

Middletown's Plan of Development

CHAPTER 9

ECONOMIC BASE: AN INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

Planning for economic development must be included in the overall community development planning process. Planning is essential to insure that the community has control over the course of events affecting it. Unexpected or unplanned changes in the economy could be detrimental to Middletown. Foresight and planning can aid Middletown in maintaining some degree of stability and growth.

An understanding of the current economic base will allow city officials, residents and the Planning staff to be aware of potential problems and/or opportunities for the future. An economic development plan in the Plan of Development is one way in which city officials, residents and the Planning staff can identify the work that needs to be done to insure economic vitality in Middletown.

GOAL

To encourage and assist existing businesses to remain prosper and expand and to attract high quality, new businesses.

To encourage retail and service establishments to locate in the Central Business District and discourage their dispersion to other parts of the City.

STRATEGIES & OBJECTIVES

1. Work with existing private and non-profit organizations in the city and state to assist existing businesses and attract new desirable businesses.
2. Make all reasonable attempts to streamline the permitting process so as to make Middletown more attractive to potential businesses.
3. Create a marketing brochure which highlights the benefits of doing business in Middletown and promotes the city's Central Business District.
4. Analyze the future of major employers in the city in terms of state and national trends.
5. Develop an early warning system to identify industries on the verge of cutting back or closing.
6. Target those industries in trouble and in need of assistance and work with them to provide various forms of assistance.
7. Insure that high school graduates are equipped to be high quality participants in the labor force by developing a working partnership between private industry and the public school system.
8. Develop a program to monitor the hiring and promotion of city high school graduates by the private sector.
9. Promote the expansion of day care and supervised after school opportunities.
10. Promote programs to increase the hiring of veterans and persons with disabilities.

GOALS

To encourage balanced growth in areas most suited for such growth, so as to insure Middletown of a sound fiscal position and a secure employment and tax base.

STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES

1. Inventory and analyze existing, undeveloped land which is zoned for business and industrial uses in order to identify shortages, and then react to these shortages. This inventory should be

coordinated by the Planning Department but include representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, Industry for Middletown, Wesleyan University and private industry.

2. Concentrate retail sales, specialty shops, governmental and legal activities in the Central Business District.
3. Adopt an aggressive and creative marketing campaign to attract more people to the CBD.
4. Inventory and promote the development of land using Public Act 270, particularly in the Industrial Redevelopment Zone, with the intent of retaining and attracting small growth industries whose customer base has expanded beyond New England.
5. Address industrial development constraints and market available land and buildings with the intent of attracting high growth, high quality industries for the year 2000 and beyond
6. Maintain an economically sound balance between residential, commercial and industrial property taxes.
7. Amend Zoning Code to allow for the incorporation of fiscal impact analysis for large residential zone changes and special exception uses, in order to better understand the fiscal ramifications of the development.

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

An important fact to understand in planning for economic development is that Middletown is part of a larger region in which social and economic interaction takes place. The economic events of surrounding communities, the region, the state and the nation all have an impact on the local situation. An economic plan that ignores the regional context has very little chance of being accurate or successful. The Middletown Plan for Economic Growth recognizes that the city is part of the larger Middletown Labor Market Area and therefore the plan is in many cases regional in scope.

ECONOMIC HISTORY

Before any technical analysis begins, it is important to review historical economic development. Any economic analysis done outside of a historical context will lack the insights necessary to make judgments about the prospects for change and growth in the future. This historical review of the city will help to gain some insights into the physical, social and economic factors that influence the continued development of the city.

In 1614 the Dutch sea captain Adrian Block ventured up the Connecticut River aboard the "Restless: to explore its long, serene, tree-lined banks. Upon returning to the Netherlands, Block told of the picturesque areas as the perfect location for settlement in the new world. During the early years of colonial history, it was the sheer beauty of the river and its surroundings which attracted the initial settlers to this area. Subsequently, these settlers acquired from the Indians properties spanning five miles or more southward from the Sebethe River, northward as far as Rocky Hill; while from the west bank the area extended inland from five to ten miles, and from the east bank of the Connecticut River more than six miles.

These lands comprised Middletown in its earliest form. From the 1600's through the nineteenth century, the economic vitality of Middletown has centered about the Connecticut River. In fact, by 1650 the early settlers, many of whom migrated from the Massachusetts Colony, made their permanent homes in the vicinity of the river in order to cultivate farm products to trade with the outside world. The Dutch initiated the trade and shipping industry by acquiring beaver skins from the Indians to send back to the Netherlands. Although making a living under the economic constraints of the early days was not a simple endeavor, the settlers remained remarkably self-sufficient in that they tilled the land, sewed, wove, cooked and harvested to sustain their community.

