Diversify and modernize our local economy

Turn our current liabilities into future assets

Improve our community image

CHAPTER 6

QUALITY OF LIFE

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CHAPTER 6
QUALITY OF LIFE

Community facilities, amenities, events, and aesthetics define a community’s desirability and image. The City of Middletown offers residents a wide range of typical municipal amenities, as well as amenities and events that are less common in similar communities but add quality and variety to the amenities available. This section describes the facilities, amenities, and events that are provided by the City, and other sources, to the residents and visitors of Middletown. Map 3 Community Facilities identifies the location of public and some private facilities.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

The City of Middletown provides a wide array of essential services to the City ranging from administration, police, fire, streets, utilities and recreational activities. To facilitate operation of day-to-day city tasks, the City maintains the following municipal buildings. Map 3 shows their locations.

- **City Hall.** The Middletown City Building is located at 1 Donham Plaza, which is the site of City Hall, administrative offices, and the Police Headquarters. The City Building was constructed in the 1970’s. Its size is still adequate to perform essential administrative and departmental functions. Large conference rooms are often used for community meetings. Beneath the City building is the Police Department.

- **Police Department.** The Middletown Police Department has over 130 men and women staffing a Patrol Division, Detective Division, Services Division, and a Special Response Team. The Patrol Division has 58 assigned officers, 6 sergeants and 3 lieutenants. The Detective Division’s staff of 19 handles 1,500 police reports annually. The Services Division includes 17 dispatchers, 12 corrections officers, and several civilian staff in the Records Section.

Middletown Police Department operates a Special Response Team (SRT) to handle high-risk search and arrest warrant situations as well as hostage situations. The team is made up of 13 patrol officers and a Lieutenant in command, and is trained in hostage negotiations, tactical movement, firearms and explosive recognition, crowd control and non-lethal force. Middletown Police Department is unique in that it runs its own full-service jail facility. The average daily population of the facility is 60 persons, requiring a staff of 12 corrections officers and 1 sergeant.
**Fire Department.** Middletown’s Fire Department provides very good emergency services to the residents and businesses of the City. The Insurance Services Office rates Fire Departments for the purpose of adjusting homeowner’s insurance premiums. The ranking system is based on a 10 point scale, where 1 is the best score and 10 is the lowest. Lower ratings generally mean that a house can be insured cheaper. Middletown’s ISO rating, as of January 2005, is 3.2, which is an excellent rating.

The City’s 1997 Master Plan Update identified four potential locations for new fire facilities to serve the increase in land area after Middletown’s annexations in the 1990’s. At that time, there were only four fire stations (including headquarters) in operation, but a fifth was added (Station 2) on the east side of the City to serve the new development. The Middletown Fire Department currently operates five fire stations throughout the City:

- Headquarters (Roosevelt Blvd. and Wicoff St.)
- Station One (307 North Broad St.)
- Station Two (Cincinnati-Dayton Rd. and Towne Blvd.)
- Station Four (Tytus Ave. and Jackson St.)
- Station Five (Central Ave. and North Breiel Blvd.)

At the end of 2004, City Council reduced funding to the Fire Department reducing the number of on-duty firefighters from 22 to 19, and effectively eliminating one fire engine. The Fire Department presently operates a total of 19 vehicles: six engines (including two reserve engines), one ladder, five medic units (including two reserve units), one administrative vehicle for the Deputy Chief, one Hazardous Materials vehicle, one eight-passenger van, two utility pickup trucks, and two utility vehicles for fire investigation. Because of the reduction in staffing and budget funds, the Fire Department has no plans for expansion in the future. A station located on the east side of I-75 will likely be warranted in the future. However, no immediate plans exist for expansion due to budget constraints.

**Citizen Service Center.** The Citizen Service Center (CSC), located in the City Building, is the customer service center of the City. The center is a centralized location where residents can visit or call for information and coordination inquiries. CSC also operates an online reporting system for residents to request service, report problems, or request other information.

**Middletown Transit System (MTS).** The residents of Middletown are served by a public transit system called Middletown Transit System (MTS). MTS operates six 28-passenger buses along four transit lines. All routes terminate and originate downtown, at a recently constructed transit terminal at 55 South Broad Street. MTS service runs from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Saturday. Fares are 70 cents for a one-way trip. Senior citizens receive half-price fares. In addition to the six
buses along routes, MTS also operates two 9-passenger paratransit buses with on-demand service for people with special needs. On-demand fares are $1.40 one-way.

The four transit routes, red, blue, green and gold, provide transit access within walking distance of most of the City. All four routes serve the downtown area well. The green route serves residents and businesses along Main and Verity on the west side of the City. The yellow line runs along the north and west perimeter of AK Steel serving residents and businesses, and also runs north into downtown. The red and blue lines both originate downtown and run east to Towne Mall. The blue line runs along Grand Avenue and serves the retail area including and south of Towne Mall, while the red line runs along University and Central Avenues and serves the retail area including and north of Towne Mall.

Areas of the City which do not have easy access to a transit line are generally in the northeast part of the City, and land east of I-75. Both of these areas are where the most new development is occurring. Once the construction of the new Middletown Regional Hospital campus is complete on S.R. 122 east of I-75, consideration should be given to extending one or two bus routes to the hospital to continue to provide city residents with access to health services.

