6971 or on their Website <http://www.chc1.com>.

- Health insurance for people who do not have it.

Housing/Food/Clothing

- It is wrong to sign a mortgage for a house you can't afford.
- Houses are too big, have too many cars, too much stuff.

Homeless

- Provide housing for the homeless and poor.

Resources: The Connection Incorporated provides emergency housing at the Eddy Shelter located on the Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH) campus. For more information visit their website at www.theconnectioninc.org/hous_eddy.html or call 860-343-5520.

- Provide better counseling for the homeless.
- We need to support the homeless shelter.
- Housing units where people could stay on temporary basis in exchange for work (barter system).
- Persons recently released from jail need assistance in finding housing.
- There should be a home for the homeless on each block.

Resource: Groups addressing housing issues are:

Middlesex Chamber of Commerce's Affordable Housing Committee information can be found on the Chamber website: www.middlesexchamber.com go to the "Action" page and select "Committees".

- People do not have enough food.

What can we do?

Provide lunch during the summer for children who get free lunch during school year. Use community gardens to grow food for food pantry. Help those who use the food pantry to grow food in the community gardens.

What can I do?

Donate regularly to the homeless shelter, the food pantries and soup kitchen.

Resource: Community Renewal Team conducts the Summer Lunch Program, which provides lunch for eligible children during summer vacation. Check the web at www.crtct.org or call 860-347-4465. For meals, St. Vincent DePaul provides three meals a day, 363 days a year at 615 Main Street, Middletown (860-344-0097). On Christmas Day, people in need can go to First Church on Court Street, where church members serve a Christmas meal between noon and 2:00 PM. For Thanksgiving, people in need can go to South Church on 9 Pleasant St. St. Vincent DePaul also operates the Amazing Grace Food Pantry, currently located on 139 Main Street Extension. For additional information, they can be reached at: 860-347-3222. For web information on either program, go to www.stvincentdepaulplace.org.

- People do not have enough or proper clothing, e.g. to look for jobs, go to functions, etc.

What can we do?

Take the time to donate what we don't wear or can't wear to agencies providing this service.

Middlesex Community College

- Should be more visible.

- Provide more info regarding events where community can attend. Not everyone has computer.

Seniors

- Build Senior Center now and expand to Community Center later.
- Want to offer their volunteer skills to the schools.
- Savings programs for the elderly.

Resources: To volunteer in the Middletown Public Schools go to the following Web site <http://www.middletownschoools.org/page.cfm?p=1071> or contact Donna Marino by phone at 860-638-1462 or e-mail marinod@mps1.org .

Transportation and Parking

Buses

- More bus routes off the major roads.
- Make fares more affordable to seniors.
- City transit system does not connect well with Hartford for transfers.
- No efficient way to New Haven.
- Improve bus stop signs.
- Remove “tiers” for bus service – different ones for poor and rich.
- New bus station, similar to truck stop, with locker, shower and place to sleep.

Bicycles

- Build more bike paths, bike racks, buses able to carry bikes and bike friendly streets.
- Post signs regarding bikes.
- Reduce width of Main Street and put in bike lane between street and sidewalk.
- There needs to be more parking closer to the Library.
- NO TROLLEY!!!!
- Alternative transportation – educate public.
- Resolution of Miller and Bride Street access/egress to Route 9. This is a public safety issue.

Volunteerism and Service Organizations

- How do we get more people to join service organizations?
What can we do?
Make service organizations more appealing to younger residents. Encourage businesses and corporations to return to the days when they supported their employees volunteering and joining these organizations.
- How can service organizations make the public aware of their work and mission?
What can we do?
Hold a Media Workshop for Service Organizations

- Positive Solutions has building on Rapallo Avenue that is available for community use.
- More engaged residents.
- Increase community service, working together, sharing ideas.
- Call students to service.
- Community service for everyone.

Resource: www.timebanks.org Their web site notes that: “Time Banks Weave Community One Hour at a Time for every hour you spend doing something for someone in your community, you earn one Time Dollar. Then you have a Time Dollar to spend on having someone do something for you. It's that simple. Yet it also has profound effects. Time Banks change neighborhoods and whole communities. Time Banking is a social change movement in 22 countries and six continents.”

- Bring together community organizations.
- Better integration of all the service programs in town.

Resource: The following organizations provide networking for service programs:

Middlesex Area Interagency Council: Meets at de Koven House on the 3rd Thursday every month (8:30am-9:30am)

Middlesex Elderly Service Providers: Meets at One MacDonough Place on the 4th Tuesday of every month (8:00am-9:00am)

Middlesex Clergy Association: Meets at One MacDonough Place the 1st Thursday of every month (1:00pm-3:30pm)

Middletown Ministerial Alliance: Meets at New Jerusalem Christian Center the 4th Friday of every month (9:00am – 11am)

- A majority of the United Way funding comes from donors who give one buck a week. Small actions matter.
- Reaching out to experience and support cultural and educational groups/opportunities in our community.

What we/I can do?

Host an international student or share your community/home with exchange/international students.

- Organizations should come together to clean up Middletown.

What can we/I do?

Use barter system for City clean up.

- Wants to read with kids. How to volunteer?

Resources: There are several sources for volunteer information. Check volunteer information at the following:

United Way web site: <http://volunteer.united-e-way.org/muw/volunteer/>

RSVP – Retired Senior Volunteer Program web site: <http://www.seniorcorps.gov>

St. Luke’s Elder Care Solutions: info@stlukeshome.org or call 860-347-5661.

Assets Community Team (ACT) – www.middletownyouthservices.org



Photo compliments of Arthur Meyers

*District/Parent Partnership in Middlesex County – www.middletownschools.org
Mentor Program: Resources: To volunteer in the Middletown Public Schools go to the following Web site <http://www.middletownschools.org/page.cfm?p=1071> or contact Donna Marino by phone at 860-638-1462 or e-mail marinod@mps1.org .*

- New collective for quilts and sewing, etc. so that old sewing machines get put to use... train young people, send them overseas.

War

- Make every effort to ensure withdrawal of the troops from Iraq and Afghanistan is done honorably.

Wesleyan University

- Should contribute more financially and with volunteer services and these should be not only in the North End but other parts of town as well.

Resource(s): Wesleyan’s Center for Community Partnerships (CCP) is an excellent place to interface with the University. “The idea behind the Center for Community Partnerships [CCP] is simple: we’ve centralized the different offices which work on university-community initiatives in one place so it’s easier for everyone to access our resources. Combining the assets of the Service-Learning Center, the Office of Community Service and Volunteerism, the Office of Community Relations and the Green Street Arts Center, the CCP seeks to serve the development of both the individual and the community, guided by principles of mutual respect and shared responsibility.”

