

MIDDLETOWN

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION



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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The City of Middletown created the 2005 – 2010 Master Plan in its continuing efforts to provide a high quality of life and excellent business environment for its residents and employers. The Master Plan is the culmination of two years of intense fact finding, data analysis, and public meetings. This plan is inspired by feedback received from residents and key stakeholders during interviews, steering committee meetings, focus group meetings, and public input sessions. As a result, Master Plan goals, objectives and policy statements were driven, to a large degree, by the public. In summary, the Master Plan is an action-oriented, decision-making tool that:

- 1. Creates a Unified Development and Land Use Policy***
- 2. Manages Development and Growth***
- 3. Focuses Civic Direction and Vision***
- 4. Prioritizes Actions, Funding, and Capital Improvements***
- 5. Supports City Land Use and Zoning Decision Making***
- 6. Provides Foundation for Grant Acquisition and Alternative Funding***
- 7. Generates Proactive Responses to Opportunities and Threats***
- 8. Promotes Ongoing Communication and Participation between Residents and the City and its Various Partners***

PLANNING PERIOD

The Master Plan focuses heavily on economic development and positioning the city to take advantage of near-term development opportunities. As such, the Master Plan and numerous policy statements made within have a five-year time horizon. This is not to imply that the plan is not visionary. Forward thinking, longer term strategies, with a ten- to twenty-year implementation period are also articulated.

The ambitious implementation schedule will require the City to incorporate Master Plan recommendations in everyday staff and departmental functions. Likewise, the Master Plan will require frequent updates as major plan components are implemented. Major updates should occur no less than every five years. A five-year update will ensure the Master Plan remains a living document with relevant policy statements. Planned long-term strategies will need to be re-evaluated based on changing community priorities and resources.

MASTER PLAN ORGANIZATION

The chapters listed below are the major policy chapters contained in the Plan. Chapter 9 Development Opportunity Area Plans and Chapter 10 Implementation and Action Plan summarize the more salient land use and development recommendations and priorities.

- ***Chapter 2*** Community Description contains brief descriptions regarding Middletown’s current situation, development history, land use patterns, environment, and development opportunities.

- **Chapters 3 through 7** contain the Master Plan policy chapters dealing with Economic Development, Redevelopment, Housing and Neighborhoods, Quality of Life and Transportation respectively.
- **Chapter 8** Future Land Use contains the City’s official land use policy. Together, the Master Plan and Future Land Use Map and supporting text descriptions provide a flexible policy framework to guide land use and development decision making.
- **Chapter 9** Development Opportunity Area Plans focuses on nine different subareas that have uniquely defined development opportunities. Many recommendations from previous policy chapters are summarized in the text and on the provided maps.
- **Chapter 10** Implementation and Action Plan prioritizes key action strategies made throughout the Master Plan and identifies implementation tools. A series of recommendations are made on financing strategies, grants, and ordinance revisions from which the City can choose to achieve plan goals and objectives.

MAJOR COMPONENTS

Gem Public Services (Gem) prepared a *real estate market analysis* to determine approximate levels of demand for each major land use category. The Gem report identified prerequisite conditions that must be satisfied for Middletown to capture a proportional share of new development that is anticipated for the region. Gem also provided valuable information regarding the city’s need to establish an economic development organization and to reposition underutilized commercial and industrial properties.

Strategic Public Policy (SPP) prepared a *Fiscal Analysis*. This analysis evaluated income tax revenues and basic city service expenditures by each major land use category to determine cost of services for each. This task was instrumental in the preparation of a sustainable, fiscally responsible land use policy. Gem’s and SPP’s analyses are integrated into Chapter 3 Economic Development, Chapter 4 Redevelopment, Chapter 5 Housing and Neighborhoods, Chapter 8 Future Land Use, and Chapter 10 Implementation and Action Plan

CDS prepared an analysis of the City’s water, sanitary sewer, and roadway infrastructure. CDS’ analysis was coupled with infrastructure related objectives and strategies to form Chapter 7 Infrastructure. Planned improvements to the roadway system are shown on the Transportation Map.

BUILDING ON PAST PLANNING EFFORTS

The first City of Middletown Master Plan was adopted in 1965, substantially updated in 1977, and partially updated in 1997 to plan for new growth on the city’s east side. Many of the recommendations found in the 1965 Master Plan and the 1997 Update have been implemented. This fact coupled with new community conditions, expectations, and challenges underscored the need to prepare an updated Master Plan.

