

3.0 LAND USE AND ZONING



MIDDLETOWN PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT

3.0 LAND USES AND ZONING

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the pattern of land development within Middletown and shows the existing land uses for the city. This chapter also includes a discussion of the different residential, commercial, and industrial zones within the city to indicate what types of development are possible and where. Existing land uses generally conform with the underlying zone, so zoning has an important impact on future development. In order to plan for efficient and orderly growth, this Plan of Development recommends the following goals:

- *Maintain a variety of residential densities that support a mix of housing types and accommodate different types of households.*
- *Encourage commercial and industrial development that corresponds with the city's existing infrastructure, particularly uses that may benefit from access to rail traffic*
- *Promote land uses and densities that strengthen the vitality of the Central Business District.*
- *Encourage open space preservation to protect the city's quality of life, historic rural characteristics, as a means to direct growth, and control the cost of community services.*

3.2 Existing Conditions

The City of Middletown covers 42.5 square miles, or approximately 27,190 acres.² After excluding the Connecticut River and other water bodies, the city has a land area of 40.9 square miles.³ The city's 2000 population totaled 46,918 persons, giving it a population density of 1,147 people per square mile, making it the most densely populated of Middlesex County's municipalities. Haddam, with 159 persons per square mile, has the lowest population density in the county while Cromwell, with 1,007 persons per square mile⁴, is not far behind Middletown. Hartford, in contrast, has a population density of over 7,500 persons per square mile.

Land Use Patterns. The City has a rich variety of land uses. Table 3.1 shows the various land uses and the amount of acres associated with each use. The historic downtown reflects Middletown's past through its mix of residential, commercial, industrial, and governmental uses. Suburban and rural landscapes lie on the outskirts of town, and commercial centers line many of the gateway streets into Middletown. Large industrial/office areas are recent additions to the built environment, and have good access to highways. These different land uses show the progression of the city's development patterns over the years, tracing Middletown's history from a small riverport city, to manufacturing center, to the growth of suburban residential developments and finally to the dispersal of corporate office space. Middletown's size and position at the center of the state have also attracted a number of public institutions. Figure 3.1 illustrates the breakdown of major land uses throughout Middletown.

² Middletown's GIS database

³ Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce

⁴ Density figures equal 2000 population divided by town's land area.

