

2022 Business Survey Report

Economic Development Commission



Purpose of the Survey

Connecticut State Statutes Sec. 7-136.

“(b) The commission shall conduct research into the economic conditions and trends in its municipality, shall make recommendations to appropriate officials and agencies of its municipality regarding action to improve its economic condition and development, shall seek to coordinate the activities of and cooperate with unofficial bodies organized to promote such economic development and may advertise and may prepare, print and distribute books, maps, charts and pamphlets which in its judgment will further its official purposes.

“(c) The commission shall annually prepare and transmit to the legislative body of its municipality a report of its activities and of its recommendations for improving such economic conditions and development.”

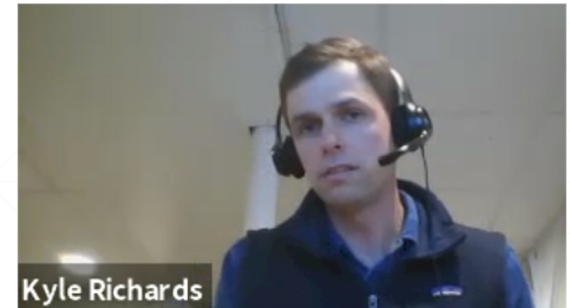
Middlebury Town Balance Sheet

NET POSITION

	Governmental Activities	
	2021	2020 (as restated)
Current assets	\$ 19,312,753	\$ 12,176,825 [▼]
Capital assets, net of accumulated depreciation	43,002,278	43,415,308
Town Reputation		
Total assets	62,315,031	55,592,133
Deferred Outflow of Resources	2,155,488	1,328,239
Long-term liabilities outstanding	30,097,685	30,010,467
Other liabilities	2,341,273	944,141
Total liabilities	32,438,958	30,954,608
Deferred Inflows of Resources	7,015,870	2,350,559
Net Position:		
Net investment in capital assets	25,769,396	27,471,354
Restricted	808,600	118,236
Unrestricted	(1,562,305)	(3,974,385) [▼]
Total Net Position	\$ 25,015,691	\$ 23,615,205

The value of our address and reputation

Metro Realty – two twin 21,000 sq-ft buildings at the intersection of Straits Turnpike and Park Road. \$5 Million investment.



“All the partners agreed, we would not have selected this site if it didn’t have the Middlebury address.”

“We needed to be confident our investment would hold up after 15-20 years”

Survey sent to 467 Middlebury Businesses July 2022

- Follow-up to 2017 survey
- Sent to 467 out of a list of 705 businesses provided by Town Assessor
- Mostly “brick and mortar” businesses directly serving customers
- Three page survey by mail and email
 - First page – rate importance of factors in doing business in Middlebury
 - Second and third page – open ended questions
- 59 responses for an overall response yield of about 12%.

