

The Comprehensive Plan & Planning Process

Welcome to the Middletown Comprehensive Plan update! This document is meant to be a resource to guide the Town through the planning process and answer frequently-asked questions.

What is a Comprehensive Plan and why do we need one?

A Comprehensive Plan is a guiding document that envisions what the future of a community looks like and outlines the steps it takes to get there. Comprehensive plans address land use, transportation, economic development, the environment, public facilities and infrastructure, housing, the character of the built environment, parks and open space, and more.

A Comprehensive Plan is important because it outlines the community's vision and the steps it will take to get there, so that the Town can guide future development to be in line with the plan. It helps prioritize the allocation of limited resources, inform where new uses should go, which areas of town should change and how, and which should stay the same. It's also an opportunity for many different stakeholders to come together and plan for the future.

How does it guide development?

The plan is a guiding document. Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia states that the plan shall guide the "location, character, and extent of each feature shown on the plan." Additionally, an adopted plan should lead to changes in the Official Zoning Map and Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, which have the force of law and will guide future development to meet the desired character outlined in the plan. The plan will also make recommendations for projects to be included in the Town's budget documents, help guide decision-making and funding prioritization for years to come.

When was Middletown's last Comprehensive Plan adopted?

Middletown's current Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2018. When adopted, this plan will supersede the previous plan.

Why is it important to update a Comprehensive Plan?

Things have changed since the last planning process started! Stakeholders in and around town, the population and events in the Shenandoah Valley, and State Code requirements for Comprehensive Plans have changed. It's important to have an updated plan so that:

- It can be a relevant and contemporary guiding document
- Current leadership and current residents can give input
- It's grounded in current reality, begins with population and demographic information
- It can use best planning practices to navigate to an ideal future

The key purposes of a Comprehensive Plan include:

- Providing a guide for future investment and decisions,
- Creating an opportunity for all stakeholders to weigh in on the town's future,
- Providing a guide for stakeholders to see the decisions that will form the future of Middletown,
- Comparing and contrasting short-term actions against long-term goals,
- Creating a well-planned system of public services, and
- Ensuring that limited resources are spent wisely.

What are the roles of Town Council, Planning Commission, Town staff, NSVRC staff, and the consultant?

Section 15.2 – 2223 et seq. of the Code of Virginia outlines requirements for the Comprehensive Plan and gives responsibility for its preparation to the local Planning Commission.

In reality, the Planning Commission rarely actually creates or writes the document. In most cases the plan document, the research, and public participation processes that go into it are completed by local government staff and/or a consultant. In this case, Middletown has hired Summit Design and Engineering to conduct the comprehensive planning process, in concert with Middletown and NSVRC staff.

While State Code gives responsibility of the creation of the plan to the local Planning Commission, the plan is ultimately adopted by Town Council, so it's important that the plan is a document that everyone can get behind.

The planning team will use an iterative process to create each component of the plan and receive feedback from the Planning Commission and other stakeholders.

Why is public participation important and how do we get it?

Plans should promote the health, safety, and welfare of residents. The people who know best about Middletown are the people who live here and care about the town. We collect public input through surveys, public meetings, focus groups or more direct conversation, and public comment on draft documents. Soliciting vision statements from stakeholders is also an important way to get input into the plan.

What are the steps we take to make the plan?

The schedule at the end of this document details each task that is involved in the Comprehensive Plan. The stars are for optional and necessary times for Town Council and Planning Commission to give feedback. The order of items on the list is strategic and does not vary much from each comprehensive planning process.

For the Comprehensive Plan, we have initial meetings and talk about expectations, then we review all necessary plans and previous documents. We also review Census data and other sources. We initiate the public participation process by creating a public participation plan, and publishing a survey.

What else does State Code say about the Comprehensive Plan?

State Code also has requirements regarding inclusion of transportation, affordable housing, broadband, manufactured housing, and more.

[See Section 15.2-2223 et seq of the Code of Virginia.](#)

Code of Virginia § 15.2-2223. Comprehensive plan to be prepared and adopted; scope and purpose.

A. The local Planning Commission shall prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction and every governing body shall adopt a Comprehensive Plan for the territory under its jurisdiction.