- **Library.** The Middletown Public Library is located at 125 South Broad Street, just south of the central business district. The library has adequate off-street parking for visitors, and is only a block away from the MTS transit terminal. The library system operates two branch libraries, one in West Chester Township and the other in the City of Trenton. In 2000, the Middletown Public Library was ranked among the top 10 library systems in the nation, according to Hennen’s American Public Library Rating Index, compared to libraries of similar size, population, and area.

- **School Facilities.** Residents of Middletown have access to a variety of academic choices; both public and private primary and secondary schools are located within the City, as well as post-secondary options. The community’s image, though, is based on the success of Middletown Public School System. As of the 2003-2004 academic year, Middletown Public Schools operated 11 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 2 senior high schools that serve a total enrollment of 7,000 students.

In November 2003, voters passed a $75.8 million bond issue. The 28-year issue will allow the construction of 6 new elementary schools and the renovation of 2 existing school buildings into elementary schools. Local taxpayers are only expected to pay for 24 percent of the program with the balancing coming from State Department of Education. In addition, several existing buildings will be closed and/or demolished. Table 16 below illustrates the construction and demolition plans.
Teachers and students have long complained about outdated facilities with falling ceiling tiles, outdated electrical systems, leaky roofs, and other problems. The six new and two renovated buildings are intended to improve their facilities and the community image and allow an educational environment where teachers and students can focus entirely on academia. Furthermore, the school district will reduce the overall number of schools it operates by two, a consolidation that will help eliminate the district’s budget deficit.

Middletown Christian School and Bishop Fenwick High School are private religious schools that serve Middletown residents and students from surrounding communities.

Miami University Middletown, a branch campus of Miami University Oxford, is located in the northern portion of the City and is primarily a commuter-oriented campus serving both local and regional students.

Middletown residents have a wide variety of choices for post-secondary education as the Cincinnati and Dayton regions are home to a variety of universities with national and international reputations, including:

- Art Academy of Cincinnati
- Middletown Regional Hospital’s Greentree Campus
- Butler Technology and Career Development Schools
- University of Cincinnati – including 2 branch campuses
- College of Mount St. Joseph
- Miami University – including 2 branch campuses, 1 in Middletown
- Union Institute
- Xavier University
- Wright State University
- University of Dayton
- Sinclair Community College
- Cincinnati State Community and Technical College

Social Service and Health Center. The City of Middletown Social and Health Center opened in 1976 to better serve the medical needs of City residents. Funding originally came from Community Development Block Grant funds, City funds, and client fees. As the community recognized the quality of medical care available combined with fees based upon client’s ability to pay, demand for services increased. In 1983, funding was secured to construct a new 7,500 square foot facility to expand services.

The Center is now operated under a contractual agreement with Middletown Regional Hospital to continue to provide a wide range of medical procedures, treatments, and services to the local and regional community. The estimated size of the population served by the Center is approximately 120,000 people from throughout the greater Middletown Area.
- **City Community Center.** The Community Center is located in Douglas Park in the southwest portion of the City. The Community Center provides a location for residents of all ages to congregate and participate in community programs such as continuing education, a wide range of recreational activities, and arts and crafts. The Center has an annual budget and a small professional staff that coordinates programming. Facilities include several meeting and activity rooms, a multi-purpose banquet hall, and a child care center. The Center dates back to 1925 and was once owned by Armco. Armco donated the facility and 15.8 acres of adjacent land to the City in 1968. Middletown recognized the facility as a valuable community asset and remodeled it in 1975. An additional $900,000 renovation occurred in 1993 with the help of CDBG funding.

**PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES**

According to the Department of Parks and Recreation, Middletown’s park system currently consists of 349 acres of park space, 304 of which is developed. Parks and Recreation maintain: 28 developed and 5 undeveloped parks; 1 public golf course; 1 stocked fishing pond; 1 community center; 2 softball complexes; 1 baseball, football, soccer complex; a skate park; 2 sand volleyball courts; 22 basketball courts; picnic shelters; a Locktenders Museum; 18 tennis courts; 1 arboretum; and a fitness trail system.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) recommend that a community park system provide a minimum of 6.25 acres of parkland per 1,000 persons. Based on Middletown’s 2003 population of 51,941, 325 acres of parkland should be provided. As previously noted, Middletown currently provides approximately 349 acres of park space, of which 304 are developed. Although the total developed parkland falls below the 325-acre minimum, Middletown would have 6% over the minimum parkland recommended by NRPA if all currently owned parkland were developed. Therefore, Middletown is situated well to provide adequate park space for its needs.

NRPA has established a system for classifying park service areas and guidelines for each type of park classification in relation to the population served by the facility. Middletown’s parks have been categorized and analyzed based on the following NRPA service area classification guidelines.