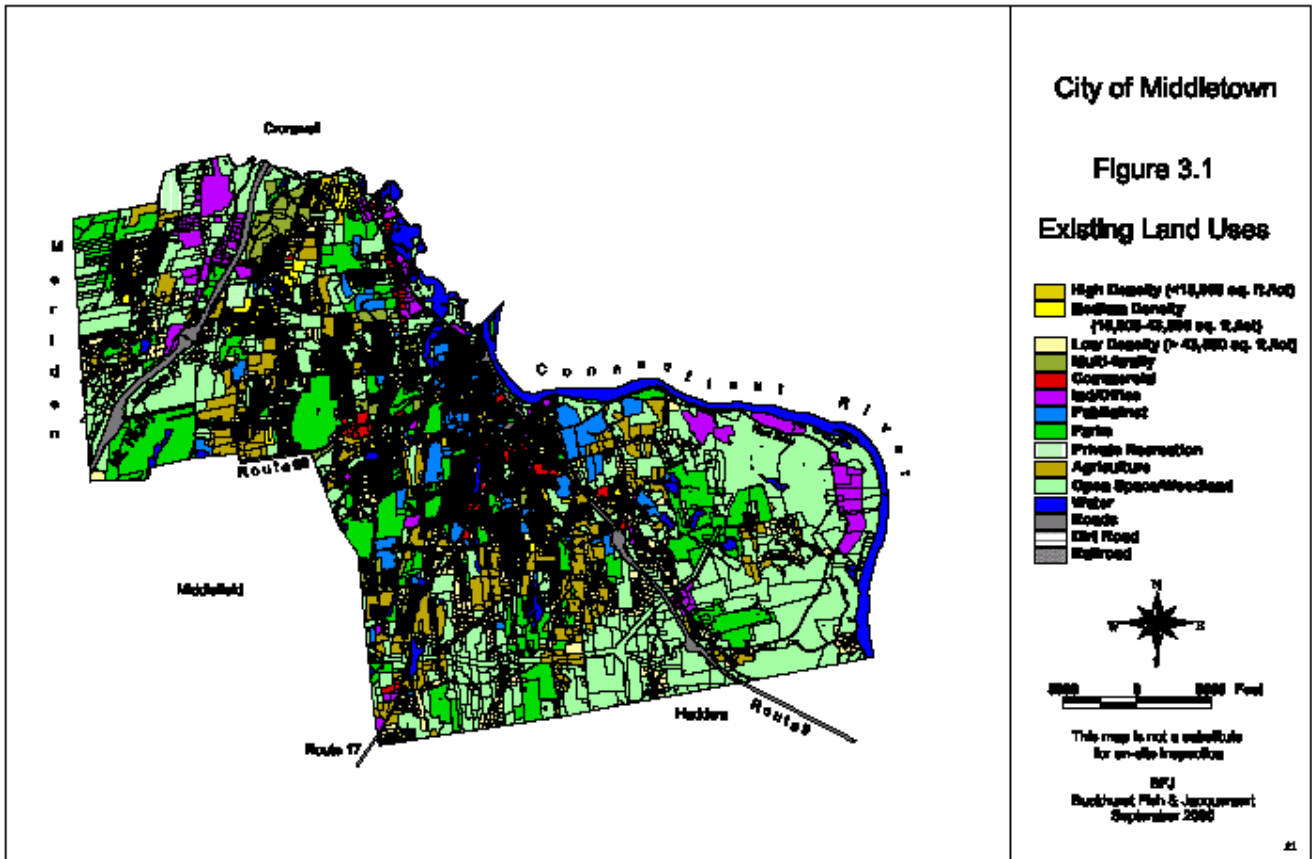
Table 3.1
Land Uses by Acreage, 2000

Land Use	Acres	%
Undeveloped		
Agriculture	2,125	7.8%
Woodland/Vacant	9,680	35.6%
Parks/Open Space	3,465	12.7%
Total Undeveloped:	15,270	56.2%
Developed		
Residential	6,080	22.4%
High-Density	940	
Medium-Density	2,445	
Low-Density	2,075	
Multi-Family	620	
Commercial	355	1.3%
Industrial	1,060	3.9%
Public/Institutional	920	3.4%
Roads/Water Bodies	3,505	12.9%
Total Developed:	11,920	43.8%
Total Acreage	27,190	100.0%

Source: BFI

Undeveloped Land. For a city as well populated as Middletown, there is a surprising amount of undeveloped land. The Land Use Map shows that undeveloped land - active agriculture, woodland and vacant land, and parkland - constitutes approximately 56 percent of the city's land area. Agricultural and forested lands make up most of this undeveloped acreage. These areas endow Middletown with its rural character. Much of the undeveloped land lies east of Route 9 and west of Interstate 91, on the outskirts of the city. Over the past decade the city has expanded its holdings of parkland and committed open space; these two uses now exceed the number of acres of active agricultural land

Developed Land. As table 3.1 indicates, residential uses occupy the bulk of developed land. Figure 3.1 shows that the City has successfully managed to promote compact residential growth, avoiding excessive sprawl. Rural areas lie just beyond the denser residential areas, with some serving as a transition between residential and woodland/open space. Although industrial districts persist along the railroad tracks, significant expansion of new industrial and office centers has occurred near I-91 over the past two decades, due to good regional access by road. Combined, commercial and industrial land uses now constitute approximately five percent of the city's land area.