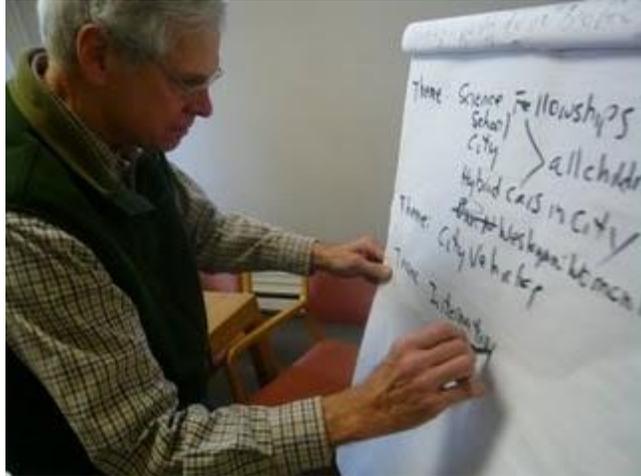
For more information go to <http://www.wesleyan.edu/ccp> or call 860-685-2245 or visit at 167 High Street, Middletown, CT 06459

Youth

- Address teen pregnancy.
- More activities.
- More job training and employment.
- Connect youth with the business sector.

Middlesex Chamber of Commerce’s Middletown Mentor Program information can be found on the Chamber website: www.middlesexchamber.com and then select “About” and “Committees” where you will find a program explanation and contact phone number.

Distributive Education Club of America Program: A National Association of Marketing Students program, which seeks to merge the students classroom activities with experience in marketing and retail. For more information go to www.middletownschools.org select “Our Schools”, then “Middletown High School” where you will select “DECA”.



Photos compliments of Ed McKeon

5.0 LESSONS LEARNED

- The CAFÉ model was a valuable tool for the Middletown Community Conversations. Having a single approach to use for all Conversations made training much easier and efficient for organization and planning. It was extremely important that, at least, one member of the planning committee was well versed in the model techniques and able to “train the facilitators”.
- Success of the Middletown Community Conversations was based in large part on the fact that: organizers and facilitators were given specific goals and assignments for each group conversation; all aspects of community interests and organizations were invited; local government leadership supported the initiative; the planning committee had one full-time volunteer organizer; the process was open to all ideas and remained very flexible; and facilitators made time for training prior to the event.
- Having a catalyst event (inauguration) to focus the community on a day of conversations was extremely helpful. The inauguration created the spark that made organization, communication and planning easier.
- The Conversations proved to be as much a social event as opportunity for problem solving. This was especially true for senior citizens. Groups were expressive and grateful for meeting peers as part of these discussions. They were also the most interested in continuing the conversations on a regular basis.
- While every effort was made to encourage conversation venues in schools, art studios/galleries, houses of worship, communities for people with special needs and civic and cultural organizations, there were no issues or answers reported back on the Conversation forms. Some of the lack of response was expected as many groups encouraged their members to attend public venues. For other groups, their schedules did not permit them to participate. However, given the lack of issues raised for certain topics, it would be wise for future conversations to pay special attention to these groups in order to capture their participation.

6.0 OUTCOMES

A year has passed since the community came together to discuss “What is next?”. During this time, several groups acted on the list of issues generated during their Conversations.

- Heritage Commons residents came together to form a group called “Yes we can”. This group put into action the answers they had given to the questions “What can we do?” and “What can I do?” Their activities included supporting recycling by the residents, reducing waste by utilizing ceramic cups rather than Styrofoam for their morning coffee club, encouraging not only residents, but family and friends to donate food to Amazing Grace by placing a collection box in the lobby as you enter the building and picking up roadside litter as they took their walks.
- The Community Conversation Committee was very fortunate to have not only Councilmen Klattenberg and Pessina as members but also Councilmen Bauer, Santangelo and Streeto. Their bi-partisan efforts in reaching out to the community were truly appreciated. In a December 21, 2009 press release, Ron Klattenberg, Deputy Majority Leader, and Phil Pessina, Minority Leader, noted that “With the success of the Community Conversations sponsored by the Russell Library and citizen volunteers in January, the Council will now hold meetings outside of the Council Chamber at various location in the City to make it easier for the public to participate during the year.”. A copy of the complete press release can be seen in the Attachments section of this report.
- During the summer and fall of 2009, the Middletown Lions Club, the Jonah Center, the Judicial Branch Community Service teams, City employees from the Parks, Water, Public Works and Fire Departments, residents, Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 777, Middletown High School Crew Team and Earth Ministries came together to clean-up the north end of Harbor Park. These volunteers, with food donated by Harbor Park Restaurant and the Lady Katherine, cleared the northern most portion of the park which had become overgrown and inaccessible to residents and visitors alike. While discussions regarding cleaning up the Lions Landing and northern 600 feet of the park had begun prior to the community conversations, it was the Conversation’s emphasis on community service, personal responsibility and expressed desire to connect with the City’s waterfront that helped energize the project coordinators and volunteers.
- First Church of Christ members created a community vegetable garden and donated all the fresh vegetables and herbs to Amazing Grace food pantry.

- Many participants of the Conversations expressed a desire to engage in more Community Conversations. With this in mind, Arthur Meyers and Russell Library prepared a grant proposal for a project called “Live Local, Speak Local: Community Conversations For the Future”. Using the Kettering Foundation’s National Issues Forums model, and in collaboration with Wesleyan University’s Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life and the Middlesex County Bar Association, the goal was to bring together organizations, institutions and citizens on July 2, 2010 for local conversations on vital issues. The conversations would have been held at various locations around the city, in conjunction with the Naturalization Ceremony for new citizens in City Hall, using National Issues Forum guides and trained moderators. Unfortunately the grant did not receive funding.
- During the Fall and Winter, 2009 the Middletown Clean Energy Taskforce discussed and prepared a comprehensive draft Energy Plan for the City of Middletown. This Plan emphasizes the importance of energy conservation and energy efficiency to lower electricity, fuel oil, natural gas, gasoline and diesel fuel costs by the City and seeks ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Plan also responds to many of the environmental/energy issues raised by participants during the Community Conversations. Further, the Plan makes specific recommendations to improve building envelope design, lighting, vehicle usage, power generation using renewable resources, clean energy procurement and overall project planning to give greater importance to energy related issues. If approved by the Common Council in early, 2010, it will become one of only a few such Municipal Energy Plans in Connecticut.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Russell Library Staff for their co-operation, enthusiasm and support.

Middletown High School Educational Technology Library Media for assisting in copying the Inauguration DVD’s.

8.0 APPENDICES

Appendix A.

