

1.0 INTRODUCTION



MIDDLETOWN PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT

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1.1 Regional Setting

Middletown, an incorporated city in south-central Connecticut, lies between Connecticut's capital, Hartford, and Long Island Sound. (See Figure 1.1) It is the sole urban center of Middlesex County, and of the Midstate Regional Planning Agency. Middletown, one of Connecticut's largest cities in terms of land area, contains 42.5¹ square miles, and is home to 46,908 people. It is the largest community in the county, with 30% of the county population. The next largest town, Clinton, has about 13,000 residents. Middletown's dominant role within Middlesex County is reinforced by the fact that the five largest employers in the county are based in Middletown. This population size and economic base give Middletown a preeminent regional role in government, education, manufacturing, and insurance.

Middletown's neighbors include Cromwell and Berlin to the north, Meriden and Middlefield to the west, Durham and Haddam to the south, and Portland and East Hampton to the east. The city's eastern boundary is defined by the Connecticut River, a major natural and historic asset. Residences form Middletown's largest land use, typical of the region. To the north, within Cromwell, medium to high density suburban developments border Middletown while to the west and south, rural and suburban densities intermingle. Middletown and its region are also distinguished by state parks and reserves. These include Wadsworth Falls State Park, Cockaponsett State Forest, and the Cromwell Meadows Fish and Wildlife Area.

Middletown is well connected via state and federal highways to other Connecticut regions (see Figure 1.2). State Route 9, a divided expressway, provides access north to Cromwell and New Britain as well as south to the shore and Interstate 95 at Old Saybrook. Interstate 91 passes through the northwest section of Middletown, providing direct access to Hartford and New Haven. Interstate 91 connects with I-691, I-84, the Merritt Parkway, and I-95 to provide easy access to other Connecticut cities, as well as regional destinations such as Boston (115 miles northeast) and New York City (110 miles southwest). In addition to the expressways, State Route 17 (South Main Street) is a well-traveled corridor linking downtown Middletown with Durham. State Route 3 (Newfield Street) is a major arterial leading to Cromwell, and State Route 66 represents the major east-west arterial through the city, connecting Middletown's Central Business District with Meriden, I-91, and I-691. In addition, Route 66 provides the sole river crossing in Middletown, linking the city with Portland on the east bank of the Connecticut River.

The roads and highways provide Middletown with convenient access to transportation alternatives. The city lies about 40 miles south of Bradley International Airport, the region's largest commercial airport. Limited scheduled service is also available from Tweed New Haven airport. The Peter Pan bus company connects Middletown with Hartford, New Haven, Worcester, and New York City. There is currently no passenger rail service within the City of Middletown. However, Amtrak provides passenger railroad service from the adjoining towns of Meriden and Berlin. Public transit connects the city to points in the rest of the state and region. Middletown Area Transit (MAT) provides service within Middletown and to Cromwell, Durham, East Hampton, and Portland. Connecticut Transit provides service between Hartford and Middletown. While the Connecticut River provides access to points north and south, it is presently used only for recreational activity and some freight transportation.

¹ According to "City Boundary" layer of Middletown's GIS database.