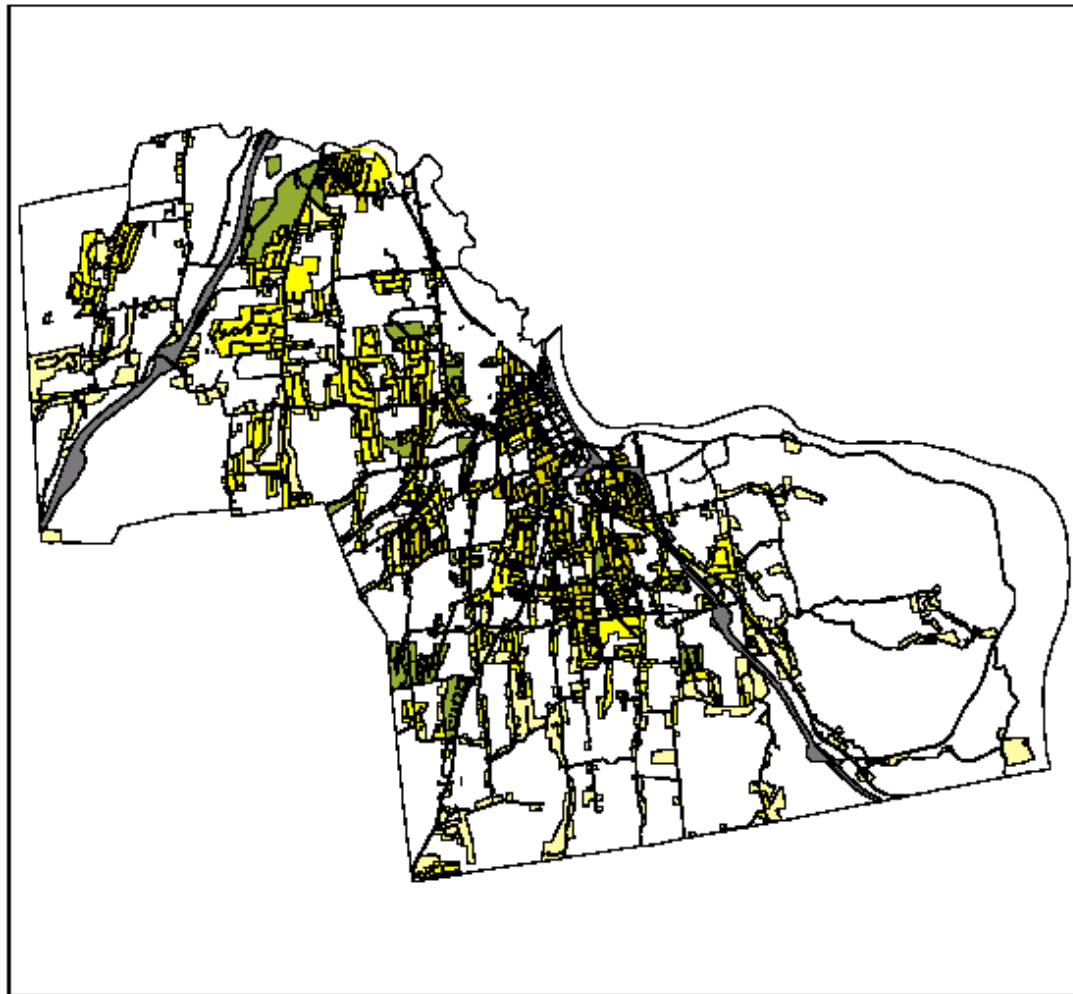
Residential Uses. After a high point of 800 new housing units in 1987, Middletown received 827 applications for new housing permits between 1990-1996, or an annual average of 118 applications. Recently, there has been a surge in construction activity coinciding with the positive economic climate. Despite housing construction in areas outside the central core, Middletown has avoided rapid suburban sprawl as most new residential developments have tended to be compact. The Westlake census tract, for instance, has a higher residential density (11 persons/acre) than does the central business district (9.5 persons/acre).⁵ Existing residential areas tend to be concentrated within the central and western portions of the city, though new housing is expanding west of I-91 and into the south central portion of the city, areas traditionally undeveloped or used for agriculture. Figure 3.2 on the following page illustrates the built residential areas within Middletown. However, as the economic climate improves, Middletown may find its undeveloped land, including farms and hillsides, under greater threat of development. Much of the recent growth has occurred in the Route 217 – I-91 corridor in the north- west section of the city, involving a mix of condominium and town house developments. Future housing development is likely to shift to areas further south and to the west, areas zoned for larger lot development. This

raises the possibility that residential building construction in these areas will lead to sprawl, harming those areas of the city that retain a connection to Middletown's rural past.