Vital to the economic growth, expansion and commercial prosperity of the 1700's was a slow, yet steady increase in the population of Middletown. Once again, the development of the Connecticut River into the main artery of regional transportation during this period enabled trade and agriculture to flourish. In fact, as early as the 1750's trade was quite extensive with the Massachusetts Colony, the West Indies, Cuba,

Jamaica and Great Britain as the settlers exported livestock, wheat, rye, barley, oats, maize and flax for sugar, molasses, rum and salt. Shipping, farming and trade with the world accelerated growth to such an extent that by 1756 a population of 5,664 made Middletown the largest town in Connecticut. Furthermore, so closely was Middletown's economic life tied to the river that, by the outbreak of the Revolution, one third of the population was engaged in commercial activities. With the establishment in 1784 of a charter for the Middletown Bank, the City became the financial center of the area attracting outsiders to come to Middletown to purchase and trade goods and to manage their finances. Finally, as land grew to be less abundant and farming less profitable, some began to look beyond the soil for their livelihood.

By the 1820's it became clear, due to various economic and political factors, that Middletown would never again be a major port – and not even a major city of Connecticut. One economic component which marked this unfortunate fact was the transformation of the local economic base from agricultural to fully industrial.

This phenomenon was engineered by external factors. The initial blow to local agriculture and trade was delivered by Thomas Jefferson when in 1807 he put into effect the various Embargo Acts in response to the seizure of American ships by Great Britain and France. This was followed by Madison's Non-Intercourse Acts, which when issued in 1809, essentially forced the relocation of shipping and trade of goods to the more easily accessible major port-cities such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore. Thus, as local trade with the world declined, so too did the profitability of harvesting agricultural goods for a living in Middletown.

The earliest industrial development in Middletown represented a response to the needs defined by the Revolutionary War. Simeon North's pistol factory exemplified this. However, the real driving force to the development of a diverse and extensive industrial base in Middletown was provided by the wealthy shipbuilders and traders, such as Samuel Russell, who dabbled in industrial development through investments of their capital in new areas.

The economic activities of these new entrepreneurs accounts for the relatively early existence of such varied industrial endeavors as woolen mills, soap-making companies, as well as pistol, sword, musket and rifle factories. Therefore, an early and adequate supply of capital provided Middletown with a vast industrial base.

The period of 1830 to 1870 marked the growth and expansion of Middletown's industrial capacity. In 1860 such major manufacturers as the Middletown Plate Company, I.E. Palmer Hammock Mills, and later in 1875, the Goodyear Rubber Company, were established in Middletown.

As a result of this, the value of industrial output increase by 140%, the value of the capital invested in industry increased by 184%, and the number of industrial workers grew from 566 in 1860 to 1,200 in 1870. Thus, it was during this crucial period of 1830 to 1870 that Middletown began to resemble the place with which we are familiar today, with industry as a permanent part of the economy.

Whereas Middletown's early industrial base was dramatically expanded by the capital investments made by various manufacturing outfits, the City's overall industrial capacity was severely limited by the scarcity of adequate transportation. Prior to the advent of industrialization, the river provided adequate access to world commerce through trade.

However, the railroads assumed the role of most efficient transporter of industrial and agricultural goods during the early nineteenth century. At this point in the industrial development in Middletown, proper access to the railroad network was essential in order to establish permanent commercial ties. Unfortunately, this access was never provided. Many cite this lack of adequate transportation as the crucial factor which thwarted further industrial growth in Middletown, thereby rendering the city a second-tier industrial power in the State of Connecticut.

Although Middletown's role in both the first and second World War was not indicative of a great industrial power of New England, the entire city certainly did pitch in to support the war effort.

Specifically, the Russell Company manufactured cartridge belts for machine guns and other arms to be contributed to the cause. The net result of this concerted effort was that the industrial growth which took place during the wars enabled the Middletownians to share in the prosperity which followed each war. Acquiring automobiles, radios and washing machines in greater numbers. Similarly, an even further expanded industrial base during World War II served to revitalize the aggregate demand left lagging by the Great Depression. Thus, the cyclical leaps and lags associated with the war times ultimately fostered renewed growth and industrial expansion in the area.

By the early 1950's however, industrial expansion, per se, was overshadowed by industrial absorption; a process by which Middletown's older and larger industries were either assimilated by distant corporations or suffered demise. For example, whereas in 1966 the Goodyear Rubber Company announced its closure, Pratt & Whitney bought the CANEL plant, thereby offsetting potential unemployment in the Middletown area. Furthermore, the economic crunch of the late 1960's and early 1970's perpetuated the trend by which large corporations such as Aetna, Fenner America and Raymond Engineering replace the family-owned industries. Perhaps it has been only these larger manufacturing and service outfits which, due to their ability to acquire raw materials and provide for transportation relatively cheaply, have been capable of competing for nation-wide markets.

