

MIDDLETOWN MASTER PLAN

Survey Results

August 24, 2004

In early 2004, the City of Middletown distributed surveys to residents with their utility bills. Of all the surveys sent out, 2,047 were returned. Assuming that only the heads of households filled out the survey, the respondents represent approximately 9.5% of the households in Middletown, based on GEM's 2002 population and household summary estimates. In this non-scientific survey, respondents were asked to rate the City's quality of life and performance in several areas, give opinions on issues facing the City, and describe key topics that they felt should be examined during the planning process.

Quality of Life Ratings

Residents were first asked to rate Middletown in ten different areas. The rating scale ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating that the City needs improvement in that area, 3 meaning the City is average, and 5 indicating that the City is excellent. Breakdowns of the responses, along with the average ratings for each of the ten issue areas, are presented in the following table:

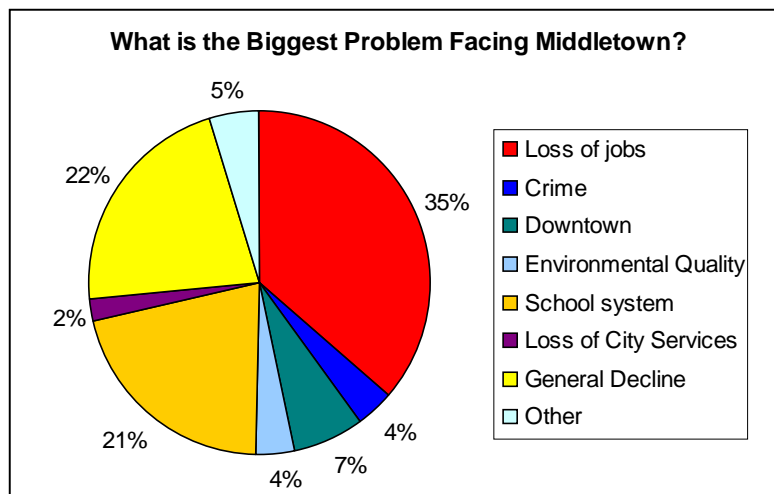
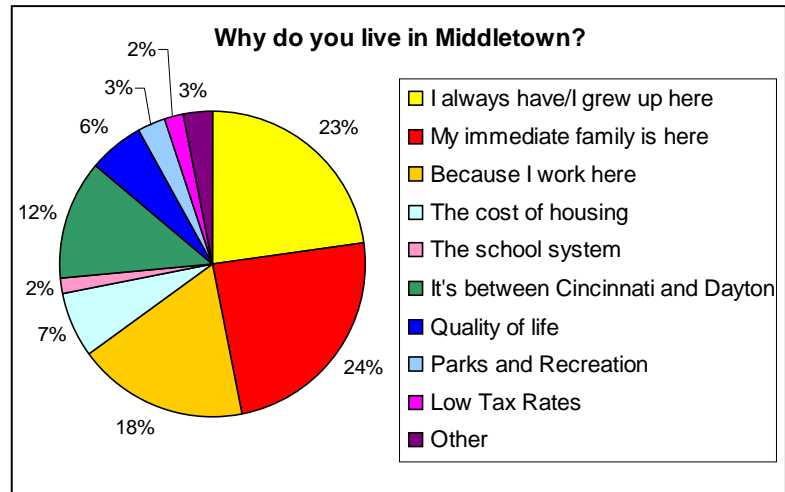
How would you rate the following in Middletown?							
Issue Area	Rating Responses (%)					Average Rating	Response Rate
	Needs Improv.		Average		Excellent		
	1	2	3	4	5		
Park system	13%	8%	45%	25%	9%	3.1	96.24%
School system	31%	18%	38%	10%	3%	2.4	95.65%
Road system	16%	10%	40%	26%	8%	3.0	96.38%
Quality of City Services*	5%	5%	27%	40%	22%	3.7	97.36%
Visual appearance*	22%	18%	41%	15%	3%	2.6	98.05%
Opportunity to be involved	9%	13%	49%	21%	8%	3.0	93.80%
Quality of environment	19%	19%	41%	17%	4%	2.7	97.12%
Quality of civic leadership*	23%	19%	43%	13%	3%	2.5	96.68%
Unity of civic leadership*	26%	24%	40%	9%	2%	2.4	94.82%
Overall desirability	13%	16%	44%	20%	7%	2.9	98.24%
TOTALS:	18%	15%	41%	20%	7%	2.8	96.43%

* Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding

When all areas are combined, Middletown received an overall rating of 2.8, which is considered "average" using this rating scale. Middletown rated average in all areas except quality of City services, which received an above average rating (3.7). The school system and the unity of civic leadership rated slightly below average with mean ratings of 2.4. Even though 38% of respondents felt the school system was average, an almost equal amount felt that the school system needed improvement (31%).