The number of disparate planning initiatives that were undertaken in the absence of an updated, officially adopted planning document provides further evidence of the need for a single, community-wide Master Plan. Many of these planning efforts, listed in the insert, were never adopted as official City policy. As a result, few, if any, plans were implemented. The lack of action is a source of frustration to numerous individuals and organizations that participated in their creation. Each plan was reviewed to identify viable strategies from each to incorporate into the 2005 – 2010 Master Plan. A summary of each plan is available from the Middletown City Planning Department.

Past Planning Efforts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Middletown, Ohio Corporate Area Master Plan Document (1977) ▪ HyettPalma Creating the Future Downtown (1992) ▪ City of Middletown Sewer Master Plan (1996) ▪ Downtown Middletown Urban Design Plan (1996) ▪ A.C.T.I.O.N. (1998) ▪ Downtown Middletown Market Analysis and Development Strategy (1999) ▪ Middletown Own It! (2000) ▪ Midpointe Centre Conceptual Design and Development Project (2000) ▪ Strategic Marketing Plan (2001) ▪ An Overall Housing Assessment of Middletown, Ohio (2002) ▪ Hook Field Municipal Airport Strategic Development Plan (2002) ▪ Creating a Competitive Community Advantage (2003)

PLANNING PARTICIPANTS

The plan is built upon what can be described as a very successful endeavor to involve residents and key stakeholders in the planning process. The public participation plan was an outgrowth of City Council’s desire to develop land use and development policies that are community driven and rooted in public support. The ground swell of public involvement surpassed initial expectations. Tremendous turnout was had at public input meetings indicating a strong interest on the behalf of residents and stakeholders in their community. The planning process is a testament and validation to the type of cooperation and public-private partnerships that are envisioned in this Master Plan.

- **City Council.** City Council gave the directive and provided the resources to prepare this Master Plan. City Council also held two work sessions, one public hearing, and one town-hall-style meeting; considered public comments; reviewed working drafts; and adopted the plan. City Council will provide leadership and direction during the Master Plan’s 2005-2010 implementation period.
- **Steering Committee.** City Council commissioned a thirty-member Steering Committee to provide project oversight. Most members were residents but a few were community stakeholders that lived outside of Middletown. Collectively, the steering committee represented a diverse cross section of Middletown’s population and business/institutional community.

The Steering Committee met eleven times over one and a half years to discuss issues of vital importance to Middletown’s future including community image, brownfield redevelopment, economic development, housing and community development, parks, utilities and transportation. In short, the Steering Committee was the backbone of the planning process as all Master Plan recommendations, actions, goals and objectives were presented to the Steering Committee before the same were presented to the Planning Commission and City Council in draft form.

- **Residents.** Residents were given an opportunity to provide input through a community survey mailed to each household, a public forum and an open house. Residents and property and

business owners also had an opportunity to attend four public hearings and a town hall-style meeting. Residents will be called upon to stay involved as the Master Plan is implemented.

- **Local and Regional Experts.** Experts in the areas of economic development, housing/neighborhoods, and redevelopment were invited to attend one of three Executive Roundtable discussions. These experts were called upon from both the Cincinnati and Dayton metropolitan regions and represented diverse professional backgrounds including banking, finance, real estate brokerage, business development, housing developers, commercial real estate developers, academia, non-profits, utilities, and government.
- **Project Management Team.** The City of Middletown retained the services of McKenna Associates, Inc., and their partners CDS, Inc., Gem Public Sector Services, and Strategic Public Policy to prepare the 2005-2010 Master Plan. This team worked closely with and reported to the City of Middletown Planning Department. The Planning Director and Senior Planner were responsible for project management at the City, day-to-day communications with the consultants, reviewing drafts, and community communications.



Master Plan Open House, February 16, 2005

PLANNING PROCESS

- **Phase 1 Planning Issues Identification.** The first three Steering Committee meetings were devoted to identifying important issues that must be addressed in the Master Plan. Initial findings were used to create a community survey. The Middletown Opinion Survey was mailed in residential water bills. A statistically significant number of responses, 2,047, were mailed back to the city. Fifteen key stakeholder interviews were conducted during the same period.
- **Phase 2 Vision, Goal, and Objective Development.** The Steering Committee reviewed the results of the Community Survey and key stakeholder interviews and provided the Project Management Team with additional

