

Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of the Town Plan

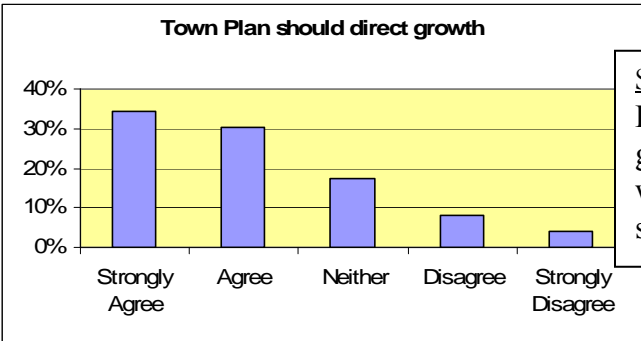
A town plan is meant to act as a guide for accomplishing the community’s goals and vision for the town’s future. It documents present conditions and makes projections about what the future needs of the town might be and how it might grow. A plan can then guide growth by:

“A Plan is a vision, a vision tempered by reality and a course of action.”
Darby Bradley,
President, Vermont Land Trust

- directing town, state, and federal investments in roads, buildings, and recreational facilities to areas where the town most needs and desires them;
- informing the revision of land use regulations; and
- setting out a course of action for the town’s committees and Select Board.

The population of Middlesex has grown by 50% over just the last 25 years. Such an increase can create challenges as the town adapts to the changing needs of new and aging residents. However, it can also create opportunities if the town manages this growth in a proactive way based on the priorities of town residents.

This Town Plan provides the most recent available data on present conditions and projections for the town’s future in each plan element. It also includes results of the recent survey the town conducted which assessed the values and priorities of residents, as discussed below. For example, a majority of survey respondents (65%) believed that having a strong town plan to guide growth was important. This plan sets out to do this by presenting goals and implementation strategies for each section that, if carried out, can achieve the vision that residents have for the future of Middlesex.



SURVEY RESULTS
Having a strong town plan to guide growth in Middlesex was important to 65% of survey respondents.

The Planning Process

The Town of Middlesex was awarded a Municipal Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs. The grant was divided into three different projects: creation of a tax parcel map in GIS format, the development of an outdoor recreation trails plan, and a town plan update. The tax parcel maps were completed with the cooperation of

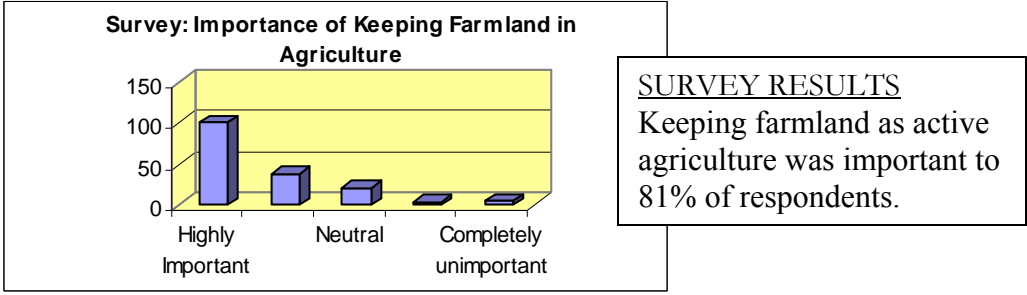
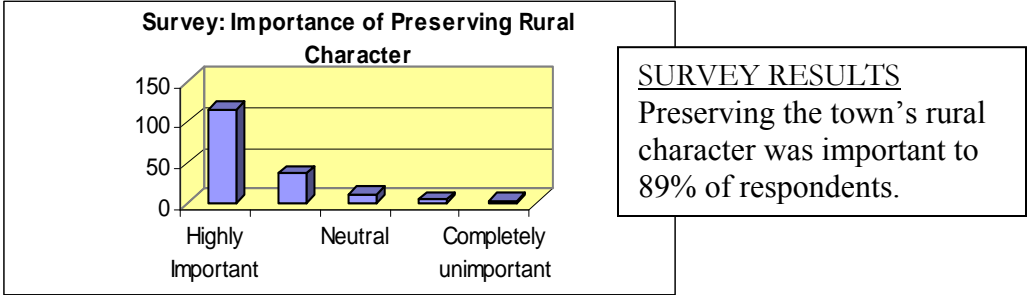
the Town Listers and through the use of digital scanning of existing paper maps. The recreation plan, which is inserted herein as an element of this town plan, was completed through the use of residential surveys, analysis of demographic data, focus groups, and field research. The remaining portions of the grant were dedicated to updating data and reaffirming goals and policies for the town plan. All 663 year round households were sent a survey via US mail that asked about their feelings toward the future of the town. A total of 174 usable surveys were returned for a response rate of 26 percent. The plan was written with the information obtained through the surveys and interviews of residents and public meetings. The existing Town Plan was reviewed. The planning commission reviewed and edited the drafts, made changes as appropriate and submitted the draft for public review. A public hearing on the draft was held by the planning commission and the final draft was prepared from those comments and submitted to the Selectboard for their approval.