Community Conversation Press Releases of 12/16/09, 1/4/09, and 1/14/09

Press Release

Dated: December 16, 2009

Contact: Ronald Klattenberg (phone)

MIDDLETOWN, CT -- Where are “We the People”? The answer is in Middletown, according to a group of citizens invited to come together by Councilman Ronald Klattenberg. On Tuesday January 20, 2009, the country will pause to Inaugurate the 44th President of the United States, President-elect Barack Obama, and this informal group feels that may be the best time for the people of Middletown to come together and focus, as a community, on the questions most important to the greater Middletown area in this time of great change and opportunity.

The group (currently acting as a planning committee) has secured Russell Library for 12 noon and at 6:00 pm on Inauguration Day for the public to watch President Obama address the nation together and participate in a facilitated community conversation. This is a not a political event but rather a grassroots initiative to identify the needs of our community in these difficult times. We will record reactions and prioritize ideas that will help Middletown proactively contribute to and take advantage of the inevitable change which is coming. Obviously, the Library has limited space, so the Community Conversations group is asking any and all community organizations in the Middletown area to join this effort and host focused conversations at other sites including homes, thus creating a true community event with the largest possible representation of needs and concerns.

Community organizations are asked to contact the planning committee to contribute additional sites, obtain assistance, distribute information or help in any way to make this an engaging and exciting community success. There will be a second planning meeting on December 20th, 10:00 am, in the Library’s Hubbard Room, to develop a general Community Conversations format, assess resources needed and prepare for a facilitators training meeting scheduled for January 3.

This effort will need volunteer facilitators, sites and of course the people of our diverse community. In the end, we will record and collect results that will culminate in an unprecedented document of what the people of Middletown feel are the priorities for our City. This is the first step toward effective change.

Any organization or group of individuals interested in supporting this effort in any way is asked to immediately contact Councilman Grady Faulkner (phone and e-mail) in order to begin organizing and identifying host sites to publish for the general public. If individuals are having private celebrations, it is important to have those discussion results included as well.

###

For Immediate Release

Dated: January 4, 2009

Contact: Ronald Klattenberg (phone)

MIDDLETOWN, CT -- Are you hosting or facilitating a community conversation around the Inauguration? In an effort to collect consistent community input there will be an Information Session offered at the Russell Library Saturday January 10th at 9am. Anyone facilitating or leading a conversation is invited to attend and receive helpful suggestions and tips on how to effectively conduct these events.

The Middletown Community Conversations Group has secured Russell Library for 12 noon and at 6:00 pm on Inauguration Day for the public to watch President Obama address the nation together and participate in a facilitated community conversation. In addition, community organizations and others are encouraged to hold conversations and submit input to the Group as well. Contact Grady Faulkner for more information.

###

For Immediate Release

Dated: January 14, 2009

Contact: Lisa Santangelo (phone)

MIDDLETOWN, CT -- On Tuesday, January 20, 2009, Middletown residents will have the extraordinary opportunity to participate in facilitated, non-partisan Community Conversations in response to the Inaugural Address by the nation's 44th President.

A diverse group of 17 organizations will host 21 Conversations. Depending on the location, the programs will take place live at 12 noon and in the evening through recorded viewings of the address and live discussions. The complete list of locations and times is attached.

Another three dozen organizations have been contacted and are encouraging their members to participate in the Conversations where they are scheduled.

Two general community-wide viewings and discussions will take place at 12 noon and 6:00 pm. They will be held in the Hubbard Room in Russell Library and in City Council Chambers at City Hall. Due to elevator repair at the Library, participants who need handicapped accessibility to reach the Hubbard Room on the second floor are asked to call 347-0196 or 347-2528.

Citizens participating in the Community Conversations should come with pen, paper and open minds willing to engage in the process. This is a not a political event but rather a grassroots initiative to identify the needs of our community at this critical juncture in our country.

Expect to view the Inaugural speech and engage in facilitated conversations to develop priorities for Middletown, ideas for action plans, and what role “We the People” are willing to actively play in setting plans in motion.

For a list of other venues conducting the Conversations, check the listing on <http://middletowncommunityconversations.blogspot.com>. The Planning Committee thanks all the volunteers, location hosts, and facilitators. Special thanks to Youth Services Bureau Director Justin Carbonella for developing and conducting the Facilitator training sessions.

Results of this city-wide effort will be published so the work can begin in Middletown.

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Appendix B.

***The Chronicle*, February 2009, Community Conversations story**

Community Conversations Open Minds, Initiate Idea Exchanges, Spark Actions
by Dortha Cool Willetts, January 22, 2009 (Reprinted with *The Chronicle* permission)

“She’s Indian and I’m black. Why do we have the same color of skin?” a kindergartner at Spencer School asked her teacher, Miss McInvale. That question led to a whole lesson for the class on how we are all different in some ways, but alike in important ways. The children held their hands out to compare skin tones and found that they as a group were virtually a rainbow of colors.

That was one of the many conversations that took place in about 19 locations around the city immediately after people viewed the Inaugural Address of President Barack Hussein Obama. The kindergartners had picked up on the uniqueness of Obama’s own skin color among U.S. presidents.

Other words in Obama’s address spurred questions, proposals, and the exchange of ideas, all of which revolved around issues that individuals or groups brought up at meetings called “community conversations.” The meetings were led by facilitators who had materials to help them guide the conversations and gather ideas and proposals to compile into a record for review and tabulation. The completed compilation of those ideas and proposals will eventually be publicized by the committee, and forwarded to government agencies for possible action.

Two individuals who were responsible for the concept of Middletown community conversations, inspired in large part by the Obama Team and Move-On organizations, are Common Council member Ron Klattenberg and Lisa Santangelo. Others who worked on a committee to organize the project were Arthur Meyers, Grady Faulkner, Cheryl Jackson, Bob Santangelo, Audrey Scotti, Frank Kuan, Jim Streeto, Justin Carbonella, Barbara Arafteh, Philip Pessina, Ed McKeon, Jonathan Willetts and Dortha Willetts.

One of the conversations, held in Russell Library’s Hubbard Room, which was filled to capacity, was facilitated at noon by Secretary of State and Middletown resident Susan Bysiewicz, and at 6:00 p.m. by City Common Council member Philip Pessina. The following are some of the comments, questions and proposals of those who participated.

One gentleman suggested reviving an antipoverty program that used to be in

Middletown to help low income people and the needy. Another man said that the key to success in our communities was families, especially more dedicated fathers; he suggested that education could be provided to help people carry out the principles of providing good family structure. Bysiewicz referred him to a state senator who has a program for helping young men to take that kind of responsibility.

Steven deVoto spoke about a need to improve the transparency of Middletown government. He suggested: (1) media coverage of all meetings, (2) government transparency: making documents available about all government decisions, and that elected officials communicate their stands on issues clearly to their constituents, and (3) town committee transparency: letting more people know more about the party town committees and their work.