This trend has been responsible for the rapid development, starting in the 1970's and continuing to the present, of the Westfield area, including the designation of the Interstate Trade and Interstate Office Park Zones in the area of Interstate 91, which has resulted in over 10,000 new jobs to date.

It is this I-91 corridor which holds the key to Middletown's future. The continued migration of large reputable corporations to Middletown means a heightened sense of professionalism for the City as well as renewed job security, commercial growth and prosperity.

Middletown's history has been characterized by a tradition of marked change and evolution. Fortunately for Middletown, this process of evolution has been toward a position of greater economic stability and opportunity for its many inhabitants.

ASSETS, LIABILITIES AND TRENDS

Middletown has many strengths when it comes to being attractive to business and industry. The strengths include a growing and dedicated labor force, steady growth in employment opportunities, a pro-business atmosphere and the ability to offer a high quality of life to the majority of its citizens. Middletown also has a first rate Chamber of Commerce, the Middlesex Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) and Industry for Middletown (INFORM). These are three professionally staffed private organizations which promote and assist business and industry in Middletown. The city is the commercial and retail center for the MidState Region, the fastest growing region in the state. The city possesses a well-established Central Business District, has excellent accessibility to major thoroughfares, maintains a significant amount of rural land and has a diverse, slightly more affordable, housing supply. Further, the present socioeconomic, and demographic characteristics, as well as the employment characteristics in Middletown and the Middletown area are an indication of a stable economy with excellent mixed growth in both the residential housing sector of the market and the employment segment of the economy. Also attractive to businesses are Connecticut's diversified economy and its excellent Department of Economic Development and their wide ranging business assistance programs.

EMPLOYMENT AND LABOR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS

An essential element in a healthy economic environment is the quantity and quality of the city's and the region's employment and labor force characteristics. The labor force of a community is a major factor in

attracting and keeping industry and commerce and the employment opportunities are a major factor in attracting and keeping a healthy labor force.

Employment data for the Middletown market shows that covered employment jobs in Middletown increase from 23,840 jobs provided in 1980 to 32,110 jobs provided by local firms in 1987. This represents a very healthy 4.3% compounded annual rate of growth in employment during the 1980-87 period with the local employment market adding an average 1,180 new jobs per year. This growth in employment opportunities resulted in declining and record low unemployment rates for both Middletown and the state of Connecticut. But, as the economic growth has slowed down unemployment rates have begun to rise. However these rates have not risen to anywhere near the levels experienced during the 1981 – 82 recession. Figure 9.1 displays the unemployment rates for the city.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES 1980 – 90

1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 JULY 1990 *UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

Figure 9.2 displays Middletown's labor force. This labor force has been increasing as the city and the region prospered from economic development. The residential labor force in Middletown has increase from 20,370 in 1980 to 26,718 residents in the labor force in 1990. This represents a 3.1 annual increase in the city's labor force.

LABOR FORCE 1980 – 1990 Source: Dept. of Labor 1980 1986 1987 1988 1989 July 1990 LABOR FORCE

The age distribution of the population and the labor force has an impact on the local economy. It influences investment spending, pensions and government expenditures. The future age distribution figure in Chapter 2 displays that as the City moves towards the year 2000 and 2010, the labor force will be an increasingly older labor force. There will be fewer young people, which means less allocation for social investment in terms of the rearing and education of this group. However, there will be a greater number of people in the ranks of the elderly, which will translate into increased public sector spending for that age group. This aging population threatens those lower paying industries, retail and low end service, which have traditionally relied upon the younger age groups whom they can pay less. This problem is compounded by the labor shortage statewide. The city's unemployment rates, shown earlier, display that rates have declined and are now at or near record lows, as the number of employment opportunities increase with the city's economic growth and prosperity. But the recent slow down has begun to produce an increase in the available labor pool. But the existing tight labor market Middletown now experiences gives employees increased choice in employment opportunities and bargaining power to demand higher salaries and benefits, such as medical and day care, even from the fast food chains. But it is this same labor shortage which makes the area less attractive to new businesses who are considering locating in this region.

A further comparison of the employment and labor force data shows Middletown was somewhat of an employment center in 1980 with 19,249 local residents employed and 23, 840 jobs provided by local firms. This would indicate that there was a net in commuter pattern, with more than 4,500 more people commuting into Middletown to work per day than were commuting to out of town jobs.

A comparison also shows that Middletown firms added an average of 1,180 new jobs between 1980 and 1987 and an additional 698 local residents joined the economically active employed work force per year during this period. Therefore, on the average, Middletown firms have added approximately 482 more new jobs per year than residents added to the employed labor force.