- **Mini-Parks.** Mini-parks function to serve young children within a 1/4-mile radius service area, and are typically one acre or less in size with few or no amenities. NRPA recommends 0.25 to 0.5 acres of mini-parks be provided for every 1,000 persons, or approximately 13 to 25 acres based on the City’s 2003 population. Currently the City has 6.89 acres of parks that range in size from 0.58 to 1.5 acres and function as mini-parks. This only facilitates 25 to 50 percent of the NRPA minimum suggested provision of mini park space.
- **Neighborhood Parks.** Neighborhood Parks provide active recreation areas that serve a wider array of residents within a service area radius of one-half mile. Neighborhood parks should typically be 15 or more acres in size, with amenities such as playground equipment, soccer fields, ball diamonds, tennis courts and picnic areas. NPRP recommends that one to two acres of neighborhood parks is provided for every 1,000 persons, or approximately 50 to 100 acres based on the City’s 2003 population. Currently the City has 207.6 acres of parks that range in size from 15 to 91.6 acres and function as neighborhood parks. This significantly exceeds the 50-100 acres recommended by the NRPA.

- **Community Parks.** Community Parks provide a diverse array of passive and active recreation activities and have amenities similar to but at a larger scale than a neighborhood park. Community parks, which are also commonly used for community events, should be 25 acres or more in size and have a service area of 1 and ½ mile. NPRP recommends 5 to 8 acres of community parks be provided for every 1,000 persons, or approximately 260 and 415 acres based on the City’s 2003 population. Smith Park and Douglass Park function as community parks, and together comprise 121.3 acres. These parks facilitate only 29 to 47 percent of Community Park space recommended by NPRP.

Ideally, all areas of a community should fall within the service area of each of the three classifications of parks, but a more realistic vision for Middletown is to have as much of the City as possible served by at least one park. Map 4 illustrates many parts of the City are not within any park service area, especially land east of Breiel Boulevard. Consideration should be given to develop a new Community Park east of Breiel. Coordination with Middletown Regional Hospital is needed to provide hiking trails and a common break area to serve hospital and planned business park employees as well as new residential areas east of I-75.

- **Private Recreation.** Aside from Middletown’s public park system, there are many additional opportunities for recreation available to residents. There are a few private recreation facilities in the City; Wildwood Golf Course, Forest Hills Country Club, and Middletown YMCA. The Great Miami River is an asset to the community providing opportunities for fishing and boating. Additionally, some newer residential developments such as Renaissance include private open space and recreational facilities to be maintained by homeowners’ associations.

- **Metroparks.** Middletown is within a short distance from three Butler County MetroParks: Sebald Park, a 399-acre park few miles west of town; Miami River Preserve, a 16-acre park with one mile of frontage along the Great Miami River; and Excello Locks, a 4-acre historic site and park at the site where in 1826, the first locks in the Miami-Erie Canal system were built and stand today.
- **Bike Paths.** Middletown also has a network of bike paths for residents to use on the west side of town. Along the Great Miami River is a 2.3 mile segment of the Great Connection. The Great Connection is a 28 mile bike path that will link the City of Hamilton north to City of Miamisburg in southern Montgomery County. The trail connects to Smith Park via a bike spur, where City residents have direct access to the trail as well as parking. An additional bike trail exists along South Verity Parkway that was constructed as part of a state-funded transportation project.

- **Great Miami River.** The Great Miami River is largely underutilized as a recreation asset due to current physical constraints. Industrial development walls off the river from residential areas. Creation of flood controls blocks the view of the river. New pedestrian connections, such as the Great Connector path are needed to increase pedestrian access.
COMMUNITY EVENTS

The City of Middletown offers residents with opportunities for recreation and social activities. Events showcasing culture, music, and performing arts are held throughout the year. Recreation activities are organized for adults and children alike. The City even provides special services such as home appliance recycling in the interest of keeping the city clean and beautiful. Following is a list with descriptions of the many community events provided to Middletown residents each year:

- **Middfest.** This weekend event held annually in early October is a celebration of culture from around the world. Each year a different country is celebrated. 2004’s celebration featured Chile. In 1995, Middfest won the prestigious Post-Corbett Award as the "Extraordinary Event" in the greater Cincinnati area. Middfest was also bestowed the Fitton Center for the Arts "Ambassador for the Arts Award" for outstanding organization in 1998.

- **Ohio Balloon Challenge.** This late July weekend event is organized by the Chamber of Commerce. It was first held in 2003 and continues to be an annual event. Events include live entertainment, food and refreshments, balloon exhibitions and the Ohio Balloon Challenge. The challenge is a competitive event where balloonists are awarded points for navigation skills. Ohio Balloon Challenge participants receive points in the National Hot Air Balloon Standings.

- **Summer Sounds Concert Series.** This family-oriented concert series runs on selected dates between June and September at Bicentennial Commons and Smith Park. Music ranges from Blues and Bluegrass to Middletown’s Symphony Orchestra.

ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

- **Sorg Opera Company.** The Sorg Opera Company formed in 1990 as the resident opera company in the historic Sorg Opera House. Paul J. Sorg recruited famous architect Samuel Hannaford to design the Theater, which was constructed in 1891. Today, the Sorg Opera recruits performers, directors, conductors and designers from around with national and international credentials and recruits orchestral and chorus talent locally. The Company is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization governed by a board of trustees and is a member of the Mid-Miami Valley Chamber of Commerce.