Issue Identification

The next section of the survey asked five questions to learn which issues citizens felt were most pressing in Middletown. Multiple-choice questions were used, with space available to write in “other” responses. The first question asked the respondent why he or she chose to live in Middletown. Most respondents indicated that it was because their immediate family was in Middletown (24%), they had grown up there (22%), or they worked there (18%).

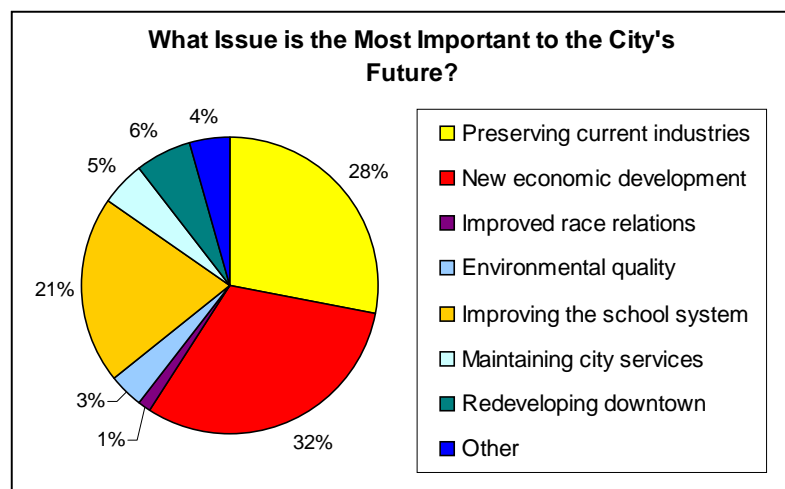


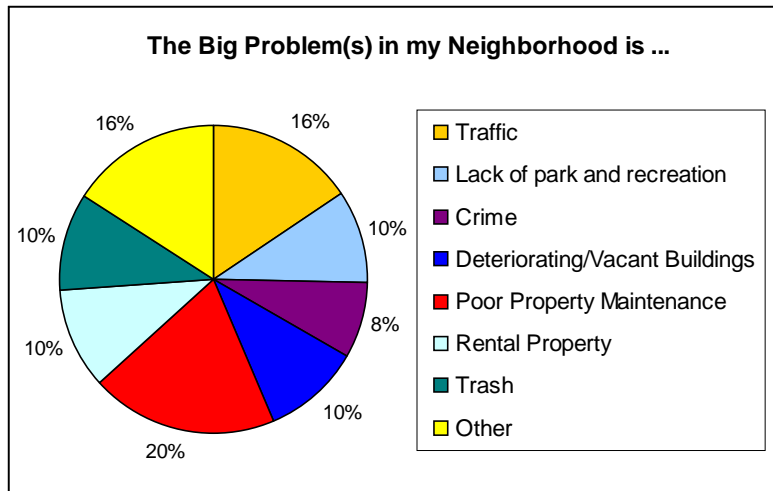
When asked to identify the biggest problem facing Middletown, loss of jobs received over 36% of the vote. The second two problems identified were the general decline of the city (22% of the vote) and the school system (21%).

Survey respondents were then asked which issue(s) would be most important to the City’s future. These answers indicated the types of approaches that

respondents felt the City should use to address its biggest problems. Over 31% felt that new economic development was the most important issue, while 28% felt that preserving existing industries was the most pressing issue. Improving the school system also received 21% of the votes.

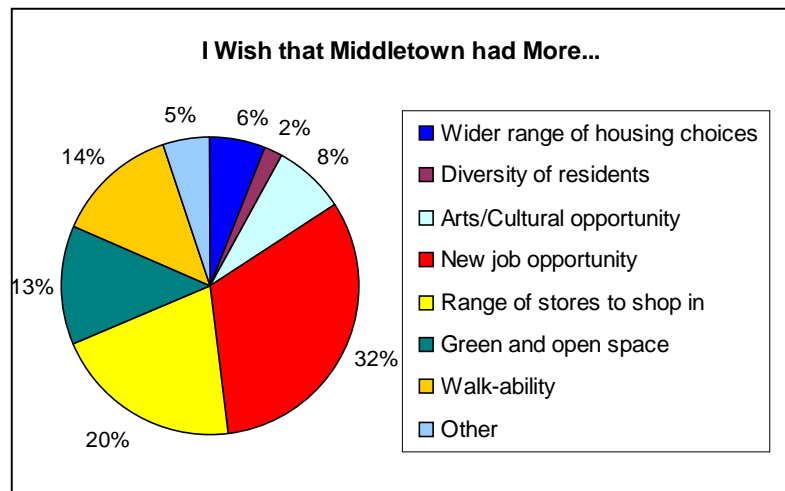
Respondents were then asked to share the largest problem facing their neighborhood. Poor property maintenance received