Local Middletown firms now provide about one third more jobs than there are local residents in the employed labor force. Clearly, Middletown is increasingly becoming an employment center, as opposed to a bedroom community so characteristic of surrounding communities.

As was noted in the 1976 Plan of Development, Middletown's economy and thus employment opportunities, is moving away from a manufacturing based economy and towards a service based economy. This is indicative of the State and New England as well. The next table displays the distribution of manufacturing and non-manufacturing employment over the years.

	Manufacturing	Non-Manufacturing
1960	42%	58%
1970	37%	63%
1980	31%	69%
1989	20%	80%

Source: Dept. of Labor

The next table gives a more detailed comparison of the behavior of agricultural and non-agricultural employment.

MIDDLETOWN LABOR MARKET AREA

	June 1990	June 1989	Net Change from June 1989
NONAG. EMPLOYMENT	48,390	47,400	+ 990
% Change			+ 2.1

Net Change From: June 1990 1,500 - 30 % Change 1.9
June 1989(R) 1,530 - 300 % Change - 2.7
June 1989 AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT 1,500 1,530 -
GOODS PRODUCING INDUSTRIES 10,850 11,150 - 300 % Change - 2.7
CONSTRUCTION & MINING 1,500 1,530 - 30 Manufacturing 9,350 9,620 - 270 Durable Goods 7,510
7,710 - 200 Non-Durable Goods 1,840 1,910 - 70 SERVICE PRODUCING INDUSTRIES 37,540 36,250 +
1,290 % Change + 3.6 Trans. Comm. & Utilities 1,320 1,340 - 20 Trade 7,870 7,840 + 30 Wholesale
1,650 1,510 + 140 Retail 6,220 6,330 - 110 Finance, Insurance & R.E. 7,780 7,620 + 160 Services
14,030 12,880 + 1,150 Health Services 4,710 4,340 + 370 Other Services 9,320 8,540 + 780 Government
6,540 6,570 - 30 Federal 260 230 - 30 State & Local 6,280 6,340 - 60 Non-manufacturing Employment
39,040 37,780 1,260 Source: Dept. of Labor

AGRICULTURE

Middletown can anticipate a continued decrease in farm related employment. In addition to a loss of jobs, some consideration should be given to the possible subsequent loss of farmland and its high aesthetic value to retaining the city's present character.

MANUFACTURING

As displayed above the city should anticipate a continued overall reduction in manufacturing. Defense cuts could intensify this problem. However, the major manufactures who have made it through the most difficult periods can be expected to remain strong. Middletown could benefit from other small growth industries whose customer base has expanded beyond New England, if adequate space is provided, particularly in the older industrial buildings. This possibility should be studied more carefully.

SERVICE AND TRADE

This sector is growing throughout the State, and Middletown can expect to benefit from this expansion. The shift from a manufacturing based economy to a service based economy raises many concerns of whether a city can survive and prosper with a service-based economy.

Consideration should be given to whether the cities labor force will be equipped to fill service and trade jobs and whether incomes will be sufficient for these workers to support their families and if workers in the older age cohorts will be capable of making the transition from a manufacturing based to service based employment.

TOURISM

Although the city currently benefits comparatively little from tourism, this part of the service sector holds particular potential for Middletown. Its location along Route 9 and Interstate 91 is a distinct advantage. Middletown is blessed with the Connecticut River along one of its entire borders, a prestigious private university, a uniquely viable downtown area, rolling farmlands and rugged mountainous areas.

Considering the current economic conditions and the anticipated resurgence of families taking vacations "close to home" city planning should concentrate on improving signage along the highways, promoting the city and upon maintaining and enhancing the retail experience in the downtown.

The link between the downtown area, Wesleyan University and the Connecticut River will be essential. The three components, working as one, can create a unique situation which will draw visitors from all over the state and New England.

The city, the private sector and Wesleyan University should work in concert to promote community activities and recreation, cultural events and entertainment. Historic preservation and associated arts and culture related activities should continue and be expanded.

The economic development potential for tourism is a prime example of how (and why) the protection of natural resources, maintenance and enhancement of a strong downtown area, maintenance of the outlying rural character and economic development must go hand in hand for Middletown.

INCOME AND WAGES

The incomes and wages that the current labor pool is receiving in relation to the state, other surrounding towns and regions is also important to review since wages are an important consideration. They can encourage or deter quality businesses and workers from moving into a region. The amount of money available to individuals and to families in the region also impacts potential sales in Middletown.