Commercial and Industrial Uses. Existing commercial and industrial land uses account for just over five percent of Middletown's land area. The central business district (CBD) has historically been the city's commercial core, with Main Street as the heart of the historic downtown. With approximately 60 acres of commercial uses within the CBD, the CBD represents less than 20% of the 355 commercial acres in the city today. The commercial strength of the downtown has been diluted over the years due to competition from nearby shopping malls and from the smaller-scale commercial plazas in Middletown, particularly those along Route 66, Newfield Street, and Route 17. The 1990 Plan of Development recognized the need for a strong central business district and promoted land use policies that have discouraged commercial development outside of the CBD. Implementation of the plan has resulted in relatively few and small-scale commercial strip developments within the city.

Middletown has approximately 1,000 acres in industrial use, concentrated in four broad areas:

- West of I-91, where light industrial and research uses are located in the vicinity of the Aetna complex;
- The I-3 zone along the Connecticut River, currently the location for the Pratt & Whitney aircraft complex as well as the Northeast Utilities plant;
- Along Route 3, where mixed light industrial and commercial uses have located near the Cromwell town line; and
- Scattered development along the Route 9/Saybrook Road corridor.



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Middletown, CT

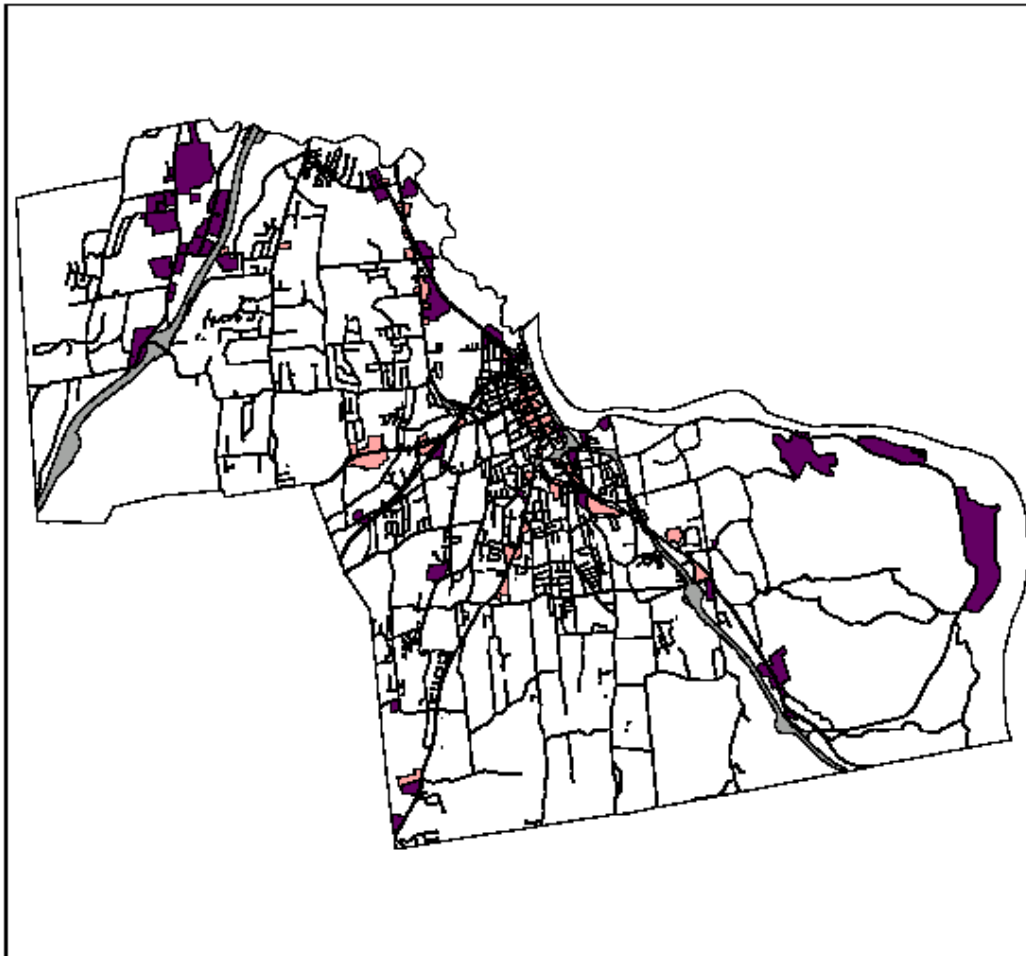
Figure 3.2 Existing Residential Areas

- High-Density
- Medium-Density
- Low-Density
- Multi-Family



0 5000 10000 15000 Feet

BVJ Buchhurst Fish & Jacquemart, Inc.