20% of the votes, followed by traffic (16%) and “other” written-in responses (16%). The most common “other” response was the condition of roads and the lack of street maintenance. Other concerns that were consistently mentioned include speeding cars, junk cars, and unleashed pets. Several respondents also mentioned drugs and air pollution from industries.

The last multiple-choice question asked residents what they wished they had more of in Middletown. New job opportunities scored the highest, with 32% of the vote, followed by a larger range of shopping opportunities (20%). Two other large desires of respondents were to improve the walk-ability of the City (14%), and increase the amount green and open space (13%).

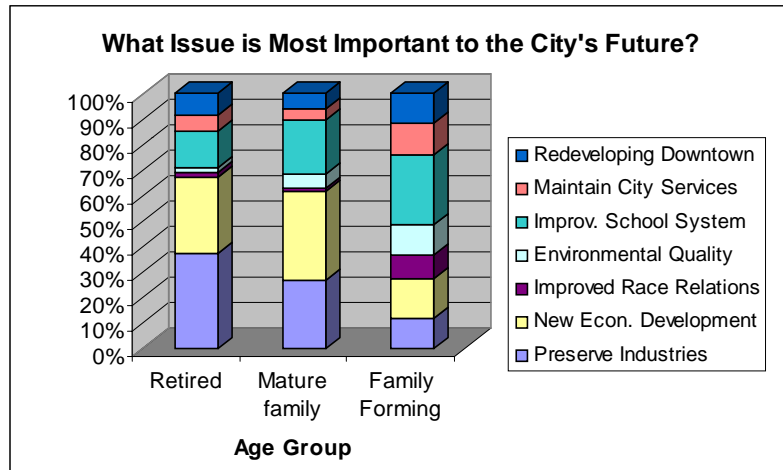


Age as a Factor

In terms of age, respondents were fairly representative of the City’s adult population. Approximately 93% of the people who returned the survey listed their age. The *reported* age of these respondents ranged from 19 years to 122 years, with an average age of 56 years. The ages of the respondents were compared to the age structure of the population, based on the 2002 population estimates provided by GEM. Of the survey respondents, 26% percent were in the Family Forming stage between the ages of 20 and 44 years (four 19 year-old respondents were included in this group). In the City of Middletown as a whole, residents in the Family Forming stage make up the largest group, representing 48% of the population. This may indicate that the opinions and needs of families, their young children and teenagers, and single young adults are under-represented in the survey. Residents in the Mature Family stage (ages 45-64 years) and the Retirement stage (ages 65 and over) were slightly over-represented, with the largest number of respondents falling into the Mature Family stage (43%).