- **Middletown Lyric Theater.** For the past 25 years, the Middletown Lyric Theater has provided quality family entertainment to the Middletown area. Each season approximately four shows are produced, including musicals, vocals, and plays. The theater is located at 130 Verity Parkway.
Middletown Symphony Orchestra. The Middletown Symphony Orchestra performs 5 concerts annually. Carmon DeLeone is in his 23rd season as conductor of the Middletown Symphony Orchestra. DeLeone has also been the Music Director of the Cincinnati Ballet for 36 years, and is also the Music Director of the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra, and has served as Host and Conductor of “Family Concert” series at New York’s Carnegie Hall.

Rising Phoenix Theater Company. The Rising Phoenix Theater Company, located in the former Masonic Temple on North Main Street, is a local performing company that puts on four to six shows a year. All performance roles are offered based upon auditions, and most are held by local performers.

Middletown Fine Arts Center. The Middletown Fine Arts Center was founded in 1957 to promote and encourage creative expression through the visual arts. The Center offers a wide variety of educational opportunities for people of all ages. The Center hosts classes in a variety of art media as well as lecture programs. Some classes are free of charge while others range in price from as little as $35 to more than $300 for workshops on painting, drawing or sculpting.

Community Image and Aesthetics

It is recommended that the City, in cooperation with businesses and local development organizations, work toward developing a distinct image and identity for the City. A task force consisting of design professionals (architects and planners), residents, and City officials, should be formed for the purpose of defining the appropriate City image and identifying site and building standards that convey the image.

Gateways. Along with the major corridors, attention must be paid to the various entrance points into the City. These gateways offer the first impression of the City to visitors, and also set the tone for the appearance of the rest of the City. These areas should be improved with landscaping, decorative street lighting and fixtures, and consistent decorative signs designating the areas as arrival points into the City. A plan to improve these gateways should be prepared to facilitate achievement of this goal. Private development can also create an enhanced sense of place at these key gateway locations by utilizing traditional building materials and strong architecture and urban design.

Streetscape Improvements. Map 5 identifies the recommended locations of streetscape improvements. The city has an abundance of streets with wide center
medians including Roosevelt, Breiel, and University Boulevards. Though significant, these boulevards do not create a strong or memorable image. Streetscape enhancements are needed to create community character and a stronger sense of place.

Existing boulevards should be treated as part of the public open space system. For example, regular street tree intervals along with interesting landscape plantings/formations provided at conspicuous locations throughout the Roosevelt Boulevard corridor should be provided to create a “greenway” treatment.

Two levels of streetscape improvement are proposed on Map 5. Major Streetscapes are locations where the streetscape design elements are most concentrated. Thus, the Major Streetscape is designed to define unique areas and strengthen community assets including (1) SR 122 at Towne Mall and the future Middletown Regional Hospital Healthcare and Technology Campus, (2) University Boulevard adjacent to downtown, (3) and Breiel Boulevard adjacent to Miami University at Middletown. Minor Streetscapes are a continuation of the design elements found in the Major Streetscape Areas but with less concentration and impact.

- **Negative Views.** The red zigzag line on Map 5 identifies “negative views” caused by a mishmash of uses, poor design/architecture, and/or areas with a general lack of property maintenance. Though other areas exist with similar characteristics, the negative views shown on the map are highly visible being located adjacent to heavily traveled thoroughfares. Unfortunately, these areas collectively create an undesirable image of Middletown. It is important that the aesthetics of these areas be improved. A multi-faceted approach is probably required to address this issue. Stepped-up code enforcement at these key locations is necessary. In other cases, moving existing uses to more appropriate locations or demolition should be considered.
QUALITY OF LIFE OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

OBJECTIVE QL 1: Achieve educational attainment levels that are a community asset and are competitive with other suburban schools.

ISSUE: Education is the cornerstone to the future of our children and our economy.

QL 1.1 Encourage communication between the City and Middletown City School District that leads both to work toward common interests.

1.1.1. Establish monthly MCSD and City communications. Invite MCSD to address City Council at regularly scheduled City Council meetings. Establish City Manager reports to the School Board at regularly scheduled School Board meetings. This communication could establish trust and greater partnership between the city and MCSD.

   a. Invite representatives from MCSD to address Council and the general public regarding school issues and why operating money is needed.

1.1.2. Avoid situations in which City and MCSD bond proposals are on the same ballot and are competing for attention.

1.1.3. City leaders should assist in educating residents about the links between school performance and property values and economic development. Make an effort to talk about the school levy at public speaking engagements and at City Council meetings.

1.1.4. Have a unanimous vote of Council to support the upcoming school levy.

1.1.5. Work cooperatively with MCSD to develop a tax incentive policy. Do so to avoid discussions later that may hinder economic development efforts. Include MCSD when City does its annual performance reviews of companies receiving tax abatements.

QL 1.2 Improve Student Performance Test Scores. Whether right or wrong, test scores paint the brightest picture of a school district. Help schools create programs that identify weaknesses in testing programs and improve. Example: provide foreign-language training to non-English speaking students.