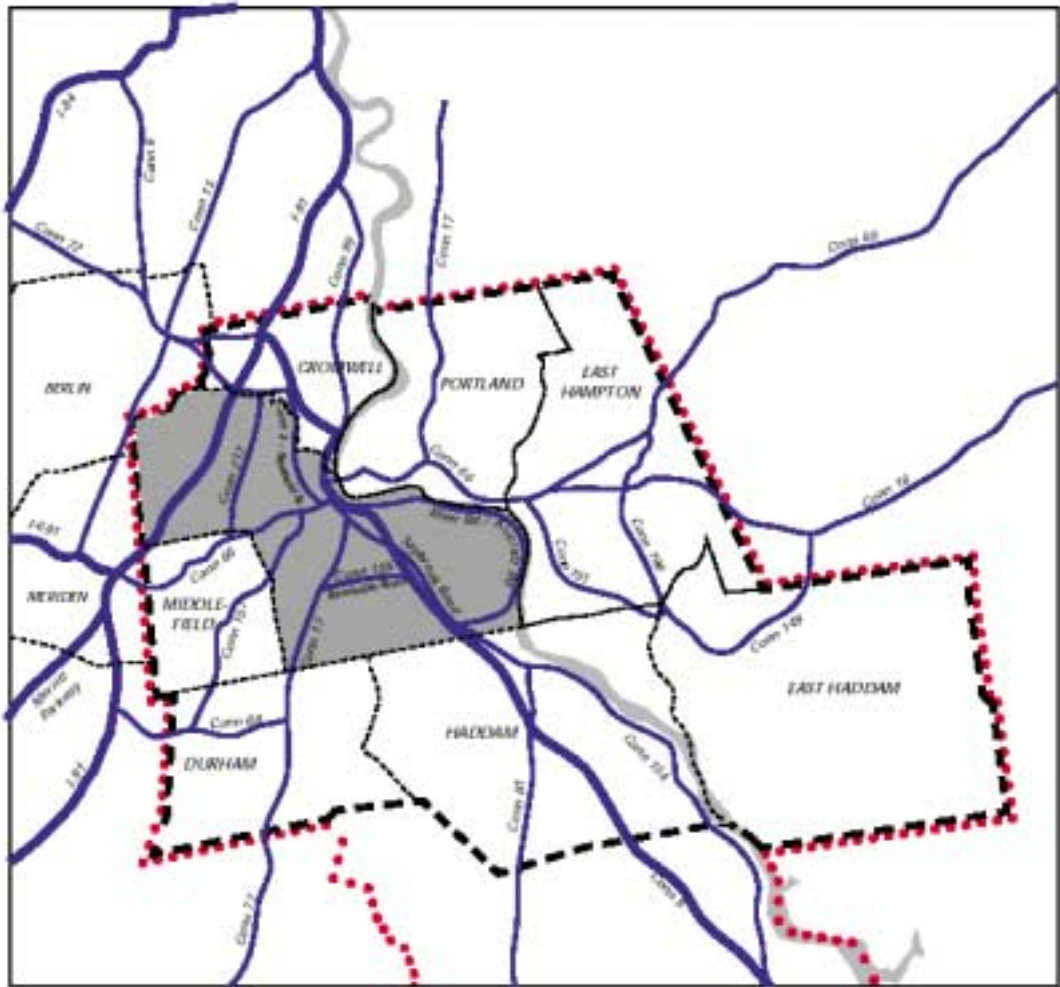


MIDDLETOWN PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT
Middletown, CT

Figure 1.1 Regional Map



-  City of Middletown
-  Middlesex County
-  Middletown Regional Planning Agency



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Figure 1.2 Regional Connections
Map

- City of Middletown
- Middlesex County
- Midstate Regional Planning Agency



1.2 Historical Context

Originating in the early 17th century, Middletown was one of the first towns founded in Connecticut. Similar to other New England settlements of the period, Middletown's economic base centered around a thriving agricultural sector. Initially producing cereal crops including corn, rye, oats and wheat, which began to be marketed in the late 1700's, the City later specialized into dairy and poultry farming, a move influenced by its proximity to larger urban areas. Agriculture remained an important aspect of Middletown's economy even in the face of new industrial development, preserving its status as an agricultural center until the 1960's.



Industry has also featured as a significant factor in Middletown's economic development. Beginning in the mid 17th century as a center for mill operations, its industrial base diversified into shipbuilding. Middletown also developed an important status as a riverport, being an official port of entry that fed a flourishing trade with the Atlantic seaboard and the West Indies.

Between 1750 and 1800, Middletown was the wealthiest town in the State. The City of Middletown was incorporated in 1784 and by 1790 it was the largest city in Connecticut and the customs port for the Connecticut River. Throughout this time, and well into the 19th century, the River was the major transportation link between Middletown and other towns. Ferries had begun to

operate on the River in 1726, soon after the east side was settled. The Middletown ferry slip was located approximately where the Arrigoni and railroad bridges are today. Commercial steamboat service began on the River in 1822 with establishment of the Connecticut Steamboat Company. Side-wheeler steamboat service linked Hartford and New York with Middletown in between. Already the City's basic infrastructure for the center had been laid down, as witnessed by the city map of 1825. Additionally, Wesleyan University was established in Middletown in 1831 and quickly became recognized as a prominent educational institution. The University has contributed to the economic and cultural well being of the community and continues to offer educational, artistic, and entrepreneurial benefits to the city.



*MIDDLETOWN PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT
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Figure 1.2 1877 View of Downtown Middletown

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The early 19th century was characterized by manufacturing growth, when Middletown led the state in the number of factories and value of its products. 1868 saw the construction of the City's first railroad bridge spanning the Connecticut River, giving it rail access to markets throughout the state. Before the end of the century, many of the City's major churches and institutions had been erected, with the majority of civic buildings aligned along its wide main streets (below).



1877 View of Main Street

The onset of the industrial revolution encouraged Middletown to develop its new character as a center for textile production, and from there the City expanded as a center for diverse manufacturing production, reaching its peak in production in the 1920's. The lack of railroads forced Middletown to search for nearby markets for its goods and services, accessible by highway and water transportation. The introduction of widespread automobile travel resulted in a gradual

growth of suburban housing patterns. Eventually, Middletown was linked to important road networks with the construction of State Route 9 and Interstate 91. During the 1980's Middletown experienced rapid economic development, buoyed by existing companies such as Middlesex Mutual Assurance Company, Pratt and Whitney Aircraft, Northeast Utilities and North and Judd, while also attracting new companies such as Aetna Life and Casualty (now Aetna/US Healthcare).