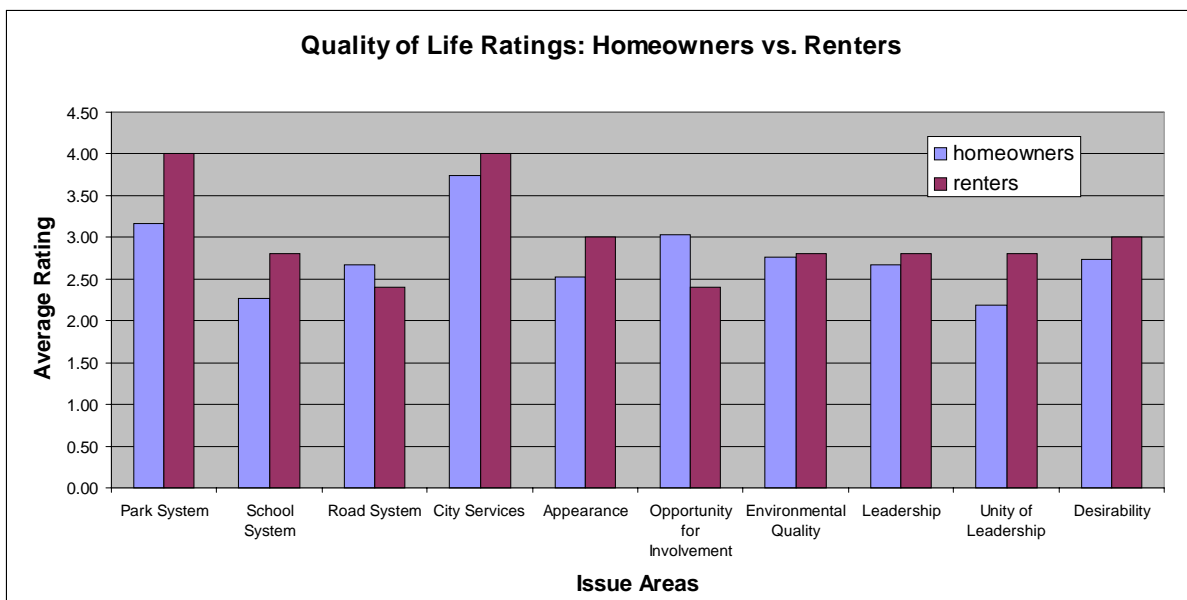
When survey responses were examined based on the age of respondents, there appeared to be very few deviations between the three age groups. When asked to rate Middletown in ten areas, the responses of each age group mirrored responses of participants on the whole. Several differences emerged in the multiple choice issue questions, however. All agreed overwhelmingly that the loss of jobs was the biggest problem facing Middletown, but when

asked what issues would be most important to address in the future, different age groups identified different approaches to dealing with this problem. Younger residents in the family forming stage believed that improving the school system and exploring new economic development strategies would be the keys to success. The majority of respondents in the Mature Family stage identified new economic development as the biggest issue, and retirees believed that preserving current industries was the most important issue. It appears that older residents hope to retain jobs by preserving the industrial sector, while younger residents wish to focus on new economic development strategies and making the city more competitive by improving the school system.



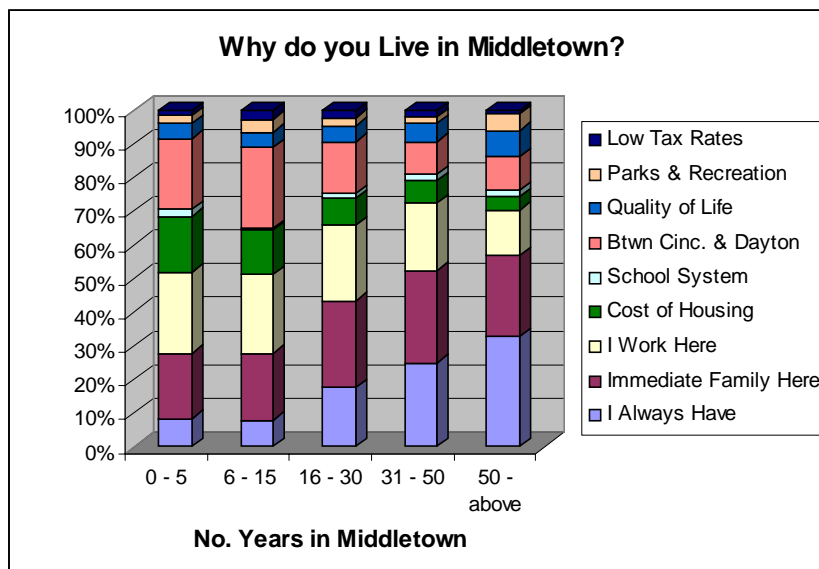
Residency as a Factor

Survey responses were also evaluated based on homeownership and the number of years that residents lived in the City. Of the respondents that indicated whether they rented or owned their home, the vast majority (90%) were homeowners. Overall, renters gave the city higher ratings than homeowners. The largest discrepancy was in the park system rating. Renters rated the park system above average while homeowners rated it average. The school system, appearance of the City, and the unity of the leadership were also rated higher by renters. The only issue areas in which homeowners rated the city higher than renters were the road system and the opportunities for involvement in the community.



