

The Issues and Opportunities Element of the *Comprehensive Plan* is intended to provide an overview of the community so that the reader has a better understanding of the circumstances that influenced Middleton's evolution to date as well as the factors that are anticipated to shape its future. This chapter reviews existing conditions, trends, and forecasts for population, households, and employment data. It also includes a broad assessment of the community's strengths and weaknesses, and a listing of overall goals and objectives. These principles reflect the actions and policies of past decades, and serve as a guiding force for the future.

History of Middleton

Courtesy of the Middleton Area Historical Society

From rather humble origins, Middleton has become a thriving and vibrant community that is a vital commercial and business center as well as the home of approximately 19,000 residents. The following is a description of how Middleton grew into one of the "best places to live" in the United States.

Early History

With its rolling landscape and ample waterways, the Middleton area was a frequent camping ground for the Algonquin tribe long before white settlers arrived. The Algonquins were known as "mound builders" and the product of their labors can still be seen at locations throughout the region. Later, the Ho-Chunk became the dominant tribe in this region.

A fur-trading post was established on the northwest shore of Lake Mendota in 1832 (now Mendota County Park). The trading post was operated by Michael St. Cyr, the area's first carpenter. Two of the most significant figures in the history of early Middleton were W.B. Slaughter and T.T. Whittlesey.

In 1836, Mr. Slaughter platted a portion of the area near the northwest edge of Lake Mendota to be called "City of Four Lakes." He dreamed that his new city would one day be the territorial capital, but politicians in Madison ended his ambitious aspirations.

Mr. Whittlesey was a former member of Congress from Connecticut and a judge. When the City of Four Lakes was thwarted, Mr. Whittlesey acquired some of Mr. Slaughter's land in the vicinity of the current Century Avenue and Branch Street and developed the community of Pheasant Branch. What is now called University Avenue was originally named Whittlesey Street.

The Township of Middleton separated from the Township of Madison on March 11, 1848, just months before Wisconsin became a state. Harry Barnes, the first postmaster in the new township, suggested the name Middleton after a community in his home state of Vermont. Mr. Whittlesey was the first chairman of the Township of Middleton.

With an influx of settlers, the township grew. The two most prominent and populated communities in the township were Pheasant Branch and East Middleton (later known as Middleton Junction, located east of Pine Bluff along the present day Mineral Point Road).

The Railroad & Middleton Station

The future of both Pheasant Branch and East Middleton hinged on a single fateful decision—the placement of a new railroad line being built from Madison to Mississippi River shipping docks in Prairie du Chien. Much to the dismay of both communities, the tracks were built in 1856 directly between East Middleton and Pheasant Branch through a sparsely populated area that is now the City of Middleton.

The railroad afforded an array of economic opportunities. Businesses and people constructed stores and homes near the first railroad depot, which was built by Mr. Slaughter. (The original depot was located across Parmenter Street from the current depot building). To identify the rail stop, a sign was erected on top of the depot with the name—Middleton Station.

Middleton Station was surveyed and the plat (map) was registered on November 3, 1856. Because registering the first plat is a critical legal step in the formation of a community, 1856 traditionally has been recognized as the year when Middleton was established.

With wheat as the king of the local economy, Middleton Station featured large grain elevators along the railroad tracks. A stone quarry, lumberyard, tin shop, pickle factory, opera house, stockyard, blacksmith shop and other bustling enterprises served the local residents. When disease decimated the wheat crops in the mid-to-late 1800s, farmers wisely switched to dairying throughout the region.

The first settlers in the area were English. Later, German immigrants arrived, and they became the predominant nationality. For several years, the local newspaper published a German language supplement.

In 1852, the first school opened near the area where St. Bernard's Cemetery is now located on Branch Street. The first high school building was constructed in 1870 on Terrace Avenue across from the present Capitol Brewery.



On the Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad near Parmenter St. and Terrace Ave.; ca. 1880

A devastating fire on June 19, 1900, destroyed or damaged most of the downtown district. The fire spurred the creation of a volunteer fire department in 1901. This highly respected volunteer firefighting organization is still going strong today.



Aftermath of the June 19, 1900 fire in downtown Middleton.

During its early years, Middleton Station residents endured somewhat offensive names for their community. For a time, it was nicknamed “Peatsville” because of a local business that cut and sold peat (for use as heating fuel) from the bogs near the modern-day Airport Road. When they filed for incorporation as a village in 1905, the residents maintained the name “Middleton” but dropped the “Station”.

Modern Middleton

Throughout the early 20th century, Middleton was a work in progress, like much of the Madison metropolitan area. In 1963, Middleton became a city, and the foundation for modernization and progress was created.



Middleton Hills Neighborhood Commercial Center.