1.2.1. City support is needed for the advancement of MCSD’s goal to understand the school’s rich diversity and to create solutions that overcome cultural obstacles. Diversity training is seen as a need at all levels of government within Middletown.

1.2.2. Provide city support for MCSD’s efforts to increase student enrollment and success at Butler Tech. Success in this regard will require program sensitivity to Middletown students’ needs and cultural differences.

1.2.3. Increase the number of tutors that are available at fees that are affordable to Middletown residents in need of such service. MUM is a potential source.

1.2.4. Participate in Sinclair Community College’s high school student development program. Recipient high schools receive computers loaded with special software that are placed in one classroom along with an instructor. Specialized software teaches students math and English skills needed to succeed in college.

QL 1.3 Increase civic interest and involvement in Middletown youth and schools.
1.3.1. Support the advancement of the existing partnership between the business community and MCSD. Identify ways to increase business and community involvement in this partnership.

1.3.2. Create a subcommittee of City Council on youth and education. This committee can work in cooperation with MCSD and youth organizations and service providers to make Council aware of youth-related service gaps and needs.

1.3.3. Empower parents to be an active force in their children’s education. Provide training on study skills, working with children, reviewing homework etc. Inform parents of the links between education and personal prosperity.

1.3.4. Work with schools to start a parent monitoring program in classrooms to provide assistance and to help with disruptive children.

1.3.5. Integrate regularly scheduled events and programs in schools to increase public usage, familiarity, and support with the school system. Examples include City sponsored workshops and recreation programs and adult education classes provided by civic groups and area higher-education institutions. (Note: New schools were deliberately designed to accommodate after-school community use.)

**OBJECTIVE QL 2: Identify and implement steps to project a positive and realistic community image locally and regionally.**

**ISSUE:** Regional residents perceive Middletown as a gritty and backward industrial town.

**QL 2.1 Start a First Impressions Program** to improve the aesthetic quality of key gateways, intersections and corridors.

2.1.1. Landscape wide boulevards throughout the city in a prioritized fashion over time.

2.1.2. Create unique gateway at the I-75/SR 122 interchange. Coordinate with ODOT and design engineer to ensure decorative landscaping and attractive building materials such as stone and wrought iron fencing in combination with landscaping. Extend enhancements to SR 122.

2.1.3. Adopt street and architectural design standards.

2.1.4. Double code enforcement efforts along important corridors.

2.1.5. Encourage retail center owners along key corridors to update the image of their shopping centers.

2.1.6. Implement streetscape improvements at key business district areas such as Breiel and Roosevelt.

2.1.7. Remove eyesore structures located adjacent to heavily traveled corridors that make bad first impressions. (See Chapter 4 Redevelopment)

**QL 2.2 Improve intergovernmental relationships and communications**

2.2.1. Ensure staff or elected officials actively participate and represent Middletown’s interest at Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments, Butler County
2.2.2. Collaborate with neighboring jurisdictions on infrastructure improvements that are mutually beneficial.

2.2.3. Keep senators and congressmen informed of Middletown’s success stories and plans for the future.

QL 2.3 **Strengthen civic unity and increase participation in governance.**

2.3.1. Create a community-based decision making system that is inclusive and democratic. For example, consider more public participation in capital improvement planning.

2.3.2. Support the creation of new neighborhood organizations and enhance existing neighborhood organizations to be more effective and active representing their neighborhood. (see Chapter 5 Housing and Neighborhoods for additional strategies)
   a. Develop registration system in which groups can be formally recognized by City Council.

2.3.3. Develop communication system to deliver timely information to civic groups, neighborhood groups, and institutions.

QL 2.4 **Market Middletown.**

2.4.1. Develop “Message Training” for city staff so that all employees can articulate city plans and vision while at work, meetings, or social settings. Each employee should have skills to discuss city vision for varying time segments between 30 seconds and 3 minutes, depending on the situation.

2.4.2. Promote Middletown’s strengths to residents and businesses and regional population. Promote the city as the center of two larger metro regions with tremendous access to art galleries and museums, performing arts, and regional parks, and universities.

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<th>Middletown’s Strengths</th>
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<td>Parks</td>
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<td>Cultural Amenities – Performing Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional community character</td>
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<td>Historic center</td>
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<td>Low traffic</td>
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<td>Historic structures and districts</td>
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<td>Central location to regional jobs, cultural and entertainment destinations</td>
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<td>Events (Middfest, Balloon Challenge)</td>
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<td>Health Care – MRH</td>
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<td>Education – MUM</td>
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<td>Bike Paths</td>
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2.4.3. Employ neighborhood marketing efforts in neighborhoods that are desirable but relatively unknown or in danger of decline such as Sunset Park area, hospital area, South Main. Identify strengths, trends, needs and create brochures, display in real estate sections of Dayton and Cincinnati papers. Advertise specific Middletown neighborhoods just as developers advertise new subdivisions.

2.4.4. Create a brochure that conveys the merits of living, working, and shopping in Middletown. A portion of the brochure should be used to highlight downtown and its attractions.

QL 2.5 **Embrace Diversity**

2.5.1. Seek understanding and define needs and attitudes of Middletown’s diverse population.

2.5.2. Provide diversity training to all public employees.
2.5.3. Put principles in action. City and schools must lead by example.