Examining the multiple-choice issue identification results also reveals several differences between homeowners and renters. When asked what they felt the biggest problem facing Middletown’s future was, renters and homeowners both listed loss of jobs, general decline, and the school system respectively as the top three problems. Crime was identified as another large problem by renters, receiving almost 11% of their votes, but was generally not considered a problem by homeowners, receiving only 3% of their votes. Renters and homeowners also differed when asked what issue was most important to the City’s future. Both felt that retaining industries, new economic development, and the school system were important, but renters felt the school system was the biggest issue in need of attention, while homeowners felt that new economic development was the most important issue. This difference may be due to the fact that homeowners pay property taxes to support the schools, while renters do not. When questioned about neighborhood problems, property maintenance was the top concern of both renters and homeowners, followed by traffic. Crime was the third largest concern among renters, but was the issue of least concern to homeowners. Understandably, renters considered rental property the issue of least concern in their neighborhoods.

When the respondents were broken down into five groups based on the number of years they had lived in Middletown, there were few major differences between the responses the five groups. The only question that revealed large differences between the groups was “Why do you live in Middletown?” For people who have lived in Middletown between zero and five years, or six and 15 years, working in Middletown and its location



between Cincinnati and Dayton were the largest factors in their decision to live in Middletown, followed closely by proximity to immediate family. Respondents who have lived in the City between 16 and 30 years cited the fact that their immediate family was in Middletown, and that they worked in the City. For longtime residents who have lived in Middletown over 31 years, proximity to family and the fact that they “have always lived here” were the top reasons they chose to remain in Middletown.

It is clear from these results that newer residents choose to live in Middletown because they work in or near Middletown. Residents often stay after they retire because they feel rooted in the community and they want to be close to their family. These results indicate that Middletown may be able to attract new residents based on its location between Cincinnati and Dayton, but preserving and increasing the number of local jobs will be essential to attract and keep newer residents in the community.

Neighborhood Issues

To explore the issues of most concern in each neighborhood, and reveal any variations that may exist among neighborhoods, surveys were grouped based on the address or closest intersection that the respondent provided. There were 160 surveys that were not grouped into a neighborhood because there was not enough information provided, or because they were located outside of the municipal boundaries. Surveys were grouped into ten neighborhoods, or survey areas: Central, Dixie Heights, Far Hills, Lakeside/Church/Downtown (Lakeside), Manchester Meadows, Oneida, Rosedale/East End, Sherman/Mayfield, South Main/Oakland/Prospect/Meadowlawn (South Main), and Wildwood/Springhill. The number of surveys received in each neighborhood is graphically displayed on the following map entitled “Survey Responses.”

When compared to population estimates for each neighborhood, it would appear that several neighborhoods are over- or under-represented in the survey results. The proportion of the City’s population in each neighborhood was estimated using Census Tract information from the 2000 Census. Residents from Central were over-represented in the survey results, constituting 23% of respondents but only 12% of the City population. Rosedale/East End was also slightly over-represented. Dixie Heights, which is home to 15% of the City’s population, was the home of only 5% of all survey respondents. South Main was also slightly under-represented. The percentage of surveys collected from each of the other neighborhoods accurately reflects the percentage of City residents living in that neighborhood.

Variations among neighborhoods are particularly important to take into account when examining responses to the multiple-choice question, “The big problem(s) in my neighborhood is...” The most common response among all neighborhoods was poor property maintenance. This was the top concern in all neighborhoods except Far Hills, Manchester Meadows, and Rosedale/East End. The responses to this question are broken down by neighborhood and presented in the table below:

Neighborhood	The big problem(s) in my neighborhood is (check all that apply)?						
	Percentage of Responses Received						
	Lack of Parks/ Recreation	Traffic	Crime	Deteriorating & Vacant Buildings	Poor Property Maint.	Rental Properties	Trash
Central	12%	17%	12%	13%	18%	14%	13%
Dixie Heights	13%	13%	11%	14%	21%	15%	13%
Far Hills	15%	16%	13%	13%	15%	14%	14%
Lakeside	8%	9%	14%	16%	20%	17%	16%
Manchester Meadows	20%	14%	13%	14%	13%	13%	13%
Oneida	16%	8%	12%	17%	22%	11%	13%
Rosedale/East End	16%	16%	13%	14%	16%	13%	13%
Sherman/Mayfield	12%	15%	14%	12%	18%	15%	13%
South Main	5%	8%	14%	18%	23%	14%	18%
Wildwood/Springhill	14%	16%	12%	14%	17%	13%	14%

Responses in Central were fairly evenly distributed, with poor property maintenance and traffic receiving the most votes. In Dixie Heights, poor property maintenance stands out as the largest

concern. In Far Hills, the percentage of votes that each response received varied by only three percentage points, with traffic receiving the most. Property maintenance was the largest concern in Lakeside, followed by rental properties, trash, and deteriorating/vacant buildings. Traffic, parks, and recreation were generally not seen as large problems in Lakeside. In Manchester Meadows the lack of parks and recreation was the greatest concern. In Rosedale/East End, responses were very evenly distributed among the seven possible responses. In Sherman/Mayfield, poor property maintenance was seen as the largest problem, with all others ranked fairly evenly. Property maintenance was also the largest concern of South Main residents, but parks, recreation, and traffic were generally not seen as problems. Responses were fairly evenly distributed in Wildwood/Springhill, but poor property maintenance received a slightly higher percentage of the votes than the other concerns.