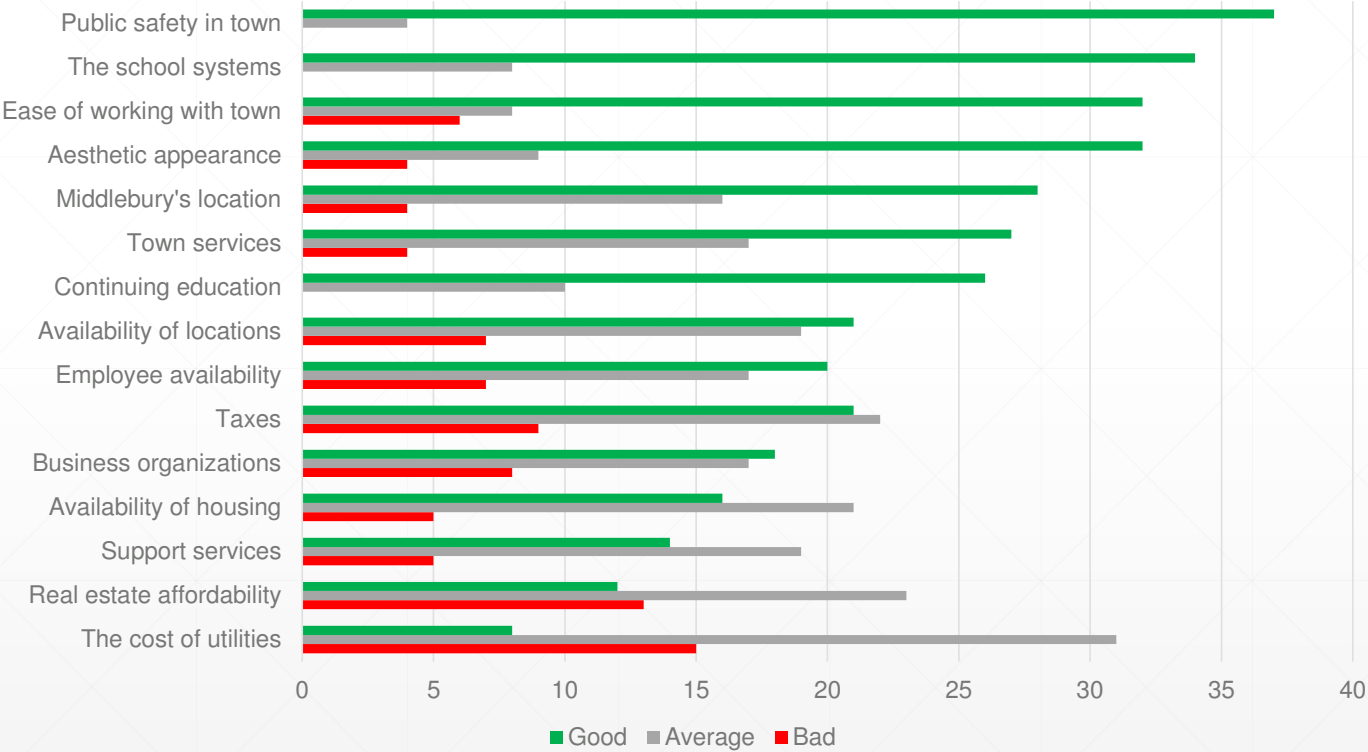
Key Findings

Key Findings - Strengths

- Safety
 - top factor for choosing Middlebury when rated against all other reasons
 - said to have a “safe feel” for women-oriented businesses
- Location
 - biggest plus of doing business in Middlebury
 - easy to get to for traveling customers and those from surrounding communities
- Demographics
 - a small, well run, beautiful town with friendly people, good reputation, values, and character
 - owners cited the ability to get to know people and develop loyal customers
 - AdvanceCT said Middlebury’s affluence and educational attainment is an asset

Key Findings - Strengths

How Middlebury Business Owners Rate the Town



Key Findings - Weaknesses

- Middlebury is not a destination for shopping
- Middlebury Center does not look inviting or upscale
- Traffic congestion on Route 63, Route 64, and I-84 backups
- Restrictive signage regulations
- No focal point to promote business in Middlebury
- Taxes, fees, and the general costs of doing business

Key Findings - Opportunities

- Most recommendations were “common sense”
 - Improve sign regulations for line of sight advertising consistent with small town feel
 - Use media of all types to promote local businesses
 - Encourage the formation of a business chamber so businesses can help each other
 - Market commercial and office real estate more aggressively.
 - Reexamine and promote the tax incentive programs

Key Findings – Opportunities, continued

- A few business owners had a broader view
 - Give potential customers more reasons to think about Middlebury
 - Make Middlebury a desirable destination worth the travel time to get here
 - Promote an upscale “vibe” that leverages local businesses and our safe small town feel
 - Examine regulations to create a positive atmosphere for those seeking to start or grow business in Middlebury

Key Findings - Threats

- Losing the small town character and attractiveness
 - Middlebury Center makes a bad first impression and looks rundown
 - no more gas stations, pizza shops, fast food stores or convenience stores
 - must keep out chain stores, franchises, and strip shopping areas
- Neighboring towns have attractive shopping and reasons for customers to shop there
- We don't have a broad tax base of larger commercial and industrial businesses

Recommended Actions

Recommended Actions - Regulations

- Signage
 - Develop signage rules to attract customers while preserving the town's character
 - Take into account Middlebury's seven distinct commercial areas so rules can vary
 - Develop a document that makes those rules understandable
- Land Use Facilitation
 - Help new or expanding businesses get through the land use process
 - Promote the existing Commercial Development Guide
 - Review the practices of "best of breed" towns
 - Find a way to link business owners with someone who "knows the ropes"

Recommended Actions - Infrastructure

- Aesthetics

Business owners complained about appearance and shopper-friendliness of Middlebury’s commercial areas.

Many areas, especially Middlebury Center, are not pedestrian friendly

The 2015 Plan of Conservation and Development makes numerous recommendations

1. Create “**Architecture and Design Guidelines**” to be used in conjunction with the town Zoning Regulations. Estimated cost, \$35,000
2. Create a “**Streetscape Plan**” now for Middlebury Center and later for the other commercial areas. Estimated cost, \$35,000
3. Obtain the services of a “**Grant Writer**” to find and apply for matching grants

Recommended Actions - Infrastructure, continued

- Utilities
 - Grease Traps - The Water Pollution Control Authority should review regulations and costs
 - Cell Service –The town should communicate the need to the Connecticut Siting Council
- Traffic Congestion
 - The Board of Selectmen and Town Engineer should meet with Connecticut DOT to find ways of dealing with traffic congestion and tie-ups along Route 64 and Route 63
 - The “Streetscape Plan” should specifically address traffic control and pedestrian friendliness.

Recommended Actions – Town Encouragement

- A little push...
 - Encourage
 - Propose
 - Champion

EDC and the town should be proactive about encouraging, proposing and championing desirable development, especially in Middlebury Center.