QL 2.6 Celebrate Middletown’s past.

2.6.1. Create transportation and industry museum. Such museum could contain machinery and archive materials from the steel and paper industry. A museum could teach children and new residents about Middletown’s industrial innovations and contributions, while bringing in visitors to patronize local businesses.

2.6.2. Explore restoration of the hydraulic canal through downtown as a unique recreational amenity and to preserve an important component of Middletown’s history.

2.6.3. Expand façade improvement loan program for historic properties in and adjacent to downtown. Provide interest free loans for business owners to improve their storefronts (0% interest for the first 3 years of the loan).

2.6.4. Promote historic tax credits.

2.6.5. Build support for downtown image campaign by promoting uniqueness and variety of downtown shopping, dining, arts, sports and entertainment opportunities through advertising to area residents. (See Objective QL 4 for more details).

QL 2.7 Reinforce positive civic activities.

2.7.1. Award residents, businesses, students and organizations annually for the most outstanding beautification projects. Beautification awards encourage landscaping and property maintenance.

2.7.2. Hold annual awards banquet. Honor businesses and institutions for achievement, growth, and community involvement. Could also honor best revitalization projects and new developments.

2.7.3. Give special recognition to individual, institutional, and corporate acts of giving, works, and accomplishments at City Council meetings.

OBJECTIVE QL 3: Provide community facilities and amenities that attract and benefit residents of all ages.

ISSUE: Middletown’s population is aging and has a relatively low percentage of residents in prime income-earning age groups.

QL 3.1 Encourage shared use of MCSD and city facilities to minimize overall facilities costs.

3.1.1. Consider usage of school buildings before creation of separate public facilities or space for community-based organizations, when uses take place after school hours.

3.1.2. Seek opportunities for use of school grounds as public parks, as well as the utilization of public parks by students.
QL 3.2  Support and leverage the planning of new schools by MCSD as opportunities to revitalize neighborhoods with renewed anchors. New schools can improve the quality of life in neighborhoods by providing enhanced community facilities and improving the general appearance of the surrounding neighborhood (see also Chapter 5 Housing and Neighborhoods).

QL 3.3  Redevelop Towne Mall.

3.3.1. Recognize Towne Mall is no longer viable as a regional mall. Intervention is needed now before the market takes its inevitable course.
3.3.2. Meet with property owners to share Master Plan recommendations and vision.
3.3.3. Encourage owner to redevelop mall into a mixed use development consistent with redevelopment concepts described in Chapter 4 Redevelopment. Offer public support for a project that meets minimum land use and design requirements.
3.3.4. Market redeveloped site jointly with property owner and partners.

QL 3.4  Expand geographical distribution of retail activity and increase retail offerings.

3.4.1. Redevelop brownfield and greyfield properties with retail to provide goods and services to adjacent neighborhoods (see Chapter 4 Redevelopment)
3.4.2. Work with retail developers and management companies to bring diversity to Middletown’s retail mix.
3.4.3. Attract desirable retailers to town centers such as fashion stores, more sit-down restaurants, and coffee shops, etc
3.4.4. Consider preparing a retail market analysis including community survey to share with developers, retailers, and investors to show need and demand for desired retail.

QL 3.5  Modernize the park system.

3.5.1. Prepare citywide parks and recreation master plan. Survey the community to determine what amenities are desired.
3.5.2. Prepare use study to determine the demand and need for each neighborhood and mini-park. Consider consolidating parks that do not warrant continued maintenance cost versus the amount of people that use the park. Potential eliminations may free up money to improve other parks.
3.5.3. Replace old playground equipment with ADA-accessible playscapes with recommended fall zone areas and materials.
3.5.4. Middletown residents expressed desire for more diversity in park system including natural areas, passive open space, and nature trails. Demand for these types of facilities is growing nationally.
3.5.5. Consider the creation of a dedicated dog park. This is also a growing trend.

QL 3.6  Plan new park on the east side.
3.6.1. Receive resident input in determining what amenities should be included in new parks.
3.6.2. Work with the MRH to determine where a strategic location might be near the hospital campus.

QL 3.7  **Expand bicycle and pedestrian circulation system.**

3.7.1. Prepare a Bicycle Master Plan to layout citywide bike path system that links to existing bike paths.
3.7.2. Include bicycle facilities in roadway improvement designs when major road upgrades are planned. Bicycle facilities increase funding state and federal transportation funding scores while simultaneously reducing local burden.
3.7.3. Identify and repair missing links in the pedestrian circulation system.
3.7.4. Apply for available grants.

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<th>OBJECTIVE QL 4: Create a sustainable downtown.</th>
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<td><strong>ISSUE:</strong> Downtown has potential to be a source of great civic pride and an amenity to local and regional residents but it is currently underutilized.</td>
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The role of downtowns across the country has changed. Downtowns will never return to the role of dominant employment and retail hub that they fulfilled half a century ago. However, trends in cities across the country have shown a renewed interest in downtowns as neighborhoods. Rather than central business districts, downtowns are evolving into communities that include a balance of residential, specialty retail, office, cultural and recreational activities within a compact, walkable environment.