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**Figure 3.3
Existing Industrial and
Commercial Areas**

- Industrial Areas
- Commercial Areas



0 5000 10000 15000 Feet

BFI Buckhurst Fish & Jacquemart, Inc.

3.3 Zoning

Middletown zoned the downtown area in 1927; outlying lands were first zoned in 1955. Today the city has twenty-eight different zoning classifications. The bulk of these are residential, followed by industrial and then business. Industrial zones line the railroad tracks and portions of I-91 and Route 9. Zones for commercial enterprises lie along the major arterials into town as well as the central business district. Residential uses and mixed uses make up most of the rest of the land within the city. Table 3.2 shows the zoning classifications and acreages dedicated to each zone. The table indicates that fully 74% of the land in town is zoned residential; 15% industrial; and less than 3% is districted for commercial uses. The percentage distribution of the various zones has not varied significantly over the past decade.

As an older city, Middletown has made substantial public investment in infrastructure. Zoning in Middletown reflects this capital investment, correlating intensity with available infrastructure. Commercial zones are mapped in the downtown and along major arterials where transportation routes and population densities support those land uses. Industrial spaces have been zoned near railroad lines or major highways, particularly I-91, to allow for movement of goods and to provide good access for commuters.

Housing densities throughout the city are likewise influenced by the availability of water and sewer. Typically, the higher density zones correspond with the availability of water and sewer connections. These zones are typically in the central developed area of town: east of I-91, west of Route 9 and north of Crystal Lake. The larger residential lots of one or one and one-half acres rely on on-site septic disposal systems and individual wells. These lots are typically found throughout the western and southern portions of the city. The larger lots also are found in areas that are environmentally sensitive and not suitable for intensive residential developments.

Middletown has updated and amended its zoning code to proactively regulate future growth in a way that benefits general public goals. The Downtown Village District Zone is the newest zone approved by the City. This zone provides the city with greater development control, requiring architectural review of new buildings. This new zone supports the findings of the citywide survey conducted in August, 1999 that favor greater aesthetic controls over new development.

**Table 3.2
Zoning Reference, by Acreage**

	Zone Name	Acreage	% Total
	RPZ Residential Rezoning	1225	
	R-15 Residential 15,000 sq. ft. / lot	4905	
	R-30 " 30,000 sq. ft. / lot	3460	
	R-45 " 45,000 sq. ft. / lot	3218	
	R-60 " 60,000 sq. ft. / lot	5720	
	R-1 Restricted Residence	480	
	M Multi-family	360	
	MX Mixed Use	330	
	PRD Planned Residential Development	785	
	DVD Downtown Village District	70	
	Total Residential	20553	78.6%
	B-1 Central Business	120	
	B-2 General Business	345	
	NPC Newfield Planned Commercial	355	
	Total Business	820	3.1%
	I-1 Service Industrial	170	
	I-2 Restricted Industrial	150	
	I-3 Special Industrial	1995	
	I-4 Limited Industrial Zone	260	
	IOP Interstate Office Park	110	
	IM Interstate Mixed-Use Zone	80	
	IT Interstate Trade	110	
	IRA Industrial Redevelopment Area	1105	
	Total Industrial	3980	15.2%
	TD Transitional Development	150	
	ID Institutional Development	347	
	RF Riverfront Recreation	305	
	Total Other	802	3.1%
	TOTAL	26155	100.0%

3.4 Development Potential

The development potential for existing undeveloped land was examined by superimposing the zoning map over existing developed and undeveloped land uses in Middletown. Table 3.3 quantifies the developable acreage and presents the development potential for each major zone category, making allowances for site constraints such as wetlands and steep slopes.