A large number of respondents also filled in the “other” option and wrote about neighborhood concerns that were not specifically addressed in the multiple choice question. In Central, street maintenance was the largest concern, followed by speeding and drag-racing, and junk cars. In Dixie Heights there were fewer “other” responses, but the canal and junk cars were mentioned more than once. In Far Hills and Manchester Meadows, street maintenance was the most common response. In Oneida and Rosedale/East End, road conditions and speeding were the most common responses. In Sherman/Mayfield, unleashed, feral animals were a large concern, along with speeding and air pollution. Drugs, junk cars, and feral cats were seen as large problems in South Main. No common concern emerged from the responses of residents in Lakeside. In Wildwood/Springhill, the most common “other” response was that there were no problems.

Responses to the multiple-choice question, “I wish Middletown had more...” were also examined for variations among neighborhoods. In each neighborhood, the distribution of responses among the seven possible answers reflected the distribution of responses when all survey responses were combined. Variations among neighborhoods were negligible. In every neighborhood, new job opportunities received the most votes. A “wider range of stores to shop in” was the second largest desire in all neighborhoods but Oneida. In Oneida, walkability received the second largest number of votes (19.5%), followed closely by wider ranges of stores (18.9%), and increased green space (17.6%).

Responses to the rating questions can also reveal more about the issues facing different neighborhoods in Middletown. Overall, the average ratings observed in the neighborhoods reflected the average ratings observed when all surveys were combined. The only exceptions were Lakeside, Manchester Meadows, and Oneida. Lakeside rated the quality of city services and the unity of civic leadership slightly lower than the combined average. Manchester Meadows rated the road system higher than average. The largest discrepancy between neighborhood and combined average results was in Oneida. Oneida residents believe that the quality of the environment needs improvement (average rating= 1), while the larger community believes that the quality of the environment is average (average rating= 3). Oneida residents’ desire to improve environmental conditions was also reflected in their answers to the question “I wish Middletown had more.” Increased green space received a higher percentage of votes in Oneida than in any other neighborhood.

Write-in Responses

Respondents were then asked two questions that allowed them to write in their own answers and share opinions or concerns that may not have been addressed in the quality of life ratings or the multiple-choice issue exploration questions. The first question asked them what they believed the new master plan should explore and address. Around 53% of respondents answered this question, and their written responses were grouped into several different issue areas, such as land use, for further examination. We have summarized the responses by issue area below.

Community Facilities & Services

The issue area with the most responses was community facilities. The top concern was to improve the school system. Respondents suggested examining nearby successful school districts, looking for additional funding sources, and increasing the number of African-American teachers on staff. Many residents also expressed their desire for a recreation or community center, and their wish for pool facilities to remain open and possibly expand/improve. Many respondents also wanted a new Post Office in the center or east side of the City.

Demographics

In terms of demographics, respondents felt strongly that children and teenagers needed more activities to keep them occupied and involved. Several people also talked about entertainment for young adults and singles to encourage them to stay in the community. Respondents also suggested a program that would assist aging residents with home maintenance, and the need for condominiums that would be attractive to “empty-nesters” and older residents who wish to stay in Middletown. There was also a suggestion to develop facilities for homeless people where they could receive job training and other services.

Land Use

There were many conflicting ideas regarding land use. A few respondents recommended annexing more land around I-75, but even more discouraged the City from expanding and over-extending its services. Some respondents felt that the City should concentrate on the area surrounding I-75 instead of the downtown, but a much larger number felt that the downtown should be the primary focus of the community. Some believed that the downtown should be revitalized in addition to I-75 development. Respondents had many ideas for downtown. Many want the buildings preserved and more businesses to locate there. Some feel that a grocery store is needed downtown, and many others feel that up-scale restaurants and entertainment venues would be good additions to the area. They would like downtown to be a destination point and the symbolic center of the community once again, and feel that it will be important to gain the input of residents when planning for its revitalization. Other land use concerns included developing a plan for the vacated hospital site, improving commercial areas along Route 4, preserving green space and slowing residential development, and re-using vacated buildings or redeveloping abandoned sites.