ESTIMATED PER CAPITA MONEY INCOME AND MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME Per Capita Median Family
1980 1986 1980 1986 State \$8,598 \$14,090 \$20,078 Middletown 7,419 11,530 21,085 34,155 Haddam
8,506 14,065 24,575 39,811 Durham 8,467 14,410 25,500 41,310 Middlefield 8,162 13,116 24,740
40,078 East Hampton 7,839 12,664 23,320 Portland 8,478 13,437 22,763 37,200 Source: Connecticut
Census Data Center

As can be recognized in the table above, the city of Middletown has the lowest incomes within the region. This situation of the central city within a region having the lowest incomes is quite ordinary. For years the central cities in Connecticut, like Middletown, have had to accept disproportionate shares of their regions poor, minorities and handicapped persons. This fact is reflected in the income figures.

The next table compares the estimated Middlesex County per capita income with the other counties in Connecticut. In this table, the estimated per capita income for Middlesex County is very close to the average of all eight counties.

COUNTY 1986 ESTIMATED PER CAPITA INCOME MIDDLESEX \$ 13,214 Fairfield 17,708 Hartford
13,609 Litchfield 13,381 New Haven 12,246 New London 12,187 Tolland 12,316 Windham 10,348
Source: Connecticut Census Data Center

In order to determine if the city is over reliant on one type of land use (i.e. residential) and the overall health of the current tax base the city's total tax levy is presented below.

MIDDLETOWN'S TOTAL REAL PROPERTY TAX LEVY BY CLASS IN 1989 CLASS LEVY PERCENT
Residential \$655,086,915 60 % Commercial \$331,126,873 30 % Industrial \$ 89,934,338 8 % Vacant \$
15,703,039 2 % Residential \$10,537,502 67 % Commercial \$ 1,870,928 12 % Industrial \$ 3,293,323 21
% Total \$1,091,851,165 100% Source: Middletown Tax Assessor

As the table above shows the city currently is in a sound fiscal position. Residential property taxes account for only 60% of the total tax levy while 38% of the total tax levy comes from commercial and industrial land uses. These commercial and industrial land uses, while contributing greatly to the total tax base, require minimal public expenditures for municipal services. Clearly tax revenues from new commercial and industrial firms could contribute significantly to easing the city's financial constraints.

The next table shows a breakdown of the city into land uses and a record of areas within each use which are currently developed and undeveloped.

APPROXIMATE LAND USE DISTRIBUTION TOTALS DEVELOPED % UNDEVELOPED % ACRES
ACRES Residential 19,641 14,058 72% 5,583 28% Commercial 273 213 78% 60 22% Industrial / Office

3,679 2,614 71% 1,065 29% Other 3,607 640 18% 2,967 82% 27,200 17,525 64% 9,675 36% Note: An undetermined portion of the undeveloped land must be considered undevelopable due to steep slopes, wetlands and flood plains.

Particular attention is paid to the portions of the industrial and commercial zones which remain as yet undeveloped. These zones hold a particular relevance to this section, not only for the fact that they provide employment opportunities in the present day job market, but also for their implications to the shape of the future job market and economic well being of the area. The accompanying Business and Industry map depicts the key industrial and commercial locations in Middletown.

As the City's economy shifts to a retail and service-based economy, retail and office space will become more and more important. There is also a shift towards smaller scale, industrial facilities. While this shift to smaller scale, less land intensive industries have been occurring, there still may be a shortage of industrial land fully serviced by the needed infrastructure. For this reason, as one of the plans objectives states, the city should inventory existing undeveloped land in order to identify shortages and react to these shortages.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above analysis and other indicators, the conclusion can be drawn that overall, Middletown's economy remains comparatively strong. The city is increasingly becoming an employment center in the region and for that matter the state. The completion of the Central Connecticut Expressway north of the city and the widening of Route 66 will greatly improve access to the city. The city's labor force is expanding and its tax base is well-balanced and fiscally sound.

The plan recognized that the city, due to its attractive location and other characteristics, as discussed, could to a large extent; rely on market forces to continue to propel the economic development of Middletown. But, this plan is designed to be forward looking. A severe economic downturn in the future can have substantial impacts on the city. For this reason the plan recommends that the city actively participate in the economic development process and attempt to fulfill the goals and objectives as articulated in the introductory portion of this economic base study. A successful economic development effort can strengthen the city's ability to maintain its remaining rural character, protect its natural resource base and improve the quality of life for its citizens. There is no "quick and easy" way to achieve economic expansion, but it is within Middletown's reach to launch a thoughtful economic development effort that features shared community objectives, such as the ones presented in this plan and collaboration among city commissions, local business, the Chamber of Commerce and community leaders.

COMMERCIAL AREA STUDIES

THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

THE FUNCTION OF THE CLASSIC CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

A Central Business District (CBD) has been defined as the focus of a community where there is the greatest concentration of people and activities. The CBD requires a large number of people for it to function properly because the activities are specialized and are needed relatively infrequently by the populace. The greater the region served, therefore, the more potent the CBD. The more specialized the services and goods offered in the CBD become, the more they are interdependent and require concentration and mutual support.