QL 4.1  **Empower the Downtown Alliance in its mission “to create a vibrant downtown environment that is attractive to businesses, residents, and visitors.”** An organization such as the Alliance, formed by downtown property owners and businesses, is the best representative of downtown interests.

4.1.1. Consolidate all past planning recommendations and identify ones that still make sense.
4.1.2. Ensure consistency between Alliance strategic planning goals and Master Plan recommendations, as a means of solidifying the partnership between the City and the Alliance and maintaining downtown as a citywide priority.
4.1.3. Pool human and financial resources with other community-based organizations that share common interests with the Alliance. An example would be organizations that represent adjacent neighborhoods.
4.1.4. Develop strong public-private partnerships. Rely on expertise and/or financial resources of partners to help in marketing and promotional activities, revitalization and business development efforts when possible.

a. Private partners may include Roger’s Jewelers/Fifth Third building: a downtown landmark
major corporations, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Convention and Visitors Bureau.

b. In addition to the City, a potential public partner is the newly formed Butler County Port Authority. The Port Authority can assist with ownership and marketing of individual properties, as well as financing for redevelopment efforts.

4.1.5. Build relationships with regional, statewide, and national organizations dedicated to downtown revitalization, such as Downtown Ohio, Inc.

4.1.6. Use special events and fundraisers to help with capital and operating costs.

4.1.7. Identify and implement at least one signature project that creates optimism and interest in downtown.

4.1.8. Consider a future extension of the Alliance’s boundaries to include all Central Avenue properties from Carmody Boulevard to University Boulevard. These areas encompass the key gateways to downtown, include many viable downtown businesses and assets, and would benefit from an organization like the Alliance.

4.1.9. As capacity outgrows the capabilities of volunteers alone, consider creating a downtown management program with a paid director who is experienced in the field of downtown enhancement and management. The director would be responsible for business recruitment and retention, marketing and promotion, “clean and safe” operations, and management of volunteer committees.

4.1.10. Revisit the concept of creating of a Special Improvement District (SID) as a means of financing the downtown management program.

QL 4.2 Create a synergistic land use mix to encourage usage of the downtown throughout the day. Residential, retail, entertainment/dining, office and parks/pedestrian spaces are all vital ingredients of a 24-hour vibrant downtown.

4.2.1. Identify uses desired and their appropriate locations, both in horizontal and vertical terms, and revise zoning regulations accordingly. For example, retail and entertainment should be concentrated at street level along high-traffic thoroughfares, while residential should be located on upper floors or on side streets.

4.2.2. Review building codes to identify whether changes are needed in order to encourage adaptive reuse.

4.2.3. Attract each land use simultaneously. Office is needed to bring jobs, retail and restaurants are needed to support office workers through the day, and residential is needed to support downtown at night and weekends. Open space and formal gathering locations are needed to attract people at all times.

4.2.4. Promote economic clustering where all stores in a cluster can be reached in 1 walking trip (from a parked car or a nearby neighborhood, depending on your target.) Businesses in a cluster should be able to service the same or similar customers, so that they can all share in the traffic generation.

a. Utilize zoning to consolidate retail in a core area, such as Central Avenue.

b. Modify roadways to increase traffic in the core retail area (see QL 4.8).

c. Coordinate clustering efforts with recruitment efforts.

QL 4.3 Connect downtown to the Great Miami River. The river, as well as Bicentennial Commons and the new bike trail, are unique amenities that can benefit downtown merchants and residents. Several obsolete, dilapidated industrial sites, however, form a barrier between downtown and these amenities and harm the image of downtown.
4.3.1. Demolish dilapidated industrial structures to make properties available for reuse and eliminate blighting influences on the downtown. Assess sites for environmental contamination and pursue remediation if necessary.

4.3.2. Reconnect downtown to the Great Miami River via a well-lit promenade.

4.3.3. Pursue redevelopment of the site of former industrial facilities that improves the connection to the river, attracts residents and visitors to downtown, and does not compete with existing downtown uses. Some possibilities include (separately or in combination):
   a. Urban housing
   b. Museum (such as that discussed in QL 2.6)
   c. Recreational facility

QL 4.4 Establish downtown as the premier cultural and entertainment center in the community. Encourage and support arts, cultural, entertainment and recreation venues. Downtown can fulfill these roles because of its pedestrian scale, mix of uses, proximity to recreation facilities, cultural venues and events.

4.4.1. Create a comfortable pedestrian experience by creating ample areas for pedestrian congregation such as outdoor seating areas and plazas, and include trash receptacles and other street furniture.

4.4.2. Construct items of interest such clock towers, water fountains, arches, sculptures and other pieces of public art.

4.4.3. Program activities for targeted audiences in these pedestrian areas such as concerts, plays, movies, and civic organization events.

4.4.4. Organize and promote existing events such as Middfest, the Holiday Tour of Homes, and performances at the Sorg Theatre in a way that benefits downtown businesses.

4.4.5. Maintain a consistently clean and safe perception of downtown. Keep downtown streets, parking lots, and sidewalks free from refuse. Hold individual property owners and business owner accountable to ensure their properties are kept clean. Consider creating a downtown maintenance program (see QL 4.1) to ensure that downtown is maintained more than the average street or park.