Transportation

Respondents had many concerns about the conditions of streets, and named many roads and intersections that they felt should be improved. Many felt that an additional interchange along I-75 was needed, and that Dixie highway should be widened. The bus system was

praised, but many wished that services would be expanded. Increasing pedestrian mobility was another concern, and bike paths were advocated. Many suggested bike paths along the river and canal that could link up with other trail systems and other communities.

Environment

Many suggestions that dealt with environmental concerns mentioned the canal. There appears to be a desire to reopen and direct water through the canal once again, or to find some other way to utilize it as a recreational attraction. People also expressed concerns about air pollution and the loss of green space, and suggested that landscaping be required on new development sites.

Economy

A very large number of respondents had concerns about the economy, job opportunities, and Middletown's dependency on the steel industry. Some respondents were not in favor of certain economic development tools such as tax abatements and other subsidies to businesses, however. Of those who made specific suggestions, many felt that diversification was important. Some advocated becoming a bedroom community for Cincinnati and Dayton, and others wanted to attract offices, business headquarters, and more high-tech development. There was also a suggestion to attract large-scale recycling industries that may fare better in the future than the steel industry. Many felt that improving the school system and other quality of life factors, such as parks, would help attract new businesses and development.

In the second write-in question, respondents were asked what they thought they could do to make Middletown a better place. The most common answers were volunteering, tutoring at the schools, becoming involved in other youth activities, and patronizing local merchants. One program that respondents frequently mentioned was Neighborhood Watch. Many expressed their desire to start such a program, or become more involved with existing programs. Respondents also frequently mentioned property maintenance and expressed their willingness to help clean up their neighborhoods and work with their neighbors to ensure adequate property maintenance. Many elderly people expressed a desire to volunteer and better maintain their property, but felt unable due to their age and/or health problems.

Summary

In summary the following survey response information will most inform this planning process:

- Among all areas of quality of life, City services rated highest, with schools generating the most concerns.
- The greatest overall desired Master Plan focus of survey respondents was jobs and economic development, including both the retention and expansion of existing industries, and the attraction of new industries and other types of employers to the City.
- A consistent area of both interest and concern among respondents was transportation, including traffic, road maintenance, and transit services, as well as sidewalks and bike paths.
- Younger respondents focused more on a desire to improve school quality and new job opportunities, while older respondents focused more on City services and industrial job retention.

- Although crime is not their largest concern, the results indicate that renters are more concerned with crime than homeowners.
- Middletown may be able to attract new residents based on its location between Cincinnati and Dayton, but preserving and increasing the number of local jobs will be essential to attract and keep newer residents in the community.
- With few exceptions (where certain neighborhoods noted a perceived lack of park and recreation resources), the greatest neighborhood concern was property maintenance, along with other issues related to neighborhood character and road safety.
- Consensus does not appear to exist over the future role of the City's downtown area, but more respondents than not supported some level of focus on its revitalization, regardless of use.
- Many respondents appear willing to volunteer and become more involved, particularly in Neighborhood Watch programs. The City may also want to consider channeling respondents' concerns about property maintenance into neighborhood improvement programs where people can volunteer to clean up trash, help elderly neighbors maintain their property, and report code violations.

Attachments (survey document, response map)

Survey_Results.doc

Middletown Master Plan Opinion Survey (pg. 2)

Why do you live here in Middletown: (choose all that apply)?

I always have /I grew up here
My immediate family is here
Because I work here
The cost of housing
The school system

It's between Cincinnati and Dayton
Quality of life
Parks and Recreation
Low Tax Rates
Other _____

What is the biggest problem facing Middletown in the future (choose only one)?

Loss of jobs
Crime
Downtown
Environmental Quality

School system
Loss of City Services
General Decline
Other _____

What issue is the most important to the City's future (choose only one)?

Preserving current industries
New economic development
Improved race relations
Environmental quality

Improving the school system
Maintaining city services
Redeveloping downtown
Other _____

The big problem(s) in my neighborhood is (check all that apply)?