Secretary Susan Bysiewicz responded by decrying the decline of media coverage of government at the state level as well as in Middletown due to the near demise of two local newspapers and cutbacks at The Hartford Courant. Without this kind of regular news coverage, people don't know what their governments are doing. Cutbacks have also reduced the updating of municipal web sites. Adding that party town committees often have difficulty finding people to run for office, she said that her office could supply information about town committees.

Katchen Coley of the city Conservation Committee was pleased with Obama's promise to revive environment regulations as well as the stimulus package to create immediate shovel-ready projects for jobs, but said that the two goals may not work together. She said that most green projects are still on the drawing board because of the lack of public education and the lack of having EPA environment reviews in place and ready to go in 90 days. She urged the development of "a future stimulus program especially for sustainable projects."

Secretary Bysiewicz said that Congressman Joseph Courtney has written to Obama and "asked that his stimulus package be targeted to the updating of schools to make them more energy efficient."

Marilyn Mills seconded deVoto's point about the lack of transparency in government. Barbara Arafah said that we need to go beyond ourselves and dedicate ourselves more than we have ever done. State Representative Matt Lesser was concerned that we might lose track of where we want to go as a city, a state, and as a nation; representatives have had to cut budgets in the state legislature on energy programs and other areas that are essential. He proposed that we create an overall larger vision of where we want to go.

The Chronicle visited four other conversation sites. The Healing Racism Coalition, meeting at the Firehouse Steakhouse, reported that they heard hope in the conversations, and sensed that folks were ready to embrace change. The general sense was that everyone was ready to move forward, not to dwell on the past. That could mean having more dialogue sessions such as they have each month.

The Chronicle went to Spencer School and observed fifth graders and their teacher Mrs. Sharp in a conversation. One boy was concerned about job layoffs, as well as safety at Middletown High School. Several children were collecting food for Amazing Grace. Others spoke about the need to recycle materials. One girl wanted to see college become more affordable, another reported his family's efforts to save on electricity use, and one youngster was concerned about the melting ice caps. Some children talked about saving energy through car pooling and fewer stops for school buses.

At First Church of Christ, Congregational, on Court Street, The Reverend John Hall led the conversation which included Jonah Center members. One participant offered her house yard for a garden which could grow vegetables for St. Vincent dePaul's soup kitchen. Common Council member Vincent Loffredo spoke of the disparities between well-to-do and low income families in Connecticut, pointing out that 25 to 30 percent of high school students in poorer districts graduate from high school. One participant offered that during Obama's administration, Connecticut might have a change to get rail lines built to connect cities. Other suggestions were: a bike path from Walmart to Middletown, bicycle racks downtown, and mentoring in schools.

After all the conversations were held, group recorders returned to Russell Library and shared the main proposals of the groups. A few were: building connections among people of different age groups, encouraging local production and consumption of goods and services; building pedestrian-friendly walkways; creating a barter system for homeless people who don't want to be in a shelter but who would work for a place to stay overnight; hiring people to coordinate human needs with resources to meet those needs; employing seniors not only as volunteers but using their skills and experience in part-time jobs.

Most of the facilitator reports were sent or brought to the organizers by January 24 or shortly afterwards. What is the ultimate outcome of this citywide effort at grassroots for connecting with government? The question that was posed by the Obama Team before the inauguration, "What is Next?" appears to have come full circle. A lot of participants are now interested in the "What is Next?" after the community conversations of January 20, 2009.

Appendix C.

Community Conversations Locations

Middletown Community Conversations Host Locations			
On January 20, 2009, please join your neighbors at one of the following conversation locations so that we can speak and listen to each other as we ask questions and find answers.			
Organization	Location	Time	Open to:
American Association of Retired Persons	St. Pius Church, 310 Westfield Street	1:30	members
American Association of University Women	Wesleyan Wasch Center, 51 Lawn Avenue	7:00	members and students
Dunkin Donuts @ South Main	South Main Street	7pm	the public
Eddy Shelter	The Connection 955 South Main St.	11:30	staff and clients
First Church of Christ & Jonah Center	190 Church Street	6 pm	the public
Green Street	51 Green Street	noon	the public
Healing Racism Coalition	Firehouse Steakhouse 412 Main St.	11:30am	the public
Heritage Commons	38 Boston Rd	noon & 8pm	HC residents their families & interested seniors
Independent Day School	115 Laurel Brook Road, Middlefield	noon	Students and staff
Middlesex Community College	Chapman Hall, 100 Training Hill Rd	noon & 6pm	the public
Middlesex County Community Foundation	Wadsworth Mansion	5pm	speaker & discussion (this fund raiser admission is \$20)
Middletown City Hall	Dekoven Dr. Council Chamber	noon & 6pm	the public
Middletown Public Schools	various	various	Students and staff
Parents Seeking Educational	Woodrow Wilson Middle School 370 Hunting Hill	7-8:30 pm	PLTI & PTA parents & friends. Welcome All!

Excellence	Avenue		RSVP 638-1462
Public Restaurant	337 Main Street	7 – 10 pm	Jazz & discussions. All donations go to the food.
Russell Library	Hubbard Room 123 Broad Street	noon & 6pm	the public
Senior Affairs	Senior Center, 150 Williams St.	noon	seniors
Village at South Farms	645 Saybrook Rd	4 pm	residents
Wesleyan	Usdan Center Wyllys Avenue	10 am	the public

Note: The North End Action Team conducted their Community Conversations on January 14, 2009. Their conversations have been included in this report.

Appendix D.

Community Conversations Participating Groups Not Hosting

While the following groups did not host a conversation, they were included in the planning and encouraged members to participate so their voices could be heard.

Altrusa

American Legion

Arts Community Groups

Aware

Boy Scouts of America

Buddhist Community

Chamber of Commerce

Civitan

Coalition for Affordable Housing

CT Coalition to End Homelessness

CT Housing Coalition

CT Partnership for Strong Communities

Cross Street A.M.E. Zion Church

Girl Scouts of America

Hindu Community

Latina Policy Institute

League of Women Voters

Lions Club

Mercy Housing

Middlesex Coalition for Children

Middlesex County Branch – NAACP

Middlesex County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

Middletown Clergy Association

Middletown Ministerial Alliance

Middletown Public Housing

Middletown United Fathers

Multicultural Committee

Nehemiah Housing

Parent Leader Training Institute

Partnership for Strong Communities

People with Disabilities

Rotary

St. Luke's

St. Vincent DePaul

Westfield Residents Association

Appendix E.