In the 1980s, the grain elevators and other blighted remnants of the old railroad days were replaced with a downtown renovation project. Residential developments in Foxridge, Stonefield, Orchid Heights, and other areas of the city added thousands of new citizens. In the 1990s, residential development continued with the addition of Northlake and Middleton Hills, which features Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired architecture.

In the new millennium, Middleton sustained its well-planned growth with continued downtown renovations and the addition of the Greenway Station retail center and commercial offices just east of the city-owned Pleasant View Golf Course. The Middleton Public Library was expanded and renovated (2004), the Middleton Senior Center moved into their current space at a

renovated bank building on Hubbard Avenue, and the Middleton High School was renovated and modernized. The Walter R. Bauman Outdoor Aquatic Center and the highly-acclaimed Performing Arts Center continue to enhance the quality of life in Middleton.

In 2009, the fully-accessible and free Middleton Splash Pad was constructed using funds from the Madison Community Foundation and the American Girl Fund for Children in part. The City of Middleton built a new EMS Station (2008), Fire Station (2008), Police Station (2010), and Municipal Operations Center (2015) that also houses the new Middleton Recycling Center.

The City also has maintained award-winning green space and recreational areas. The City has 156 acres of city-owned parks. The extensive park system includes special use parks like Quarry Skate Park and dog parks, as well as community parks, neighborhood parks, and mini parks. In addition, the City owns and maintains 28 conservancy areas located throughout the city, providing approximately 800 acres of public open space including 22 miles of trail system. The City also opened two community gardens: Bock Community Garden (2010) and Middleton Station Community Garden (2013). Approximately 26 percent of the land within the city limits is open space.

The quality of life in Middleton—often called the Good Neighbor City—was nationally recognized in 2007 when *Money*® magazine named it the #1 best place to live of "[The 100 Best Places to Live](#)" in the U.S.A. Since that award, Middleton has received numerous national recognitions, from the National Recreation and Park Association, the National Chamber of Commerce, and the National Civic League.

Clearly, Middleton owes much of its success to the pioneers of the past who worked together and overcame numerous hardships to create a community with constantly expanding potential and a consistently bright future.

Population and Demographic Information

The tables in this section provide the following information:

- Population Growth Trends & Forecasts
- Household Forecasts
- Demographic Trends
- Age Distribution
- Education Levels
- Income Levels
- Employment Characteristics

Employment Characteristics

U.S. Census data shows that Middleton's labor force increased from 8,211 in 1990 to 9,573 in 2000, representing a 17 percent increase. From 2000 to 2010, Middleton's labor force increased to 10,786, representing a 13% increase. This job growth is impressive, especially because it coincides with the Great Recession, which began in December of 2007 and continued through the early 2010s. The 2010 Census also shows that Middleton's unemployment rate was 5.7%.

These trends are expected to continue given the consistent growth and success of Middleton's

business community. In addition to many types of service industries and major manufacturers, the Middleton business community also features a strong cluster of high-tech businesses, including those specializing in agribusiness, pharmaceutical, biotech, health/medical/wellness, and research & development. Increased employment in these sectors may continue to create relatively high income jobs in the City of Middleton.

Community Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

- Ideal location in the metropolitan area makes it poised for continued growth.
- Full range of urban amenities.
- Top ranked school district.
- Excellent working relationship with the Middleton-Cross Plains School District, the Middleton Chamber of Commerce, and other local and regional organizations.
- A commitment to intergovernmental cooperation and coordination with all adjoining municipalities.
- Corporate headquarters for many great businesses, creating a dynamic regional economy.
- Strong and continually expanding economic base.
- Strong sense of community identity and a “Good Neighbor” spirit.
- Leader in environmental sustainability.
- More than a quarter of the City’s land area is preserved as permanent public open space.
- A proactive commitment and proven results toward reducing erosion into and sedimentation of Lake Mendota.
- Well developed, multi-modal transportation infrastructure, including its own general aviation facility.

Weaknesses

- Increasing lack of affordable housing.
- Funnel for regional traffic heading to and from Madison.
- City residents lack access to transit service on Sundays and late in the evening on weekdays. In addition, the weekday service is infrequent during off-peak hours. Some neighborhoods are inadequately served by transit.
- There is limited land available for residential and business growth within existing city limits.
- Much of the community is low-lying and contains soil that can make development difficult and costly.
- Very little publicly-accessible land along Lake Mendota within the City limits.
- Lack of a central community center to serve all-ages.

Overall Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of the community is to enhance and protect the high quality of life in the City of Middleton by utilizing the following criteria and standards: preserve and protect neighborhoods; protect and enhance the environment; provide efficient and effective public services; integrate multi-modal transportation opportunities; facilitate sustainable growth and preservation; and promote compact urban form, to create a safe, livable environment for all current and future residents. Detailed goals and objectives are contained within each element of this plan.