The first column in Table 3.3 shows the number of vacant acres that each zone contains. The second column shows the net developable acreage. This is calculated by first subtracting 50% of the environmentally sensitive lands (slopes over 25%, floodplains, wetlands, and water bodies) from the vacant land and then subtracting 10% of the remaining acres to account for roads, utilities, and design inefficiencies. The third column, potential development, reflects the net developable acres multiplied by the building standards found within the zoning code. This then results in the amount of additional floor space that could be built in the commercial/industrial sectors and the number of new dwelling units possible in residential sectors.

Commercial and Industrial Potential. The table indicates that another 794,000 square feet of commercial space could be built and nearly 20,000,000 square feet of industrial floor space. Figure 3.4 shows the location of undeveloped commercial and industrial land in Middletown. Although slopes over 25% were discounted from the acreage calculation, it is possible that the industrial figure remains overly optimistic. For instance, the I-3 section in the Maromas area has a

great deal of topographic variety. Even though slopes may not exceed 25% in certain places, parts of the remaining terrain will require substantial preparation for construction and thus may not be truly usable. As Figure 3.4 illustrates, most of the remaining undeveloped business and commercial areas are concentrated in four areas: 1) west of I-91, 2) along the railroad tracks in the northeast corner of town, 3) the Maromas area, and 4) off of Route 17 adjacent to Middlefield.

Housing Potential. Table 3.3 indicates that under current zoning, the majority of new residential construction could take place within the R-15, R-1, and RPZ zones, which have a minimum lot size of 15,000 square feet per residence. The second highest number of new units that could be constructed is in the R-60 zone, those areas on the outskirts of town that are predominately in use for agriculture and woodlands. Figure 3.5 illustrates the land that is zoned for residential uses but has not been developed. Most of the vacant residential areas are west of the downtown area, east of Route 9 and in the south central portion of the city. Only 26% of the land zoned for residential uses has been developed. Generally speaking, zones allowing higher densities are located closer to the CBD with the R-30, R-45, and R-60 zones situated progressively further from the downtown.

Comparing the current land uses with those of a decade ago, housing developments have expanded into what was wooded and agricultural lands west of I-91 and continue to push southerly into the south-central area of town. Water and sewer systems have been extended to these areas, putting development pressure on land that is presently undeveloped.