Community Conversations Reading List – Russell Library

Prepared by:
Russell Library
123 Broad Street
Middletown, Connecticut 06457
(860) 347-2528
www.russelllibrary.org

Community Building

Wisdom Circles: A Guide to Selfdiscovery and Community Building in Small Groups by Charles Garfield, 1998 (302.34 GAR)

Working with Your Homeowners Association: A Guide to Effective Community Living by Marlene Coleman, 2003 (333.338 COL)

Ending Poverty in America: How to Restore the American Dream by Senator John Edwards, 2007 (339.46 EDW)

Building Powerful Community Organizations: A Personal Guide to Creating Groups That Can Solve Problems and Change the World by Michael J. Brown, 2006 (361.8 BRO)

All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents by Peter Benson, 2006 (PAR J 649.1 BEN)

Going Green

Going Green by David Armentrout, 2009 (j 333.72 ARM)

Connecticut's Energy Future by the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund, 2004 (VIDEO 333.79 CON)

75 Green Businesses That You Can Start to Make Money and Make a Difference by Glenn Corston, 2008 (377.72 CRO)

Green Living for Dummies by Yvonne Jeffery, 2008 (640 JEF)

Home Rich: Increasing the Value of the Biggest Investment of Your Life by Gerri Willis, 2008 (643.12 WIL)

Building Green directed by Tippy Bushkin, 2008 (DVD 690.837 BUI)

Health Care

Critical Condition: How Health Care in America Became Big Business and Bad Medicine by Donald Barlett and James Steele, 2004 (362.1 BAR)

Health Care on Less than You Think: The New York Times Guide to Getting Affordable Coverage by Fred Brock, 2006 (362.1 BRO)

Overtreated: Why Too Much Medicine Is Making Us Sicker and Poorer by Shannon Brownlee, 2007 (362.1 BRO)

Critical: What Can We Do About the Health Care Crisis by Tom Daschle, 2008 (362.1 DAS)

Betrayal of Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health by Laurie Garrett, 2000 (362.1 GAR)

Health Care Meltdown: Confronting the Myths and Fixing Our Failing System by Robert LeBow, 2003 (362.1 LEB)

Severed Trust: Why American Medicine Hasn't Been Fixed by George Lundberg, 2000 (362.1 LUN)

The Health Care Mess: How We Got into It and What It Will Take to Get Out by Julius Richmond and Rashi Fein, 2005 (362.1 RIC)

Stay Healthy, Live Longer, Spend Wisely: Making Intelligent Choices in America's Health Care System by Davis Liu, 2008 (615.5 LIV)

Strengthening the Economy

Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future by Bill McKibben, 2007 (306.3 MCK)

Field Guide to the U.S. Economy: A Compact and Irreverent Guide to Economic Life in America by Jonathan Teller-Elsberg, 2006 (330.973 TEL)

The Green-collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems by Van Jones, 2008 (363.7 JON)

75 Green Businesses that You Can Start to Make Money and Make a Difference by Glenn Croston, 2008 (377.72 CRO)

Strategies for the Green Economy: Opportunities and Challenges in the New World of Business by Joel Makower, 2009 (658.048 MAK)

Volunteerism

Giving: How Each of Us Can Change the World by Bill Clinton, 2007 (171.8 CLI and BKCD 171.8 CLI)

The Power of Serving Others: You Can Start Where You Are by Gary Morsch, 2006 (171.8 MOR)

The Kids Volunteering Book by Arlene Erlbach, 1998 (j 361.37 ERL)

The Future Is Ours, So Now What? A Youth Volunteer Program of Lions Club International, 1995 (VIDEO 361.37 FUT)

The 100 Best Vacations to Enrich Your Life by Pam Grout, 2007 (910.202. GRO)

The 100 Best Worldwide Vacations to Enrich Your Life by Pam Grout, 2008 (910.202 GRO)

Appendix F.

World Café Design Principles in Action

The principles of the World Café offer important considerations for ways to help people learn the art of conversation. First, pay attention to the setting. Creating comfortable and inviting settings honors the importance of conversation and respects the participants. While we may not always attend to every detail exactly (red checkered table cloths) it is important to create settings where small groups (ideally 4 – sitting at a small table or on the floor) are able to have more intimate conversations.

We want to carefully consider what the focus and scope of the inquiry will be. What are the questions that matter and how can they be framed to be developmentally and culturally appropriate?

Insuring everyone's contributions are heard is important. Sessions using this process are best conducted after clear guidelines for groups have been established and put into motion during prior group meetings.

How can the small groups share their discussions in ways that bring forth new information where the collective intelligence of the group is harvested? And, once harvested how can the information be put into action?

(The following has been extracted from <http://www.theworldcafe.com/know-how#context>.)



Set The Context

There is an old saying that if you don't know where you are going any road will get you there. When you have a clear idea of the what and why of your Café then the how becomes much easier. Here are a few questions to ask yourself and those helping you plan:

- What is the topic or issue we want to address or explore?
- Who needs to be invited to participate in this conversation?
- Who represents both the conventional and the unconventional wisdom?
- How long do we have for the inquiry?
- What line(s) of inquiry do we want to pursue? What themes are most likely to be meaningful and stimulate creativity?
- What is the best outcome we can envision? How might we design a path toward that outcome?



Create Hospitable Space

Most meeting places are sterile, cold, and impersonal. Consider choosing warm, inviting environments with natural light and comfortable seating. Honor our long traditions of human hospitality by offering food and refreshments. Hospitable space also means "safe" space--where everyone feels free to offer their best thinking.

Hospitable space begins with the invitation to attend a Café. Include the theme or central question you'll be exploring in your Café in the invitation. State it as an open-ended exploration, not a problem-solving intervention. Use color, hand printing, graphics and other ways to make it stand out from the deluge of paper and e-messages we all receive.

When we ask people where they have experienced their most significant conversations, nearly everyone recalls sitting around a kitchen or dining room table. There is a easy intimacy when gathering at a small table, that most of us immediately recognize. When you walk into a room and see it filled with café tables you know that you are not in for your usual business meeting.

Creating a Café ambiance is easy and need not be expensive:

- Stagger the tables in a random fashion, don't set them up in straight rows
- Use plastic red checked tablecloths
- Cover these with two sheets of flip chart paper
- Place a mug or wine glass filled with water based markers to encourage people to write and draw on the tablecloths
- A small bud vase and a votive candle will complete the table set up
- Have some soft music playing as people arrive
- Be sure to have some food and beverages available



Explore Questions That Matter

Knowledge emerges in response to compelling questions. Find questions that are relevant to the real-life concerns of the group. Powerful questions that "travel well" help

attract collective energy, insight, and action as they move throughout a system. Depending on the timeframe available and your objectives, your Café may explore a single question or use a progressively deeper line of inquiry through several conversational rounds.