The CBD contains three basic land uses: 1.) dominant; 2.) auxiliary; and 3.) service. The dominant activities are vital to the CBD and are usually so large in area that they can outbid other uses in choosing locations in the CBD. The dominant activities are broken down into five land uses: 1.) retail, 2.) office and communication, 3.) entertainment and culture, 4.) government and 5.) institutions.

DOMINANT ACTIVITIES

The commercial activity of the CBD revolves around the stores that have the capacity to bring large numbers of people to the downtown area. These are generally large department stores. Around these generators are the smaller specialty shops. These smaller shops are considered parasites as they generally live off the activity created by the generators.

The offices in the CBD are the regional decision making centers and they require a central location in order to maintain ties with other offices and to optimize the opportunities for personal contact. The employees of these firms add to the life and vitality of the CBD as potential customers and users of the other establishments.

The CBD is the communications center of the region as the radio, television and newspapers are often located here. They depend on fresh information and the stimulus of new ideas that only the CBD can provide.

Entertainment and cultural facilities add the necessary depth to make the CBD an unusual attraction for the region. The theater, movies, art galleries and library draw people both night and day.

Government and institutional facilities are traditionally located here. They function best in the CBD and add an atmosphere of dignity and solidarity to the area.

AUXILIARY ACTIVITIES

Along with the dominant activities of the CBD are the auxiliary activities such as law offices, banks and the like. They support the dominant functions.

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Near both the dominant and auxiliary activities and facilities are the service functions (such as barber shops, restaurants, shoe shops) that enable others to operate and live.

THE MIDDLETOWN CBD DEFINED

For the purposes of this study the CBD is defined as follows: Bounded on the south by Union Street and on the north by the railroad tracks. Bounded on the east by the Connecticut River and on the west by Pearl Street and Broad Street. The CBD can be divided into three distinct sections. Each section has its own identity and therefore its own unique set of problems and potentials. These sections are the central retail area, the north end, and the south end. The central retail area runs from College Street on the east side and Court Street on the west side north to the intersection of Ferry Street and Main Street. The north end runs from Ferry Street north to the CBD northern boundary. The south end extends from Court Street on the west and College Street on the east, south to the CBD's southern boundary,

CBD PLANNING HISTORY

The CBD has been the concern of Middletown planners since the 1950's. The 1955 General Plan adopted the following principal to maintain the city as a rural city.

"the position of the CBD district as the shopping center for the City and surrounding area should be retained. Development of large scale commercial centers in any other section should not be fostered"

Despite this goal, shopping center development came to Middletown the following year with the opening of a major super market on Route 17. The 1965 Plan of Development also recommended that commercial

areas be contained in the CBD because "Middletown's CBD would suffer very adversely from the spreading of retail and other commercial areas to outlying spots." Shortly thereafter in 1967 the Washington Plaza Shopping Center began development.

The 1976 Plan of Development recognized the significance of the CBD, but integrated the CBD, with community wide economic development. The plan emphasized that planning for the CBD must be coordinated with planning for Middletown's other commercial areas, because there exists a reciprocal relationship with each other. The Plan of Development supports the 1976 hypothesis on planning for the CBD but emphasizes the need for a public / private partnership and an aggressive and creative marketing campaign.

The CBD is defined as the B-1, Central Business Zone. In acreage, the CBD is Middletown's largest shopping area. There are 77 acres in the CBD.

The CBD is the most important commercial area in the city. In the CBD are located general merchandise, apparel and furniture stores, offices, major public buildings, personal services, restaurants and related commercial functions. These activities require concentration in the CBD. Concentration enables them to complement one another, and to provide important specialization to the community. More varied activities take place in the CBD than in any other part of Middletown. Within a few blocks are residences, churches, stores, businesses, government offices, service centers and restaurants. The CBD land use map in the Current Land Use portion of this plan displays the different types of land uses which are in the CBD. Clearly, the Middletown CBD generates activity because of the unique combination uses and not a single use.

FUTURE PLANNING FOR THE CBD

As the Middletown CBD moves towards the year 2000, it will continue to be threatened by existing and new regional malls in surrounding towns. For this reason, it is essential that the city strive to make the CBD unique. It must be different from other CBDs and more attractive than the mall. This will be no easy task. The mall offers convenience, speed, easy accessibility, ample parking and a wide array of shopping. But, with creativity, the city can develop a downtown retail experience unmatched by the malls. For each of three distinct areas to remain and prosper or recover and prosper, it is important that the entire CBD function efficiently and that the three sections complement one another. Because these three sections are so distinctly different, creating areas which complement one another will require first and foremost, a strong and coordinated commitment. Many experts in the field agree that commitment is the most important ingredient in improving and rejuvenating a CBD. The commitment must come from the city officials, the merchants, the Chamber of Commerce and the residents of Middletown. Going hand in hand with this commitment is long range comprehensive planning for the CBD, which heretofore has been lacking. This Plan of Development strongly endorses the preparation of a comprehensive Plan of Development of the entire CBD.

