



**MASTER PLAN PUBLIC FORUM
REVIEW OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
WEDNESDAY, JULY 28, 2004**

INTRODUCTION

On Wednesday July 28, 2004 a community forum was held at the Middletown City Building. This was the second opportunity for residents to have direct input into the Comprehensive Plan update process. The Public Forum was deigned to solicit resident feedback on critical goal statements and associated objectives that will guide future City actions. The public forum began at 6 p.m. in the fourth floor community room. Approximately twenty people attended the forum.

After a brief introduction by City staff, Brad Schwab from McKenna Associates, Inc. presented the three goals and corresponding objectives that were created by City Staff and refined by the Steering Committee. In order to facilitate small group discussion, the forum attendees were divided into four small groups. Each small group reviewed the goals and objectives and made appropriate revisions. At the end of such review, the small groups prioritized each goal’s objectives by identifying their three perceived most important objectives in rank order. The results of this exercise are detailed in the remainder of this summary analysis.

RESULTS

Following are the results of the small group session. Red text indicates addition and deletion comments made by focus groups.

GOAL 1: Find a New Direction for our Economy

Middletown’s economy is concentrated in a few industries in categories that are declining or stagnant nationally. The City needs to diversify its economic base and find a new niche in the national and world economy in order to replace lost jobs and increase incomes of its residents.

FOCUS GROUP					OBJECTIVE
RANK	A	B	C	D	
		1			Create 3,000 "New Economy" jobs in the next five years. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment: Academic partnerships are required – example: MU; this could be a strategy that fits under either this objective or the workforce objective ○ Comment: Promote artisan community

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	2		3	<p>Create and maintain a positive business environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Comment: need less red tape, more positive attitude from city government o Comment: should be either combined with or changed to the "Create a change..." objective
			1	<p>Seek and promote common interests and action among major stakeholders.</p>
	2	3		<p>Create market-ready economic development sites.</p>
1				<p>Ensure adequate regional transportation connections including direct access to downtown and land west of the river</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Comment: City's responsibility
	1	X		<p>Prepare today's workforce for tomorrow's jobs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Comment: include next generation, not just today's workforce
3				<p>Create, support, and fund an in-house and quasi-public economic development organization. (Internal functions handle business inquiries and placement activities, external functions handle recruitment and marketing activities).</p>
		X		<p>Create a change of culture and public acceptance for reacting to change.</p>
		X		<p>Convert all underutilized properties to productive and compatible uses.</p>
			2	<p>Focus on small businesses and entrepreneurship</p>

GOAL 2: Convert Our Past Liabilities to Future Assets

Middletown has underutilized properties and outdated infrastructure that are legacies from another era. Many of these are drains to our tax base and blighting influences on our neighborhoods. Middletown needs to find ways of restoring these properties to active use and updating our infrastructure to meet current and future needs.

FOCUS GROUP					OBJECTIVE
A	B	C+	D**		
RANK	2	1	X	1	Convert all underutilized properties to productive and compatible uses. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment: Too many properties are controlled by a few owners – this is holding us back ○ Comment: Increase the number of “City/Beau Verre” combinations. ○ Comment: Cooperate with or provide incentives to the people who own our downtown buildings to invest in their buildings to make them more inviting and rentable.
		2		3	Build or substantially renovate 300 housing units per year at targeted locations that improve the tax base.
		3			Provide a mix and convenience of retail uses that satisfies the needs of every neighborhood. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment: This should be moved under the “Promote a land use mix...” objective
				2	Adapt existing water and sewer infrastructure to changes in use at redevelopment and existing sites.
	1	3			Eliminate combined-sewer overflows. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment: Combine with above
		2			Promote a land use mix that maintains a healthy tax base. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment: City’s responsibility
	3				Promote higher density mixed-use infill (re)developments with essential urban amenities to maintain Middletown’s urban character.

+ Comments:

- Need enforcement and incentives to prevent blight.
- Improve schools – better funding, more attractive

** Comments:

- Improve the perception of the downtown as a safe place.
- Rather than putting the gambling on I-75, why not bring it downtown. Re-analyze the 3rd party’s analysis of why downtown won’t work
- Need a downtown entertainment center.
- Concluding statement (no specific goal): Our elected representatives need to focus on our needs and problems not on their internal bickering.

GOAL 3: Improve Our Image Within and Outside Our Community

Middletown is a diverse, urban community with unique assets not found in surrounding suburban areas. Recent economic changes, however, have posed challenges to our quality of life, both real and perceived. The community needs to capitalize on its strengths and improve upon its weaknesses so that current residents are proud of Middletown, and residents and businesses outside Middletown are attracted to our community.

FOCUS GROUP				OBJECTIVE	
A	B*	C	D		
RANK		1		Achieve educational attainment levels that are a community asset. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment: Emphasize accomplishments ○ Comment: Match what is going on in suburban districts. ○ Comment: This is the job of the school board and the state, not the city. 	
		2		Project an attractive community image to visitors and create ownership/positive attitude among residents. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment: Need to promote our assets to our residents ○ Comment: Communication between government and citizenry needs to be improved ○ Comment: Roads – vague; what/who ○ Comment: combine with “Adopt...” objective 	
	1	2	X	Reduce and prevent housing deterioration and make landlords accountable for property conditions through code enforcement. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment: Need better code enforcement as well as a better mindset among property owners (see “ownership” revision above) ○ Comment: combine with “Adopt...” objective 	
	3	3		Provide community facilities that attract users of all ages. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment: Important to provide for adolescents ○ Comment: vague 	
	2	3		1	Adopt and meet require environmental quality-of-life standards in all neighborhoods throughout the City. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment: Need clarification
	3	3			Create a “24-hour” downtown. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment: This will create a sense of community ○ Comment: Earlier comment regarding too many properties controlled by too few owners definitely applies here ○ Comment: urban flavor with suburban ○ Comment: (Should be) an entertainment center. ○ Comment: People work there, live there, something is always going on (should be this way).
				3	Repave residential streets regularly.