As we have worked with groups over the years we have asked hundreds of people what makes a powerful question. Several themes have emerged. A powerful question:

- Is simple and clear
- Is thought provoking
- Generates energy
- Focuses inquiry
- Surfaces assumptions
- Opens new possibilities
- Invites deeper reflection
- Seeks what is useful

A note about appreciative process... David Cooperrider has long championed something he calls "appreciative inquiry." After several years of studying how people ask questions he has stated that the most important lesson from appreciative inquiry is that "people grow in the direction of the questions they ask." The questions we ask and the way we construct them will focus us in a particular manner and will greatly affect the outcome of our inquiry. If we ask: What is wrong and who is to blame? We set up a certain dynamic of problem-solving and blame assigning. While there may be instances where such an approach is desirable, when it comes to hosting a Café, we have found it much more effective to ask people questions that invite the exploration of possibilities and to connect them with why they care.

One potential pitfall is posing questions that ask about the nature of truth. Philosophers have spent thousands of years arguing the nature of truth and many of the wars in history have been fought over such questions. We are seeking to reach "shared understanding about what is meaningful to each individual." Such shared understanding does not mean that we all share the same perspective on what is true, but rather, that each participant has the opportunity to share what is true and meaningful for them. This in turn will allow us all to see our collective situation in a different light, hopefully enlarging our individual views of truth along the way. Our experience has been that questions which focus on "What is useful here?", are more effective at generating engagement on the part of participants and tend to provoke less defensive reactions than questions which focus on "What is true?"



Encourage Everyone's Contribution

People engage deeply when they feel they are contributing their thinking to questions that are important to them. Encourage all participants to contribute to the conversation. As Meg Wheatley says "Intelligence emerges as a system connects to itself in new and diverse ways." Each participant in the Café represents an aspect of the whole system's diversity and as each person has the chance to connect in conversation more of the intelligence inherent in the group becomes accessible.

We have found that on occasion it is helpful to have a "talking object" on the tables. Originally used by numerous indigenous peoples, a talking object can be a stick or stone, a marker or salt shaker, almost anything so long as it can be passed among the people at the table. There are two aspects to the talking object. Whomever holds the talking object is the only one empowered to speak. And whomever is not holding it is empowered to listen. For the speaker the responsibility is to focus on the topic and express as clearly as possible their thoughts about it. For the listeners, the responsibility is to listen to what the speaker is saying with the implicit assumption that they have something wise and important to say. Listen with a willingness to be influenced, listen for where this person is coming from and appreciate that their perspective, regardless of how divergent from your own, is equally valid and represents a part of the larger picture which none of us can see by ourselves.

It is not necessary to use a talking object all the time, but in cases where the topic being explored raises impassioned responses, it can be a very effective way to ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute, even if they simply choose to hold the talking object and observe a few minutes of silence.



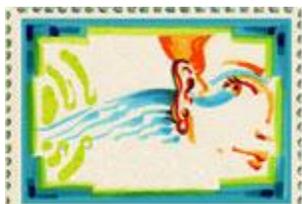
Connect Diverse Perspectives

Ask members to offer their individual perspectives and listen for what is emerging "in the middle of the table." Use the tablecloths and markers to create a "shared visual space" through drawing the emerging ideas. Sometimes the co-created pictures can really be worth a thousand words in showing the relationships between ideas.

A woman we know once remarked: "The most radical thing you can do is to introduce people to folks they don't know." Make sure that participants from each round each go to tables with different people as the conversational rounds progress. This cross-pollination of ideas often produces surprising results that could not have happened otherwise.

Setting up your Café in conversational rounds and asking people to change tables between rounds allows for a dense web of connections to be woven in a short period of time. Each time you travel to a new table you are bringing with you the threads of the last round and interweaving them with those brought by other travelers. As the rounds progress the conversation moves to deeper levels. People who arrived with fixed positions often find that they are more open to new and different ideas.

Our experience shows that it's very useful to ask one person to remain at a table to act as the table host. This person will summarize the conversation of the previous round for the newcomers ensuring that any important points are available for consideration in the upcoming round. They then invite the travelers to likewise do a brief sharing of the essence from the previous round allowing everyone to become more deeply connected to the web of conversation.



Listen Together and Notice Patterns

Listening is a gift we give to one another. The quality of our listening is perhaps the most important factor determining the success of a Café. Whole books and courses have been written about how to listen. One of our favorite analogies comes from jazz great Wynton Marsalis who explains that when jazz musicians get together to jam, whoever is the best listener ends up contributing the most to the music, because they are able to play off of whatever is being offered by the other cats in the band. Café conversations share that jazz element, of inviting each person to express themselves authentically, and those who listen skillfully are able to easily build on what is being shared. A few tips for improving our listening:

- Help folks to notice their tendency to plan their response to what is being said actually detracts from both the speaker and the listener
- Listen as if each person were truly wise, and sharing some truth that you may have heard before but do not yet fully grasp
- Listen with an openness to be influenced by the speaker
- Listen to support the speaker in fully expressing themselves
- Listen for deeper questions, patterns, insights and emerging perspectives
- Listen for what is not being spoken along with what is being shared



Share Collective Discoveries

Conversations held at one table reflect a pattern of wholeness that connects with the conversations at the other tables. The last phase of the Café involves making this pattern of wholeness visible to everyone. To do so, hold a conversation between the individual tables and the whole group. Ask the table groups to spend a few minutes considering what has emerged in their Café rounds which has been most meaningful to them. Distill these insights, patterns, themes and deeper questions down to the essence and then provide a way to get them out to the whole room. It can be helpful to cluster this aspect of the conversation by asking for one thing that was new or surprising and then asking people to share only those ideas which link and build on that particular aspect. When it is clear that the group has exhausted this topic ask for another one and repeat the process until you have given each table or person the opportunity to speak about what matters to them. Make sure that you have a way to capture this, either on flip charts, or by having each table record them on large post-it notes, or even their table cloths which can then be taped to a wall so that everyone can see them. After each table has had the opportunity to share their insights, the whole group may wish to take a few minutes of silent reflection and consider:

- What is emerging here?
- If there was a single voice in the room, what would it be saying?
- What deeper questions are emerging as a result of these conversations?
- Do we notice any patterns and what do those patterns point to, or how do they inform us?
- What do we now see and know as a result of these conversations?

Appendix G.

How to Hold a World Café

The World Café is a whole group interaction method focused on conversations. A Café Conversation is a creative process for leading collaborative dialogue, sharing knowledge and creating possibilities for action in groups of all sizes. The environment is set up like a café, with paper-covered tables for four supplied with refreshments. People sit four to a table and hold a series of conversational rounds lasting from 20 to 45 minutes about one or more questions which are personally meaningful to them. At the end of each round, one person remains at each table as the host, while the other three travels to separate tables. Table hosts welcome newcomers to their tables and share the essence of that table's conversation so far. The newcomers relate any conversational threads they are carrying -- and then the conversation continues, deepening as the round progresses.