Public Participation and Planning Process Summary and Timeline

- Eleven Steering Committee Meetings
- Community Survey Mailed in Water Bill
- Fifteen Key Person Interviews
- One Public Forum
- Three Focus Groups
 - Economic Development,
 - Community Development
 - Redevelopment Roundtables
- Three Strategic Community Meetings:
 - Downtown Alliance
 - Middletown City Schools
 - Middletown Regional Hospital
- One Public Open House
- Two Planning Commission Work Sessions, including One Public Hearing
- Two City Council Work Sessions, including One Public Hearing,
- One Town-Hall-Style City Council Meeting
- Planning Commission formal recommendation, public hearing (April 13, 2005)
- City Council; 1st Reading, Public Hearing (May 3, 2005)
- City Council; 2nd Reading, Adoption (May 17, 2005)

direction. The end result was draft set of goals and objectives. Residents were invited to attend the July 28, 2004 public forum to review the draft goals and objectives. Participants were divided into four discussion groups. Each group was instructed to critique the initial set of goals and objectives and identify unimportant and/or missing items. At the end of the meeting, each group prioritized the draft objective statements. The results were finalized and presented to City Council on August 31, 2004 for adoption.

- **Phase 3 Data Gathering, Analysis, and Mapping.** Phase 3 occurred concurrently with Phases 1, 2 and 4. The recommendations in this plan are based on an extensive inventory and analysis of Middletown's demographic, physical, housing, transportation, and real estate market characteristics. Thus, Phase 3 in the planning process involved gathering information about Middletown and analyzing that information for meaningful conclusions.
- **Phase 4 Strategy Development.** The Project Management Team created action strategies to implement each Master Plan objective. This task required a considerable amount of research and review of pertinent planning, housing, and (re)development resources. To refine and validate the initial set of strategies, three executive roundtable meetings were organized around Redevelopment, Housing and Community Development, and Economic Development. Roundtable participants were asked to evaluate the general strengths, weaknesses, and shortcomings of each strategy. Emphasis was placed on identifying land use and development strategies that would be embraced by the private sector.

Three strategic meetings of community-wide importance were held with the Downtown Alliance, Middletown City School District, and Middletown Regional Hospital. These meeting were held to create an initial dialogue; give each organization an opportunity to review Master Plan goals, objectives and strategies; and identify potential partnering opportunities to achieve common goals.

- **Phase 5 Master Plan Creation.** The key strategies, conclusions, and land use recommendations were presented to the steering committee for their final review and consideration over a series of four meetings. After consensus was reached, all of the various reports, analyses, and mapping that occurred to date were placed in draft document form.
- **Phase 6 Master Plan Adoption.** The plan was unveiled to the public at an open house on February 16, 2005. Map and text display boards were placed around the ground floor lobby at City Hall. Members of the Project Management Team were available to answer questions and present major themes. Comments and questions were written on index cards provided at each station and inserted into comment boxes. The boards were also displayed at the Middletown Public Library, and electronic versions of the boards were posted on the City's website with an opportunity to email comments to City Planning staff. Planning Commission held two work sessions and one public hearing to review the draft plan. The Commission then held a final public hearing and made a formal recommendation to approve the Master Plan on April 13, 2005. City Council also held two work sessions and one public hearing, as well as a town hall-style meeting. The town hall meeting, part of an ongoing



series known as Conversations with Council, was held at Wildwood Elementary School to discuss the Master Plan with Middletown citizens. Council held a final public hearing, as well as the first reading of the adoption ordinance, on May 3, 2005. The final step in adopting the Master Plan was Council’s second reading, which was held the on May 17, 2005.

MASTER PLAN THEMES

The following paragraphs summarize the overarching Master Plan themes. These themes were consistently raised by planning participants at public forum, open house, and steering committee meetings and during key stakeholder interviews.

- **Economic Development.** Community input received during the planning process consistently placed economic development, tax base diversification, and job creation among the most important Master Plan issues. Residents are keenly aware that the city’s future viability is linked to high-wage employment growth that results in increased expendable income for residents and higher income tax revenues for the city. Additional economic development resources, including increased funding for staffing and related programs, must be provided in the very near future.
- **Growth.** Middletown is strategically located at the leading edge of two converging development patterns expanding outward from Cincinnati to the south and Dayton to the north. Paradoxically, Middletown’s land supply of vacant land is insufficient to accommodate long-term sustained growth. A small window of opportunity exist, probably less than five years, for the city to proactively position itself to be an active participant and beneficiary of inevitable development in the I-75 growth corridor. In the absence of growth, Middletown runs the risk of becoming a functionally landlocked city as development in neighboring jurisdictions encircles the city. The alternative to growth is stagnation and potential insignificance.
- **Redevelopment/Revitalization.** Redevelopment of vacant and underutilized commercial and industrial properties is essential to the long term health and vitality of the City. Downtown and neighborhood revitalization cannot occur until such negative influences are removed and the land is placed back into productive use. Likewise, neighborhood issues must be better understood and the forces that are pulling residents away from Middletown must be addressed.