Lack of park and recreation
Traffic
Crime
Deteriorating/Vacant Buildings

Poor Property Maintenance
Rental Property
Trash
Other _____

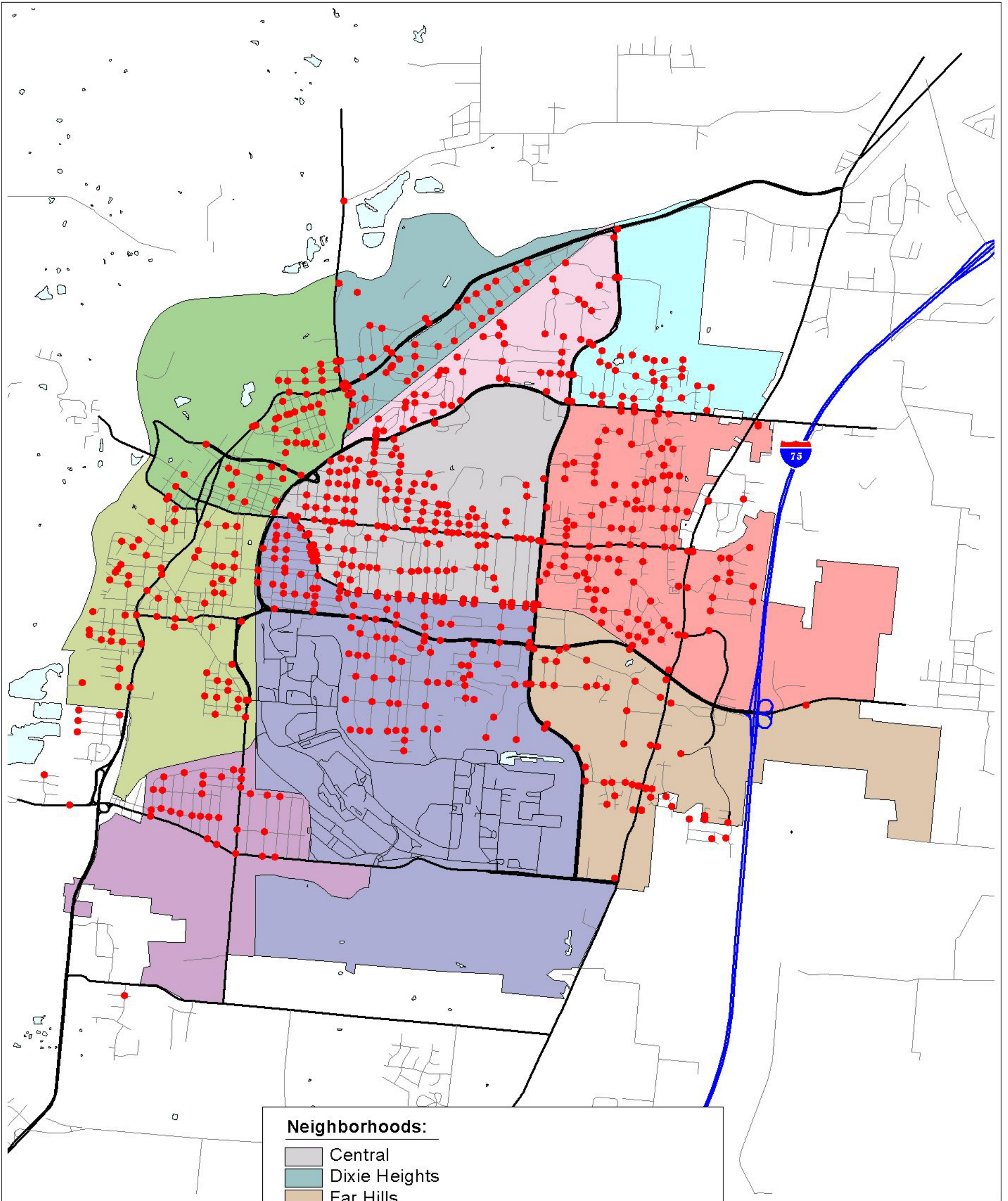
I wish that Middletown had more of (check all that apply)?

Wider range of housing choices
Diversity of residents
Arts/Cultural opportunity
New job opportunity

Range of stores to shop in
Green and open space
Walk-ability
Other _____

Something I really believe should be looked at in a new master plan for the City is:

Something I think I could do to improve my community is:



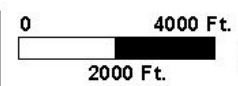
Neighborhoods:

- Central
- Dixie Heights
- Far Hills
- Lakeside/Church/Downtown
- Manchester Meadows
- Oneida
- Rosedale/East End
- Sherman/Mayfield
- South Main/Oakland/Prospect/Meadowlawn
- Wildwood/Springhill

● Survey Responses

Survey Responses

Base Map Source: Middletown, Ohio, 9/02



6/11/04