

Town of Middlesex Planning Commission Proposed Municipal Plan Adoption Report

Report on Draft Plan dated May 15, 2019

In accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4384(c), the Middlesex Planning Commission has prepared the following report regarding the Town's proposed Town Plan.

This plan presents a vision to guide how the Town evolves in the coming years. The plan identifies and recommends a number of actions and strategies that can be undertaken by the town and community to help achieve the goals and objectives therein.

Current Challenges and Vision

Middlesex is a small central Vermont community with limited financial and administrative resources. Middlesex does have a wealth of other resources, however, in its community, landscape, significant emerging opportunities in its Village Center, and a strong foundation in equitable and effective governance. While its citizenry has identified its challenges, the town plan provides the policy framework to utilize and protect the Town's strongest assets, while advancing the Town's vision and goals.

Plan Purpose

The Town Plan documents and assesses the present conditions of key components of life in Middlesex, while also expressing the community's vision for the future. It endeavors to guide growth by directing Town, state, and federal investments in roads, buildings, and recreational facilities to areas where the Town most needs and desires them; informing the revision of land use regulations; and setting out a course of action for the Town's committees and Select Board.

This 2019 Town Plan represents the culmination of a public process led by the Middlesex Planning Commission. It provides the most recent available data on present conditions and projections for the Town's future in each plan element. It also includes results of the 2018 What's Next Middlesex? outreach and report, and early findings of the 2018-2019 Town Plan survey solicited by the Middlesex Planning Commission which assessed the values and priorities of residents. For example, a majority of survey respondents (88%) would recommend Middlesex to a friend or family member as a good place to live.

This plan presents goals and implementation strategies for each section that, if carried out, can achieve the vision that residents have for the future of Middlesex. The Town Plan evaluates key accomplishments as well as areas for improvement. It also reviews current trends and conditions, explores new issues and opportunities and ensures that recommendations contained in the Town Plan are aligned with the community's vision and goals for the future.

Public Outreach and Update Process

Throughout 2018, the citizens and stakeholders of the town came together to participate in one of the most robust community conversations that has ever taken place in Middlesex: to ask and answer What's Next Middlesex, an ambitious and successful vision to action forum. Middlesex embarked on a dynamic series of two-way conversations between community members and local leaders. Extensive planning brought with it an elder/youth oral history project, a creative community-building Story Pot activity involving townspeople and elementary students at Rumney School, a well-attended community dinner, a day and a half of vibrant facilitated discussions, a final report, and four resultant community action committees to focus on economic development and infrastructure, trails, community spaces and events, and outreach/communication. The Planning Commission offered a survey to residents, and the town received more than 300 responses as of May 2019.

Public outreach continued with regular meetings of the Planning Commission, sharing of drafts with community boards, officials and interested townspeople, tremendous input from volunteer community members in drafting sections of the Town Plan and a public outreach meeting held on May 9th. More than a dozen residents came to listen to a presentation, ask questions, and provide input which has been directly incorporated into this Plan.

New Trends and Key Plan Updates

The plan builds on the previous plan but is remarkably distinct from its 2013 predecessor. Key updates include:

- New key themes;
- Incorporating the community conversation, including What's Next Middlesex?
- Updates to goals, objectives, and implementation strategies;
- Refreshed organization;
- Key components not previously discussed, including a future land use map, forest block identification and protection, infrastructure planning;
- Updates to Village Center planning and goals.

Themes and Organization

The 2019 Town Plan is organized around 4 key principles that emerged from the What's Next Middlesex Process.

A Community that Works for All. People, Housing and Livelihoods

A Landscape that Lasts. Protecting Working and Conservation Lands

A Place to Gather. Fostering a Vibrant, Connected Village Center

A Strong Foundation. Equitable and Effective Governance and Services

Consistency with State Goals in 24 V.S.A. sec. 4302

The 2019 Town Plan is consistent with goals of 24 V.S.A. sec 4302 by incorporating the following:

1. Historic Settlement Pattern:
Provides for growth in and around the existing village to maintain the historic settlement pattern of a compact village center surrounded by rural countryside and discouraging strip development in the area of the Interstate Interchange
2. Strong & diverse economy
Provides for expanding opportunities to build and grow businesses in town in ways that accommodate valuable and fragile natural and community resources
3. Access to educational opportunities:
Identifies ways to broaden access to educational opportunities for all residents
4. Transportation:

- Provides guidance for expanding transportation options that respect the integrity of the natural environment
5. Natural Resources:
Identifies important natural and historic features, including fragile areas, water resources, historic sites
 6. Quality of air, water, wildlife, forests and land resources;
Provides for maintaining the quality of air, water, wildlife, forests and other natural resources, including identifying significant forest blocks and wildlife crossings reducing water pollution and river hazards.
 7. Energy:
Encourages efficient use of energy and allows the growth and increased reliance on renewable energy resources to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
 8. Recreation:
Identifies existing recreational features and encourages planning to continue to allow access to broad recreational resources for the Town
 9. Agriculture and Forestry
Identifies agricultural resources and opportunities to continue to provide local farm and forest products for Town and regional residents and businesses
 10. Extraction of earth resources
Provides for continued wise use of earth resources and appropriate extraction of the earth resources and remediation
 11. Affordable housing
Provides for expanding opportunities for more diverse housing to allow housing to be more available and affordable
 12. Public facilities
Identifies the current public facilities and services and provides for their continued availability to serve town needs
 13. Child care
Identifies opportunities to ensure the availability of child care for town residents
 14. Flood resilience
Identifies flood and erosion hazards and provides for protecting areas to avoid damage

Designation of Land Area

The 2019 Town Plan does not significantly alter the designation of any land area. It provides for a closer look at the boundaries within the Village, Industrial and Mixed Use areas around the Middlesex Village and further exploration of the designation for the Putnamville area.