Second to commitment and long range planning is management. Comprehensive and coordinating are two very important words. When the idea of suburban malls was exploited by the entrepreneurs, they realized what the market required and wanted in terms of the retail experience. With these requirements in mind, they created a self contained and centralized management entity. The success of the malls is largely due to comprehensive, coordinated and centralized retail management. No matter how efficiently one store in the downtown may be managed, it will have difficulty surviving if the entire downtown is not managed efficiently.

For this reason, this plan endorses a more comprehensive, coordinated and centralized management approach by the Central Business Bureau. This management entity in the downtown area would have objectives such as:

1. To establish uniform operating hours:

2. To establish a well coordinated and adequately funded promotion and advertising program:
3. To work with the city police department for setting a high level of security:
4. To work with the city public works department in setting standard for improved and expanded environmental services such as street and sidewalk cleaning, trash removal, snow removal and maintenance of public areas:
5. To provide marketing, merchandising and employee service training assistance to individual merchants:
6. To provide leasing assistance to individual building owners: and
7. To direct and coordinate implementation of a carefully formulated retail strategy.

There are many different types of centralized management approaches which put control of some of the property rights into the hands of the management entity. While these different approaches are too detailed to discuss here, they all should be further investigated to find the approach which is best suited for the Middletown CBD, The following are a few other strategies which can help to attract people and businesses to the CBD:

1. Rezone the entire downtown to recognize the three distinct entities which make up the CBD. Prior Plans of Development recognized these entities, but the corresponding zoning did not. To this end, these entities were thought of as three entities which functioned as one. For many years, prior to malls and interstate highways, the CBD was successful and functioned well as one entity. But, for many reasons, the CBD can no longer compete as is, in the retail markets. Creativity and new ideas are essential. These new ideas begin with the recognition, via zoning, of the three districts in the downtown. These three districts need not, and cannot function as one. The districts must complement one another. In order to do this, each must establish its own concentrated mix of similar uses.

Shopping districts should be as compact as possible to encourage pedestrian traffic among stores, thus facilitating comparison shopping and impulse buying. It appears that these characteristics, due to the long and dispersed nature of Main Street, are non-existent. It is a long-held belief that the potential customer who has to move his car and park a second time is as likely to head home or to a suburban mall as to remain downtown and shop.

For this reason, this plan recommends three zones which, in all likelihood, will begin to take on their own separate identities and thus a concentration of similar uses will be established in each zone.

For similar reasons, comparison shopping and impulse buying, the zoning should restrict the uses on the bottom floors of buildings fronting on Main Street in the prime retail area to retail, service and eating and drinking establishments. By restricting the uses in this manner, retail store frontage can be kept continuous, with minimum interruptions by parking lots, office buildings, banks, travel agencies or other non-retail uses. This proposed zoning scheme would enhance the retail experience of the downtown, as shoppers will be able to concentrate their shopping in one area.

In the North End the plan recommends that the zoning should encourage the Planning and Zoning Commission, by using their discretion as granted in deciding special exceptions, to promote retail and service on the lower floors and business and professional offices in the upper levels. The spill over from the prime retail area to the south will generate retail establishments in this area which can complement the interspersed and upper level business and professional offices. The zoning should attempt to stimulate and encourage negotiations between the public and private sector in order to attract and create economically feasible projects in this zone. It is essential that the historic nature of the buildings in this area be preserved. For this reason, consideration should be given to building height restrictions and design guidelines, as recommended in the April 1990 North End Urban Renewal Study.

The zone in the southern part of the downtown should recognize that the majority of establishments here are business, financial and professional offices and that these uses also thrive on concentration and short walking distances between uses. Furthermore, the substantial positive spill over effects on retail and eating and drinking establishments from office development can be noted in many cities. Hartford's Constitution Plaza and Boston's Government Center are two prime examples. The opening of Middlesex Mutual Assurance will no doubt have major spill over effects as will any Government Building or Center. For all intensive purposes, this area is healthy and will function nicely as a Downtown Office Zone. Therefore, further office development should be encouraged as the primary use in this area.