- * Seat four or five people at small Cafe-style tables or in conversation clusters.
- * Set up progressive (usually three) rounds of conversations of approximately 20-30 minutes each.
- * Questions or issues that genuinely matter to your life, work or community are engaged while other small groups explore similar questions at nearby tables.
- * Encourage both table hosts and members to write, doodle and draw key ideas on their tablecloths or to note key ideas on large index cards or placemats in the center of the group.
- * Upon completing the initial round of conversation, ask one person to remain at the table as the host while the others serve as travelers or "ambassadors of meaning." The travelers carry key ideas, themes and questions into their new conversations.
- * Ask the table host to welcome the new guests and briefly share the main ideas, themes and questions of the initial conversation. Encourage guests to link and connect ideas coming from their previous table conversations, listening carefully and building on each other's contributions.
- * By providing opportunities for people to move in several rounds of conversation, ideas, questions, and themes begin to link and connect. At the end of the second round, all of the tables or conversation clusters in the room will be cross-pollinated with insights from

prior conversations.

* In the third round of conversation, people can return to their home (original) tables to synthesize their discoveries, or they may continue traveling to new tables, leaving the same or a new host at the table. Sometimes a new question that helps deepen the exploration is posed for the third round of conversation.

* After several rounds of conversation, initiate a period of sharing discoveries and insights in a whole group conversation. It is in these town meeting-style conversations that patterns can be identified, collective knowledge grows, and possibilities for action emerge.

Appendix H.

Middletown Community Conversations

Inaugural Celebration (Jan. 20, 2009)

Information Session for Host of Community Conversations

Agenda

- Introductions
 - Who are you, what agency do you represent?
 - Why did you decide to be a part of this initiative?
- Principles of the Community Conversations
- Your role as hosts/facilitators
- What are the questions that matter?
- Recording the conversation and looking for outcomes
- Ways to hold a conversation
- Questions/Thoughts???

Introductions

Who are you, what agency do you represent?

Why did you decide to be a part of this initiative?

Principles of the Community Conversations

The idea is for the community to watch President Obama's inaugural address at 12 noon or at 6pm (or some other time) and participate in a facilitated community conversation. This gathering is not a political event. It is grassroots initiative to identify the assets that we all have and how we can deploy them in these difficult times.

We will record the discussion and work to prioritize ideas that may help Middletown proactively contribute to and take advantage of this current moment in history.

To do so, we are looking for locations all across the community to hold community conversations. Additionally, we are asking each site to adhere to the following principles:

- Set the context
- Create hospitable space
- Explore questions that matter
- Encourage everyone's contributions
- Connect diverse perspectives
- Listen together for insights
- Share collective discoveries

Your role as hosts/facilitators

The role of each host and its facilitator will be to manage the community conversation at their site. We are allowing each site to determine what will work best for them as they follow the basic principles outlined above. You know your group and your constituents best while also understanding what resources you may have available to you. We also understand that these resources will change from site to site. The important thing is giving as many Middletown residents as possible a chance to join their fellow citizens

and be a part of a conversation where everyone's voice may be heard. Much of that comes with the ability of the host to create a comfortable environment that will allow for open and honest discussion. Imagine you were inviting a guest to your house, what you would do for them to make them feel welcomed?

What are the questions that matter?

“If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes.” – Albert Einstein

“Questioning breaks open the stagnant, hardened shells of the present, opening up options to be explored” – Fran Peavey, *Strategic Questioning*

Principals of Strategic Questions

- Be engaging, invite further learning, and assume the best of intentions in the hearer.
- Help the hearer move on the basis of their strengths, their logic about how change occurs, and their environment.
- Be asked at the right time, with a few simple words, and by someone whom the hearer truly respects.
- Be truly open (not be asked manipulatively, and/or in order to achieve a particular answer, and/or worded in a way that contains or suggests a solution)

Examples of strategic Questions

- How might we best get this done?
- What experiences are influencing how you perceive this issue?
- What might shift our situation for the better?
- What kinds of information, from what sources, do we value?
- How has change happened here in the past?
- How and why did this issue first surface? What's change?
- How can we redesign “x” to be more efficient?

Sample questions for your conversations

If “yes we can”, then what will I do?

Related to what will “I do”, what can we do together?

What resources do we need to make this happen?

Recording the conversation and looking for outcomes

The goal is to collect results that will culminate in an unprecedented document of what Middletown's citizens feel are the priorities for our City. The collective statement of needs and concerns is the first step toward effective change in our community.

To do this we need a recorded document of what were the identified solutions and steps for a better Middletown at each conversation site. We are asking that a simple bulleted list of these solutions and steps is created for each question asked (or that come up at any point in the discussion). The information can be recorded as raw data and the host organization will not have to synthesize or analyze the material in any way.

Basic responsibilities for a recorder to consider:

- Record the group’s answers to each of the questions
- List key points (examples, elaborations) offered to flesh out or provide the rationale for the group’s answers to each of the agenda questions. Include name of person if they indicate they would like to be followed up with.
- Keep a parking lot list for issues that don’t directly address agenda topics
- Ask for clarification when something is unclear
- Review notes at the close of meeting, to clarify or fill in gaps in the record
- Record notes in a written document

Your group’s final document should include the following information as a heading to the document:

group/organization involved¹

¹ If your location has been deemed “open to the public” then you may state so in the first line of the heading

location of discussion

date and time

number of attendees

If a group would also like to include a list of its attendees and their email addresses you include it in your final reports. Please note that the request for emails is so that the final document may be distributed back out to the community once complete.

Your recorded notes may be submitted to Justin Carbonella at carbonellaj@mps1.org or mailed to or dropped off at:

Justin Carbonella

Middletown Youth Services Bureau

370 Hunting Hill Ave

Middletown, CT 06457

Appendix I.

Suggested Greeting for Community Conversations

Good afternoon/evening on behalf of the organizers of the Middletown Community Conversation and (HOST ORGANIZATION) we wanted to welcome you all for joining us today. All across Middletown groups just like this one are coming together to focus on making this a better community for all. And in doing so we hope to allow all of our neighbors to come together and discuss opportunities, identify priorities, and generate new ideas on what's next for Middletown as we enter this historic new chapter in our nation's history books.

To help us stimulate discussion we will provide some questions that we will share with you shortly as well as the opportunity to view President Obama's inaugural address. However, before we do that I would just like to go over some housekeeping and set some ground rules.