Master Plan Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Economic Development - Higher paying jobs, economic diversification and a growing economy. ■ Growth – Additional land with necessary infrastructure in place is needed to accommodate future growth. ■ Redevelopment – Blighted, underutilized commercial and industrial buildings must be removed to stabilize neighborhoods and the tax base. ■ Image – Showcase the city’s many strengths and improve upon obvious weaknesses. ■ Involvement – Residents and stakeholders are eager to stay involved. They must have buy-in and be given legitimate leadership roles. ■ Partnerships – The City cannot implement this plan alone. Partnerships with private and other public sector entities are mission essential. ■ Persistence – City leaders must stay the course and be mindful that challenges were not created overnight and neither will the solutions.

- **Improve Community Image.** Middletonians are keenly aware of the community’s negative image as a result of the city’s heavy industrial base, older housing stock, brownfields, and public school performance. Frustration was expressed over not knowing how to overcome this pervasive problem. However, Middletown has many existing assets to offer ranging from a large park system, traditional neighborhoods, arts and cultural amenities and events, and world class healthcare and educational facilities. However, more must be done to promote internal strengths and improve upon real and perceived weaknesses.
- **Community Buy-in and Participation.** Master Plan implementation will be difficult without community support. Speed and timing are critical factors for many Master Plan recommendations. The City will be judged at some level by the manner it is able to bring the community together to rally behind Master Plan goals, objectives, and action strategies. Several Master Plan strategies will require an ongoing effort on part of the City and its partners to keep residents and the business community informed and engaged during the Master Plan implementation process. Several steering committee members, key stakeholders, and focus group participants indicated a desire to stay involved after the Master Plan is adopted. Residents are also longing for an active voice and appear eager to participate in broad and meaningful ways.
- **Reestablish Partnerships.** Collectively, the priority Master Plan recommendations are beyond the city’s ability to implement within any nominal time period due to human resource and funding limitations. As in the past, private, public, and quasi-public entities must be given meaningful roles to provide leadership, talent, and financial resources in collaborative implementation efforts. Communication, consensus building, inter-governmental cooperation, and acquisition of alternative funding sources are all prerequisites to the successful implementation of this plan. The previous statement is even more important in this era of decreased state and federal financial assistance to municipalities.
- **Persistence.** City leadership, residents, and the business community must be mindful that the challenges facing the city were not created overnight. Similarly, solutions to identified problems will not take hold immediately. Many Master Plan objectives, such as redeveloping brownfields, can take years to accomplish because of the complexity and magnitude of the task. Similarly, neighborhoods and downtown revitalization efforts can take years if not decades to accomplish.

Ancillary themes can be drawn from the main pages of the Master Plan text. One such theme is worth noting: the city cannot rest or become complacent at any time during the five year implementation period. The will to succeed must remain strong in light of inevitable difficulties. City officials must possess a contagious “can do” attitude and be willing to expend available political and financial resources.

MASTER PLAN VISION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

To simplify the use of the Master Plan, the number of goals was kept to a manageable number. Master Plan goal statements and corresponding vision statements are listed below:

Master Plan Goals and Vision Statements

GOAL A: Diversify and modernize our local 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 order to add 3,000 jobs and grow the incomes of its residents.

GOAL B: Turn Current Liabilities into 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.

GOAL C: Improve Our Community Image

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.

All three goals are highly interdependent. For example, it will be difficult to improve the quality of life of residents without increasing the city's tax base. The City may find it difficult to attract new businesses if the issues affecting community quality of life are not simultaneously improved. However, consensus held that the limited vacant acreage located near I-75 must be preserved for high tech business park development. It is largely felt that the City will never have the financial or political leverage needed to undertake seemingly more difficult activities if new revenue sources are not secured.

Master Plan Vision, Goals and Objectives, as adopted by City Council on August 31, 2004, are summarized on the next page.