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			2	Give more focus to citations about quality of housing and neighborhood issues to assure their compliance takes place.
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* General comment: This group felt that it was the most difficult to choose priorities under this goal. They felt that the top 3 were the “A-list”, the middle 3 were the “B-list”, and the bottom 3 were items that have already been accomplished in Middletown.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Each small group was asked to identify their top three priorities for each goal. The intent was to establish a hierarchical ranking of the top three objectives for each goal. Such guidance was requested to aid in the formulation of strategies for Middletown's most pressing and urgent planning and community development issues.

However, each group voted in a slightly different way and as a result almost every objective received a vote by at least one small group. The range of responses makes it difficult to focus in on a limited set of objectives. The results suggest that the public envisions the need to implement all of the presented objectives to successfully meet the stated goals.

Group D voted for exactly three objectives for each goal, ranking the highest objective as "1" and the lowest objective as "3." Groups A and B have ties for some of their priorities, meaning they have more votes than the other groups. Group C voted for anywhere from one to three objectives in each of the three goals, but voted by using an "X" for each. These different voting systems means the results will require some analysis for meaningful conclusions.

Goal 1: Find a New Direction for Our Economy. The number one objective for this goal is "Prepare today's workforce for tomorrow's jobs." A few comments were gathered from the small group sessions indicating an interest in re-directing this goal. Several groups indicated they would like the emphasis placed on not only today's workforce, but also on tomorrow's workforce (such as students). The goal received two votes, one for first place and one "X."

There were three objectives that tied for second-place in importance. "Create and maintain a positive business environment", "seek and promote common interests among major stakeholders", and "create market-ready economic development sites". In a way, these three objectives are inter-related. These three objectives seek to improve the business climate within the City by improving public/private relationships and providing new businesses with the resources needed to succeed.

Goal 2: Convert Our Past Liabilities to Future Assets. The number one objective for this goal is "Convert all underutilized properties to productive and compatible uses." Three out of four groups chose this as their number one objective, and the fourth group chose it as number two. Several comments were made concerning this goal as well. First, there is concern that a few owners are controlling too many properties downtown and these owners are not motivated to renovate or aggressively pursue tenants. Second, the City should cooperate with or provide incentives to owners of downtown buildings to make the buildings more inviting and rentable.

The number two objective is "Eliminate combined-sewer overflows." One focus group suggested this objective should be combined with "Adapt existing water and sewer infrastructure to changes in use at redevelopment sites." This combination would create

one comprehensive water and sewer infrastructure objective that may adequately represent the community's needs.

The number three objective is "Build or substantially renovate 300 housing units per year." One group commented that the objective should be amended to say "...at targeted locations" and "...that improve the tax base." These comments represent the community's perception that certain areas need housing development or renovation more than others. The community also feels it is necessary to concentrate public efforts at targeted locations to maximize investment and make improvements more noticeable.

Goal 3: Improve Our Image Within and Outside Our Community. The number one objective for this goal is "Reduce and prevent housing deterioration." One group commented that the objective should be amended to end with "...and make landlords accountable for property conditions through code enforcement." Additionally, several groups commented that code enforcement needs to be improved, and property owners should have a better mindset about property maintenance. Finally, one group suggested this objective should be combined with the objective stating "Adopt and meet environmental quality-of-life standards in all neighborhoods."

The number two objective is "Adopt and meet environmental quality-of-life standards in all neighborhoods." This objective places emphasis not on creating a visually appealing community, but ensuring that pollution controls are in place that prevent the quality-of-life problems that pollution often brings. Overall though this objective is related to the above in that both strive to make the community "look" better. One group commented that this objective was broad and needed clarification.

The number three objective was "Achieve educational attainment levels that are a community asset." Several of the groups commented that the educational attainment levels should emphasize accomplishments and that the City's schools should provide a level of service that matches what exists in the suburbs. One group commented that this objective is the job of the School Board and the State, not the City.

SUMMARY

Identifying specific objectives in need of immediate attention is difficult given the small group voting pattern. However, two objectives did receive majority votes. "Convert all underutilized properties to productive and compatible uses" under Goal 2 received 2 first places votes, 1 second place vote and the only "x" given by Group C. The "Reduce and prevent housing deterioration and make landlords accountable for property conditions through code enforcement" objective found under Goal 3 received one first and second place vote along with Group C's only selection.

The identification of these two objectives as consensus items is not surprising given the participants passion about their community and their desire for improvement. The message is clear: vacant and underutilized properties need to be placed back into productive uses and measures are needed for neighborhood stabilization to prevent any

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further decline. The participants were keenly aware that the physical condition and occupancy status of Middletown's housing and commercial structures have profound impacts on the community's image inside and outside of the city.

"Adopt and require environmental quality-of-life standards in all neighborhoods throughout the City" also received several votes under Goal 3. This objective is closely related to the "preventing housing deterioration" and "convert underutilized properties" objectives in that the participants felt that the image and quality of life of Middletown's neighborhoods need improvement.

Priority votes under Goal 1 were not concentrated on any one objective. Again, this demonstrates the participant's perception that all Goal 1 economic development objectives are essential and important to Middletown's future.