(HOUSEKEEPING-note if food is available and that they should help themselves, note if you have name cards, where are the bathrooms???, hopefully you can create an email list-you may note that this is for follow up and will not be shared for any other purposes, add anything else you think might be helpful to ease people into the discussions and make them comfortable)

As for some general guidelines, first we'd like to note that although the focus is on Middletown, we do not want to limit any idea from being shared, so if it includes something that is regional, state-wide or national please feel free to share. We also ask that we focus on solutions and although problems and concerns may come up in our discussions, let's try to drive this conversation toward our individual and shared community assets and how they can be deployed to make Middletown a better place. Additionally, and in keeping the end in mind, we want everyone to know that each conversation will be recorded and the information will be put into one collective document that will help us identify what's next for this community. And finally, there are additional guidelines specific around sharing during our conversations but we will wait until after we watch the speech....so without further delay...(speech may be started here).

The following guidelines may be shared as you are about to start the conversations.

Community Conversation Guidelines

- Sharing is voluntary.
- We want to create a safe, loving, and respectful atmosphere.
- Sharing is about one's own feelings, experiences and perceptions, etc
- We are not always going to agree, or see everything the same way, and that's okay
- Each person has a right to and responsibility for his or her own feelings, thoughts and beliefs
- It is important to avoid criticism or judgment about another person's sharing and point of view of his/her feelings.
- Avoid debate and argument. It rarely changes anything or anyone, and tends to ultimately inhibit the sharing
- All ideas are valuable.
- Refrain from singling out any individual as "representing " their group, gender, race, etc.
- It is important to give full attention to whoever is talking.
- Feelings are important
- No cross talking or debate
- No talking to person next to you while someone else is being talking.
- Hopefully, we will leave these meetings with a deeper sense of community and a renewed hope for the future of Middletown

Notes:

Appendix J.

Community Conversations Sample Questions and Response Forms

Middletown Community Conversations

Several groups have asked for example facilitating questions with which to start their community conversations as well as an example of a response form to report out their conversation results.

Sample Questions

The following are two sets of three questions we found helpful.

What important issue or idea was brought to mind by the Inaugural Address?

What can we, as a community, do about it?

What can you as an individual do about it?

If “yes we can”, then what will I do?

Related to what will “I do”, what can we do together?

What resources do we need to make this happen?

Conversation Reporting Form

The conversation reporting form is on the next page. If you do not use this form, when you report back, please be sure to include: group/organization involved, location, date, time, and number of participants. This information should be forwarded to Justin Carbonella at either his e-mail address:

carbonellaj@mps1.org or mailed to:

Justin Carbonella
Middletown Youth Services Bureau
370 Hunting Hill Avenue
Middletown, CT 06457

Middletown Community Conversations

Held by(organization): _____

on (date & time) _____

at (location) _____

for (# of people) _____

For each of the topics discussed, please report out topics noted below. For **example**, the issue is picking up after your dog; group solution might be install pooper scooper bag kiosks and signs as well as submit grant application to dog food companies for signs and kiosks; individual solution might be pick up after your own dog and encourage family and friends to do the same; resources would be signs and kiosks.

Issue (please relate to Middletown):

Solutions:

What can we do?

What can I do? _____

Resources needed (if any): _____

Notes:

Continued Next Page

Issue (please relate to Middletown):

Solutions:

What can we do?

What can I do?

Resources needed (if any)

Issue (please relate to Middletown):

Solutions:

What can we do?

What can I do?

Resources needed (if any)

Appendix K.

City of Middletown Common Council 12/21/09 Press Release



**COMMON COUNCIL OFFICE
245 deKoven Drive
Middletown, CT 06457
860 344-3442**

PRESS RELEASE:

For Immediate Release

FROM: The Common Council Office

CONTACTS: Ronald P. Klattenberg
Philip J. Pessina

DATE: December 21, 2009

On November 17, 2009, the Common Council adopted new rules for the conduct of its business at regularly scheduled Common Council meetings. One new provision to the rules removed the agenda item entitled, "public hearing on non-agenda items" whereby the public could address the council on any issues of concern. Because of the growing length of council meetings, this item occurred late in the evening. The public has expressed frustration by having to wait an inordinate amount of time before having the opportunity to speak. The Council has decided they needed to get out into the community to hear citizens' issues and concerns. With the success of the Community Conversations sponsored by the Russell Library and citizen volunteers in January, the Council will now hold meetings outside of the Council Chamber at various locations in the City to make it easier for the public to participate during the next year.

The Council members anticipate this new move, to city-wide locations, will encourage public involvement. Because of the structure of the meetings in the past, the public who spoke had little or no feedback from the City. The Common Council will be noting the topics raised at the community meetings and forwarding those items to appropriate Council Committees and/or the Mayor's Office for follow-up. The objective of these meetings is to encourage broad public participation in the form of presenting their concerns and ideas to the Common Council for referral to the appropriate City department or Committee for future action. This will make local government more accessible and find new ways to improve Middletown's economy and services.

The Community Public Meeting Schedule for the Common Council has been set for the coming year. The Council rules state each member of the public will have ten minutes to address the Council with their concerns. The first meeting will be held on January 12, 2010 at 7 p.m. in the Media Center of Woodrow Wilson Middle School, Hunting Hill Avenue.

The meeting dates for the year are as follows:

January 12, 2010 Tuesday 7 p.m. WWMS Media Center
February 9, 2010 Tuesday 7 p.m. MHS Media Center
March 9, 2010 Tuesday 7 p.m. Macdonough Gym
April 13, 2010 Tuesday 7 p.m. South Fire Community Room
May 13, 2010 Thursday 7 p.m. Moody School Gym
June 10, 2010 Thursday 7 p.m. MHS Media Center
July 8, 2010 Thursday 7 p.m. City Hall Council Chamber
August 12, 2010 Thursday 7 p.m. South Fire Community Room
September 9, 2010 Thursday 7 p.m. Macdonough Gym
October 14, 2010 Thursday 7 p.m. Moody School Gym
November 9, 2010 Tuesday 7 p.m. Snow Auditorium
(November 11 is a Holiday)
December 9, 2010 Thursday 7 p.m. City Hall Council Chamber

WWMS – Woodrow Wilson Middle School, Hunting Hill Avenue
MHS – Middletown High School, LaRosa Lane
Macdonough Elementary School, 66 Spring Street
South Fire District Fire House, 445 Randolph Road
Moody Elementary School, 300 Country Club Road
Snow Elementary School, 299 Wadsworth Street
City Hall Council Chamber, 245 deKoven Drive

The meetings will be advertised during the year with the hope that many citizens will take advantage of these opportunities to express their ideas and concerns. Should the public have questions or concerns regarding these meetings they should contact Councilman Ron Klattenberg, Democratic Deputy Majority Leader or Councilman Phil Pessina, Republican Minority Leader through the Council Office, 860-344-3442.