**Table 3.3
Development Potential by Zone**

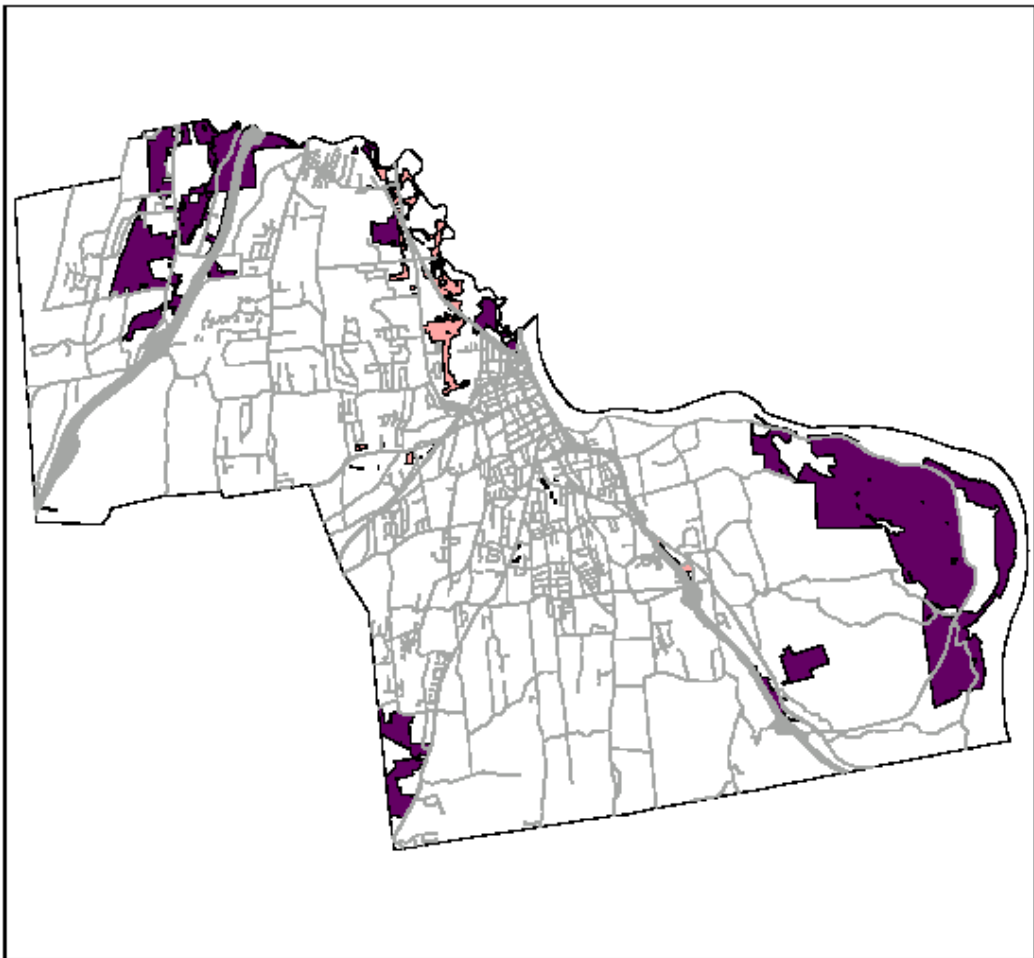
Zones	Vacant Acres	Net Developable Acres	Potential Development	Additional Population³
Commercial B2	100	55	794,000 sq. ft.	
Industrial				
I-1 / IRA	145	90	1,956,000 sq. ft.	
I-2 / I-4 / IT	765	700	8,732,000 sq. ft.	
I-3	1,555	1174 ¹	8,000,000 sq. ft. ¹	
IOP	40	35	300,000 sq. ft.	
NPC	135	65	849,000 sq. ft.	
Subtotal	2,740	2,119	19,837,000 sq. ft.	
Residential				
Multi Family	65	50	300 units	690
R1/ RPZ /R15	1,530	1,070	3,100 units	7,130
R30	1,730	1,365	1,975 units	4,543
R45 ⁴	1,120	860	830 units	1,909
R60	3,900	3,030	2,200 units	5,060
TD	15	8	32 units	74
Mixed Uses				
MX	45	25	150 units	345
IM	60	35	250 units ²	575
Subtotal	8,465	6,443	8,837 units	20,325
TOTAL	11,205	8,562		

¹ Connecticut River Interceptor Sewer Project, Middletown Department of Planning, Conservation, and Development.

² Prior to building 250 units, a minimum of 700,000 square feet of office space must be under construction.

³ The 1998 average household size of 2.3 persons was multiplied against the dwelling unit count to arrive at the additional population count. As the trend is toward smaller households, we expect this future population estimate to be overly generous.

⁴ R-45 development calculations exclude lands owned by CVH.



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Figure 3.4
Industrial and Commercial
Undeveloped Areas

-  Undeveloped Commercial Area
-  Undeveloped Industrial Area



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The table indicates that an additional 8,800 units could be built, adding 20,400 persons to the city's population, raising the total population to approximately 65,000 people. This figure represents a theoretical maximum build-out, however, and does not represent a population projection. In fact, the State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) predicts a population level of 49,050 people for the City of Middletown in 2020 (See Table 2.2, page 9). This forecast harmonizes with the survey findings from August, 1999, in which two-thirds of Middletown residents stated their desire to see the City's population increase slightly to 50,000. Only one-third of respondents wished to see a moderate growth rate resulting in about 55,000 residents.

Following the State DECD population projections, the City will need approximately 2,400 additional housing units. As Table 3.3 makes clear, Middletown has ample undeveloped land to accommodate the increase in housing units. The challenge confronting residents and city officials is to channel that growth so that the additional units benefit the city and do not detract from the existing quality of life.

Mixed-Use Areas. It should also be noted that Middletown has mixed-use zones that allow both residential as well as commercial uses. The MX zone can be found along major corridors while the IM zone is limited to a site near the interstate. The IM zone has a maximum cap of 250 dwelling units. Table 3.3 only lists the residential possibilities in these two zones, though additional commercial space is possible in the MX zone, and office space is required in the IM zone, as indicated in the table.