An example was a discussion July 2021 with the Board of Selectmen regarding a sale of town land to allow expansion of the Four Corners Shopping area. Such an expansion could lead toward parking, shopping, and walking between businesses.

We should do more of this, as possibilities present themselves.

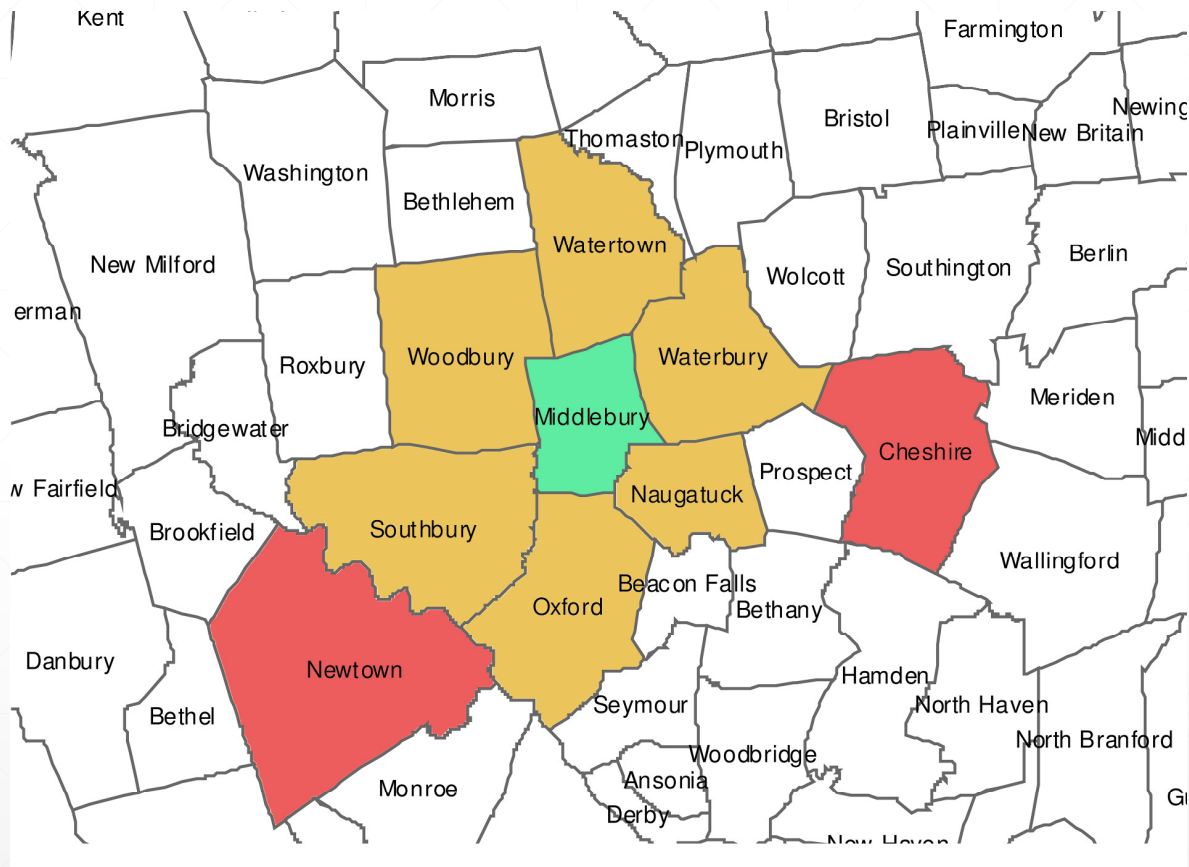
Recommended Actions - Advocacy and Support

- Business Association
 - EDC should find motivated business owners and bring them together
- Business Promotion
 - Help create “buy local” and “meet the business” programs
 - Create a video to describe Middlebury’s attributes and value
 - Bring back “Celebrate Middlebury” and encourage concerts, etc.
 - Articles of Middlebury businesses in Voices, Bee-Intelligencer and Middlebury Neighbors
- Improve the “vibe” to make Middlebury a destination
 - Create reasons for people to visit Middlebury
 - Encourage and listen to “outside the box” ideas and creative proposals
- Business Contact Database
 - E-Mail database to be used by EIDC to inform businesses of opportunities and issues

Recommended Actions - Staffing

- Economic Development Coordinator
 - Create a new paid position or increase the duties and hours of an existing town position
 - Regular office and administrative support in town hall
 - Single point of contact for business
 - Proactive, helpful, and familiar to the business community
 - Visit businesses, gain a realistic understanding of economic situations
 - Collect data
 - Bring people together and solve problems
 - The First Selectman does some of this now

EDC Budgets



Town	EDC Budget
Middlebury	\$2,000.00
Waterbury	\$950,000.00
Naugatuck	\$92,000.00
Oxford	\$119,437.00
Southbury	\$101,325.00
Woodbury	\$0.00
Watertown	\$55,744.00
Newtown	\$140,809.00
Cheshire	\$122,743.00

Thank You