2. City staff should undertake a comprehensive and coordinated CBD Study. This study should recognize the three distinct sections of the CBD and their inter-relationship. Growing out of this study would be the development of a CBD Master Plan.
3. While this Plan of Development primarily focuses on the physical development of the City, the social conditions in the CBD can not be ignored. Therefore, the social problems in the CBD should be addressed as recommended in the June 1988 North End Task Force Report.
4. Make Harbor Park more accessible to the CBD.
5. Provide links between the CBD, Wesleyan University and the Connecticut River.
6. Promote tourism in Middletown.
7. Adopt an aggressive and creative marketing campaign to attract more people from all over the state to the Middletown CBD and continue to promote frequent CBD events.
8. Create a marketing brochure and advertising campaign which highlights the benefits of doing business in Middletown and the Middletown CBD, as opposed to the surrounding malls.
9. Concentrate retail sales, specialty shops, governmental and legal activities in the appropriate sections of the CBD.
10. Discourage social service agencies, such as the unemployment office, the welfare office, soup kitchens or homeless shelters on Main Street. These uses detract greatly from the retail experience and discourage people from going to the CBD.
11. Increase the presence of uniformed officers in the CBD.
12. Encourage a mix of uses and events which will keep the CBD active both in the day and in the early evening.
13. Address parking and traffic circulation concerns highlighted in the Wilbur Smith Study in order to make the CBD more accessible.
14. Spruce up the CBD area with more shade trees and flower beds and do not allow litter to accumulate.
15. Encourage the Redevelopment Agency to designate the North End as a redevelopment area and begin the redevelopment of the area as recommended in the North End Urban Renewal Study.
16. Develop a city-wide system of street signs to direct people to the CBD and major establishments in the CBD.
17. Preserve and rehabilitate the historically significant buildings in the CBD.

THE WASHINGTON STREET (ROUTE 66) AND SOUTH MAIN STREET (ROUTE 17) RETAIL CORRIDORS

Washington Street and South Main Street are Middletown's other two major retail-shopping areas other than the CBD. The Washington Street study area extends generally from the westerly edge of the CBD to the Middlefield town line. The South Main Street study area extends from the CBD south to Randolph Road.

Over the past decade as Middletown's population increased, so too has the pressure on these retail areas. As development continues to fill in heretofore vacant parcels and development is maximized on already built up land. This development, along with severe traffic volume increases in these corridors, has and will continue to contribute to development pressure similar to other retail corridors in Connecticut and elsewhere. These characteristic problems include, but are not limited to: traffic congestion, traffic hazards

resulting from multiple curb cuts and unrestricted left hand turns, distracting signage, inaccessibility to pedestrians and all the other characteristics so common to commercial strip development.

The areas are composed of a mix of small retail and service establishments including, to mention a few, fast food restaurants and automotive stores. Each corridor also has 2 large shopping plazas.

To date, development and redevelopment pressures continue to intensify in these areas, and it is therefore useful to incorporate general policies for these areas into the Plan of Development. These policies will help to guide future Planning and Zoning Commission action regarding development in these corridors:

1. Undertake detailed land use studies for each of the corridors:
2. Amend the Zoning Code to allow for uses which complement rather than compete with the uses in the CBD:
3. Work with the State Department of Transportation to hasten the widening of Washington Street beginning with the areas in most need of widening and to increase the capacity and ease of flow on South Main Street:
4. Encourage the private sector to redevelop the major shopping plazas within the two corridors:
5. Whenever possible, particularly during the widening and improvement process, minimize the number of curb cuts along the corridors. This will reduce the number of left-turning vehicles as well as the points of entering traffic.
6. Whenever possible, interconnect parking lots to reduce curb cuts between establishments and provide for safe and efficient flow within these lots. These interconnected lots, where appropriate, should also be concentrated in the rear and side yards in order to improve the visual quality of the corridor.
7. Provide for more sidewalks, crosswalks and other safety features to make the area more conducive to pedestrian traffic.
8. Require the maximum number of shade trees and planting beds on sites, particularly within the front yard landscaped areas. Species selected should be resistant to adverse road conditions and sufficiently dense to screen the retail establishment from view.
9. Strongly recommend that retail establishments in the corridor keep their planting beds and lawns well-maintained.
10. Require that side yard parking area be screened from the front yard view with a berm or a dense evergreen hedge.
11. Strengthen and strictly enforce the presently liberal sign regulations in the Middletown Zoning Code. Simple signs will help reduce traffic hazards and maintain the areas attractiveness to the shopper.
12. Free-standing signs should not be allowed along the corridors and existing non-conforming signs should be eliminated.
13. Glare from various light sources identified in the study areas should be eliminated or minimized.
14. The quality of the building design will have an overriding impact on the remainder of the development and redeveloped buildings, therefore it must be reviewed and be consistent with the character and overall design objectives of the city for these areas.