Costs of Community Services. Commercial, industrial, and residential development provides new tax revenue and a larger tax base for the local municipality. However, local governments have become more aware of the different costs associated with different types of development. Commercial and industrial development tends to generate tax dollars, requiring few services from the city or town. Residential development, however, often ends up being a liability, requiring the city to spend more in services than it generates in tax dollars.

Middletown's Department of Planning, Conservation, and Development examined the budgetary impacts of development on the City's education costs. The 1997 report concluded that single-family residential development requires the City to spend \$1.32 in taxes for every \$1.00 the household generates. Commercial/industrial development, however, required only \$.54 in expenditures for every dollar, netting the City 46 cents. From a budgetary perspective, commercial and industrial development appears preferable to residential growth. However, industrial and commercial growth also results in residential growth, as people move to the community with the new jobs. This has the effect of reducing some of the economic gains brought about by the development in the first place.

Because the education budget makes up such a large percentage of the city's entire budget (53% in 1996), development that does not impact the educational system is often seen as "paying its own way." Residential developments that cater to older Americans, for instance, are often welcome because these households do not add children to the local school district and therefore do not require construction of new public buildings. Likewise, simply preventing residential development can save the city educational dollars. Buying land (the amount often leveraged with federal or state funds) and setting it aside for open space purposes, can result in a net savings for the city.⁶ Another economic benefit from buying open space is that residential land near the open

⁶Department of Planning, Conservation and Development. *Cost of Community Services/Total Build Out Analysis*. City of Middletown, February, 1997.

space parcel typically rises in value, generating additional tax dollars to the municipality (Weicher and Zerbst, 1973; Hendon, 1971; McLeod, 1984).

While full build out to 65,000 residents would severely and negatively impact the school district, low-level growth can be absorbed by the present infrastructure. The 1996-1997 school year saw an enrollment level of 4,800 students while the total capacity for the school district is 6,112 students. However, the age distribution of the students is not evenly spread out. The high school, for instance, is currently over capacity. If Middletown grows to a population of 50,000, the desired level indicated in the recent survey, current municipal infrastructure can probably accept the new arrivals, though some additional needs may be required.

3.5 Summary

Over the past decade, the city has added to its housing stock and increased its commercial and industrial tax base. Development during this time has been consistent with the 1990 Plan of Development, which sought:

“to encourage the appropriate, coordinated, and economic use of land in a manner which is consistent with the goals articulated in this plan, facilitates conservation of energy, and enables the efficient supply of public utilities and services.” (p.19)

Goals laid out in the 1990 Plan, such as the acquisition of more open space, encouraging the vitality of the Central Business District, scrutinizing expansion of the water and sewer service areas, and encouraging a diverse mix of single-family residential dwellings set the guidelines for commercial, industrial, and residential development over the past decade that maintained a coherent scheme.

Looking to the future, residents have strongly voiced their concern to limit Middletown’s growth to approximately 50,000 people. If current population projections hold, then Middletown will not reach that level for at least 20 years. At the same time, 65% of respondents also want the City to pursue commercial and industrial expansion. Industrial and commercial expansion, however, often results in new families moving into a community to be closer to where they work.

The quality of the new growth is going to be a significant factor in the future. Already, residents are speaking out about the design of their community – 74% of those surveyed said they want greater design review of all projects. It is not enough to limit growth, but to also ensure that it is visually compatible with and enhances the existing built fabric.

Major Assets

The city’s current land use mix is characterized by:

- A compact downtown that offers numerous services within walking distance of many single-family and multi-family homes.
- Variety of residential densities.
- Existing infrastructure that can accommodate new development of large, vacant tracts.
- Significant acreage of parkland and dedicated open space.
- Proximity to unique natural resources.

Issues and Opportunities

In order to continue to build on its assets, the city should continue to:

- Control expansion of water/sewer service areas as a means to limit residential sprawl.
- Consider rezoning land to lower future population levels, reflecting survey results.
- Acquire open space and recreational land as means to limit residential growth.
- Encourage a variety of residential options, including retirement communities.
- Safeguard and enhance existing commercial districts.
- Discourage dispersal of retail centers.
- Support improved rail access to industrial zones.
- Encourage greater design review of new development.
- Upgrade existing infrastructure and linkages along the riverfront and within the Maromas areas to ensure compact environmentally sensitive development.