



8.0 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Regional Economy

The economy of Middlebury depends to some degree on the health of the regional Waterbury economy. The region experienced severe economic dislocations in the 1970s and early 1980s with the closure or scaling back of the brass manufacturing, clockmaking and rubber products industries. Middlebury was directly affected by the elimination of everyone but the staff at the Timex headquarters, the closure of Uniroyal footwear division in Naugatuck, and the later sale and dismemberment of Uniroyal and its corporate offices in Middlebury.



8.2 Local Economy

The economic and employment base in Middlebury generally included large employers like Uniroyal Chemical and General Data Communications Corporation. While the presence of large firms has a positive impact on the tax base, their activity can cause major fluctuations in the work force. The 1980 employment level of 4,170 declined to 2,800 workers in 1984. At the beginning of the 1990s, the employment level rebounded to 3,660. During the past decade, the levels remained stable, resting at 3,580 in 1996.

Relative to Connecticut as a whole and to Waterbury, the largest regional economic force, Middlebury has maintained a favorable unemployment rate. Only 4.1 percent of Middlebury workers were unemployed in 1996, whereas 5.7 percent of all workers in the State and 8.3 of the Waterbury workforce were unemployed.



Table 8.1
Unemployment Rates; 1990 to 1996

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
CONNECTICUT	5.2	6.8	7.6	6.3	5.6	5.5	5.7
Middlebury	4.3	5.5	5.9	5	4.4	3.9	4.1
Waterbury	8.1	10.1	11.3	8.8	8.2	7.6	8.3

Source: State of Connecticut Department of Economic Development.

According to a real estate company catering to the regional commercial marketplace, the vacancy rate for office space remains very low. Principally, there is relatively little supply of space catering to small and medium-size business. At the same time, the Town is largely oriented toward residential needs, creating the demand for community-based business. The large campus office complexes rarely factor into the vacancy rates. Those facilities may change ownership from time to time, but are not necessarily available for lease.

8.3 Economic Development Issues

8.31 Dependence on Major Employers

Middlebury will continue to rely on major employers for the bulk of its employment base and for a significant portion of its tax base. Accommodating smaller light industrial operations to diversify the type of employers in the community would offset this reliance. There are two areas to which such companies might locate. One is within the LI-200 area on land not owned by IBM, the other is on the northern section of Straits Turnpike. Such development should be allowed subject to site plan control and buffering from adjacent residential areas.

8.32 IBM Lands

The development of IBM's property will have several impacts on the town. However, because of its location in the southwestern corner of Town, many impacts, such as traffic, will not be directly felt by Middlebury residents. Positive impacts of the development would include a large increase in the tax base and the corporate sponsorship of community programs and facilities. Negative impacts could include a steady rise in the pace of development and demands on Town services. Control of "spin-off" office and retail development could also be a concern. The Middlebury Zoning Regulations does not allow retail development within Industrial zones. If and when the IBM development does become reality, consideration should be given to establishing a small convenience retail zone within the LI-200 area which would allow for restaurants and convenience shopping needs.



IBM also owns large tracts of land outside the boundaries of the Light Industrial district for which its plans are unclear. This property should remain as a residential zoning use. The site may be suitable for a Planned Residential Development that could include single or attached housing surrounding a golf course. Such a development should include a visual buffer, minimizing its impacts on the views of surrounding property owners.

8.4 Land Use and Zoning Concerns

Since Middlebury is not attempting to satisfy all the commercial and retail needs of its population, the commercial zoning areas should be examined for their appropriateness as follows:

- along Route 64 near the intersection with Route 188 the vacant CA-40 areas should be considered for rezoning to residential because of the grade along Route 64 and the desire to avoid retail uses at the entrance to the Town center on Route 188.
- most of the CA-40 zone along Regan Road should be eliminated so that retail development inappropriate to the character of this collector road does not occur. The elderly housing regulations should be rewritten to establish a special zoning category for the existing project. Convenience retail uses could still be built on the parcels adjacent to Route 64 which also have frontage on Regan Road.
- the intersection of Park Road and Straits Turnpike is important in establishing the corporate office character of the Timex/General Data Communications Corporation offices. The LI-80 zone at the northwest corner should be eliminated, largely because much of the property is in undevelopable wetlands. Consideration should also be given to changing the CA-40 designation on the southwest corner so that retail uses could not occur. Office or perhaps professional office uses are more appropriate. The commercial zoning could be retained on the eastern corners to provide convenience retail to surrounding residential areas for office workers.

The most congested commercial area in town is Four Corners. Current road improvements will help the congestion problem, but a proliferation of curb cuts, canopies and new construction could still be improved upon. Design standards should be developed for this and other retail areas which would regulate driveway entrances and spacing, and provide canopy and landscaping standards and the like. Cross access between commercial areas should be encouraged so that unnecessary driveway entrances are avoided. All commercial areas and industrial areas in the community should echo the high quality of the Town's residential stock and its natural landscape.