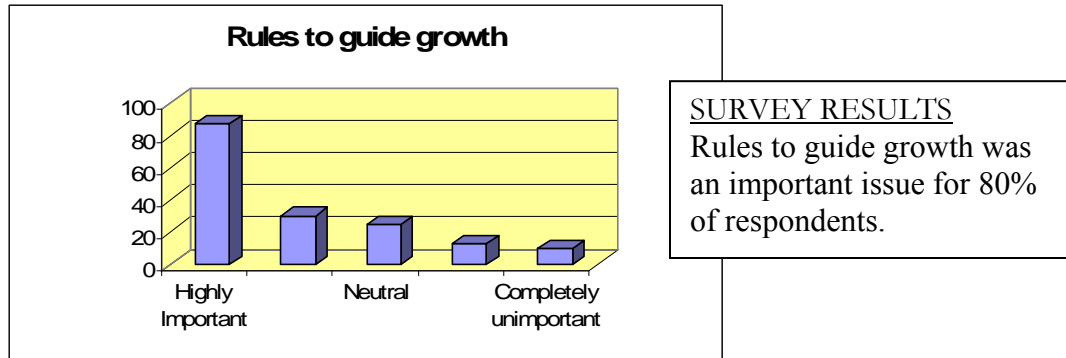
Recent Survey Results

The survey asked a series of questions on community values. On a 5-point scale from highly important to highly unimportant, the values that are most important to responding residents emerge as the responses that received over 50% of the highly important category. The questions that received this rating were:

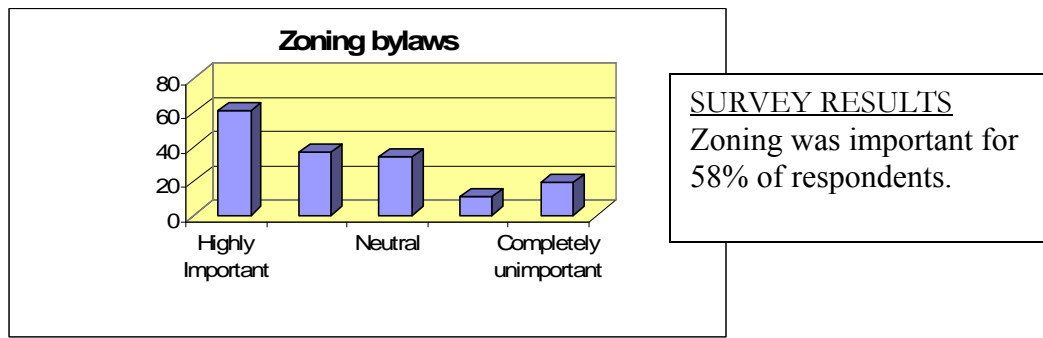
- 1. preserving rural character,
- 2. keeping farmland in agriculture, and
- 3. rules to guide growth.

It appears that most residents responding want to see the rural character and farmlands preserved and are willing to pass local ordinances to ensure it. The results of the questions are shown below by adding the highly important and important categories together.





When asked specifically whether the rules to guide growth should be zoning bylaws, 58% considered them either important or highly important.



Residents were asked what type of community they thought Middlesex was. They were given a choice of six different community types: bedroom community; retirement community; second home community; an agricultural and natural resources community; a tourism community or a community where most people live and work in town. The overwhelming response was that residents regard Middlesex as a bedroom community. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents thought that Middlesex was primarily a bedroom community. The second most common response was an agricultural and natural resources community. All other choices received very little response.

When asked if this composition of community types for Middlesex was acceptable, 75% of the respondents said "yes." Middlesex is a bedroom community with a rural/agricultural feel. Most people leave town to go to work and want to return to a rural community with open spaces, forests, low density housing, and dirt roads. The majority of residents want to preserve this type of community and want to use zoning ordinances and other local rules to ensure it stays this way.

Vision for the Future

When respondents are asked to describe the town's characteristics that are important to them today, and what they would like to preserve for the future, here is what is mentioned most frequently:

- The Town's rural character should be preserved.

- There should be rules to guide growth in a way that respects the preservation of rural character.
- Our schools should deliver superior cost effective educations to our children.
- Small town, direct democracy should be preserved.
- The environment, including water, forests, and wildlife, should be protected.
- Elders and disabled residents should be well housed.
- Tax supported services should be cost-effective as judged by taxpayers.
- The right of residents to conduct home based businesses that are compatible with residential areas should be supported.
- Opportunities for residents to have good jobs should be supported.
- Farmland should be kept open.

The 2008 Middlesex Town plan sets out a course by which we can achieve this vision.