QL 4.5 Grow Businesses by actively recruiting and retaining businesses, and creating opportunities for entrepreneurship.

4.5.1. Maintain an inventory of existing businesses and available space in the downtown.

4.5.2. Identify niches that should be targeted, using a market study as a
resource. For example, Middletown could build off the strength of Downtown’s arts community and events by promoting downtown to art studios and galleries. Downtown buildings could be converted to live work units where wares are sold on the first floor and the second stories are lofts designed for artists.

4.5.3. Identify existing businesses in the region that meet the desired range of uses. Identify a short list of top prospects and actively recruit them to downtown Middletown.

4.5.4. Encourage retention and expansion of existing businesses, utilizing the inventory of existing businesses and available space as well as the Alliance’s relationships with businesses.

4.5.5. Coordinate and pool resources with citywide economic development functions and strategies (detailed in Chapter 3 Economic Development).

4.5.6. Encourage entrepreneurial activities and small business development by promoting and/or expanding business incubators and working with local education institutions and the Chamber of Commerce Small Business Development Center.

4.5.7. Establish at least one business, ideally a restaurant that provides downtown Middletown with regional notoriety. People are generally willing to travel considerable distances to restaurants with great reputations. The Montgomery Inn serves as an example.

QL 4.6 Promote downtown by creating a comprehensive downtown marketing campaign.

4.6.1. Publicize downtown initiatives, developments, store openings, business openings, expansions, residential developments, streetscape improvements, park enhancements, etc. Relay a constant stream of success stories in the media as free advertisements.

4.6.2. Initially advertise existing resources such as Smith Park, Bicentennial Commons, YMCA, Sorg Theatre, Arts Center, Middletown Public Library, Manchester Inn, new bus terminal, and new charter school in addition to Middletown businesses.

4.6.3. Promote downtown as a place to live, initially by working with existing residential property owners, such as Trinity Apartments, to incorporate downtown amenities into their advertising. If residential reuse of older buildings occurs, home tours could be incorporated. Identify target populations, such as students, young professionals, or empty nesters.

4.6.4. Market downtown businesses to the greater community as a single development, similar to a shopping center, listing stores, businesses and services in full page newspaper ads. This may require more standardized hours of operation for restaurants and retail operations.

4.6.5. Hold coordinated downtown sales events to achieve a greater draw.

4.6.6. Develop a downtown newsletter, web page, and list serve. Incorporate or link the downtown website with other pertinent sites such as the City, Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, and Chamber of Commerce.

4.6.7. Coordinate downtown promotion with promotion of existing events in or near downtown, such as Middfest and the Ohio Balloon Challenge.

4.6.8. Develop a visitor information center with public restrooms.

QL 4.7 Preserve and enhance Downtown Middletown’s unique sense of place.

4.7.1. Set clear design standards that encourage development and rehabilitation that protects the integrity of the downtown and creates an inviting pedestrian environment. Examples include placement of buildings at the sidewalk, placement of parking behind buildings, horizontal and vertical scale, and façade transparency.
4.7.2. Balance the need for parking with the need for a dense, pedestrian-oriented environment. Avoid excessive amounts of surface parking. Encourage use of existing lots, particularly the parking garage, and screen and enhance necessary surface lots. Encourage redevelopment of underutilized lots.

4.7.3. Create consistent signage and way-finding program within downtown, particularly in encouraging the utilization of parking facilities.

4.7.4. Continue and expand programs for grants and low interest loans for façade improvements. Improvements must be consistent with desired architectural guidelines. Explore use of façade easements that allow access to make repairs when the property owner neglects maintenance.

4.7.5. Identify and submit for downtown revitalization grants (bricks and mortar) and Transportation Enhancement grants (streetscape, bike path, historic preservation of transportation facilities).

4.7.6. Creatively use historic tax credits to renovate historic buildings.

QL 4.8 Improve access to the core of downtown.

4.8.1. Explore options for improving access from I-75, such as increasing the capacity of the Grand-Sutphin-Central route. Capacity increases could include widening and/or reconfigurations of key intersections.

4.8.2. Support efforts by Ohio Rail Development Commission and other groups to study the feasibility of using railroad right-of-way along University Blvd. as part of a high-speed rail and/or light-rail corridor. Placing a station along this line and within downtown would spur transit-oriented redevelopment.

4.8.3. Encourage traffic to utilize Central Avenue as the primary route into and through downtown. The following could help in accomplishing this task:
   a. Calm traffic on Manchester and First Avenues by changing them to two-way, introducing four-way stops where possible, and/or other traffic calming tactics. These are mostly residential streets that currently encourage traffic to bypass Central Ave.
   b. Explore changing the path of SR 122 to follow Central instead of Reinartz/Second. This would better orient drivers to use Central and may open up state funding streams for future improvements on Central Ave.

4.8.4. Widen SR 122 bridge over the Great Miami River. This is a key gateway to downtown and the city overall and currently faces traffic congestion.

QL 4.9 Attract regional recreation facility to downtown.

4.9.1. Prepare feasibility study to determine need and support for community recreation center or ice skating rink.