

## **USER NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Data from the following community surveys and forums is compiled in chronological order.

### **Fall 2019 Middletown, RI Community Livability Report**

**The National Community Survey (NCS)**, conducted by National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) in collaboration with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA)

Conclusions: At least 8 in 10 community members gave high marks to the overall quality of life in Middletown, the town and their neighborhoods as places to live, and Middletown as a place to raise children. Residents indicated that the facet of Safety was an important focus area for the Town to address in the coming two years. Respondents' assessments of crime prevention were exceptional and higher than the national benchmark.

Survey participants highlighted the Economy as a priority for the Town in the next two years. Similar to other comparison communities, at least half of residents positively rated the overall economic health of Middletown, Middletown as a place to visit and work, and the overall quality of business and service establishments. However, evaluations of the cost of living, vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, economic development and new development in Middletown were below average, with less than one-third of residents providing favorable ratings. Additionally, assessments of housing-related items were lower than the national benchmarks; less than 4 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the availability of affordable quality housing and the variety of housing options in Middletown.

Middletown residents also selected Education and Enrichment as a key focus area for the community. Community members' ratings of public libraries and special events were positive and on par with national averages. Conversely, reviews of K-12 education, opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities, availability of affordable quality child care/preschool, adult educational opportunities and overall opportunities for education and enrichment were lower than reviews observed in comparison communities.

### **February 11, 2020 Citizen Input Survey – Middletown Strategic Plan 2021-2023** – two week online survey on the Middletown website

There were two hundred thirty three responses: 86.96% from Middletown residents; 13.04% from people who work or own a business in Middletown.

Education and Enrichment including public & private schools, library services, preschool & child care programs, adult learning, art and music – rated third most important out of eight categories, with safety and natural environment placing first and second respectively. The remaining five categories in order of importance are economy, mobility, built environment, recreation & wellness, and community engagement.

Suggestions for Improvements for Built Environment: 1. Invest in green energy wherever possible, especially for public buildings like schools and the library.

2. Affordable housing where residents can walk to the store, library, post office, town hall.

Suggestions for Improvements for Recreation & Wellness: JFK should become a town athletic center to tie in with the fields on the other side of the library.

Suggestions for Improvements for Education & Enrichment: 1. Get the library their new building!

2. Add foreign language back to elementary schools. Expand the STEM programs. Offer public preschool for all. We are regulars at the library, and love it but wish the children's section were bigger.

3. There is no bus to the library.

4. Enable artificial intelligence & machine learning curriculum for all levels of society in town. Perhaps at CCRI Newport, the public library and all schools. Use high speed internet to enable access to "super computer" power (i.e. GPU's etc.) from home... almost like a utility.

5. The main façade of our high school needs a facelift. We need to replace our library: it's an old eyesore that is, literally breaking down. A library is a direct reflection of a community's commitment to its people, and ours sends a clear message: "Eh!" Consider a public/private development similar to that of Silver Springs, MD. That city features a beautiful library that's integrated into a shopping and entertainment complex. It's a win for everyone!

(<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Library/branches/silverspring.html>)

6. The library could use more funding for updated books and more public computers.

7. The public schools could be better with more professional leadership from the school board and school administration. — Also, the library does a great job, especially since its building is falling down!!! The town deserves a first-rate library building to go along with its first-rate library services.

8. Providing the library the sufficient funds in the budget is important in order to maintain the building is beneficial for all residents, seeing as the library provides both resources and information to the town.

9. There seems to be a lack of preschool age and younger facilities that are affordable and high quality. Middletown should also look to Portsmouth for improving public schools. The library also could use updating and expanding, particularly the Children's area.

Suggested Improvements for Community Engagement: 1. Have a town day just directed towards community involvement, joining town committees – people are hesitant as they are not sure of what the commitment is or what is the function of the committee. Town should support the library for fund raising – Newport library has great fund raising events that bring in lots of dollars.

2. Public art and displays are a benefit to Towns. Rotating displays of various types and forms of art throughout Municipal facilities would be a fun, engaging endeavor. Paintings and sculpture at the library and Town Hall would be a good, easy start. Someplace like the trails along the valley park could have "art pads" (solid cement pad for artwork) installed for a rotating sculpture installation and would be a good incentive to get people out and about. There could be a quarterly rotation which could be promoted.

3. Beach gatherings, commemorative events, enhanced opportunities for lectures and classes at the library and schools and senior center. Wouldn't it be great to have a neighborhood guild like South Kingston has – a dedicated building for fitness, art, maker space, wood shop, etc.

Bringing so many people together and enhancing interaction, creativity, and community. We are commuting over there (yes, to the other side of the bay!) To participate now. Why can't that kind of community resource exist in Middletown? Visit – you will be impressed!

4. Utilize the library more for community social for outreach. Utilize what we already have in place.

**February 26, 2020 Middletown Planning Dept. Community Forum West Main/Coddington Development Center**

Thirty three people attended but only a handful spoke. Some advocated for planned development and others recommended the land be used for affordable housing. No one said that the library should remain where it is.

**Feb. 29, 2020 Middletown Strategic Planning Meeting**, Facilitated by the Middletown Town Council with all Town Dept Heads in attendance.

It was determined that the Library can support the Middletown Schools with digital access to resources for language learners, self directed learning, and career development.