

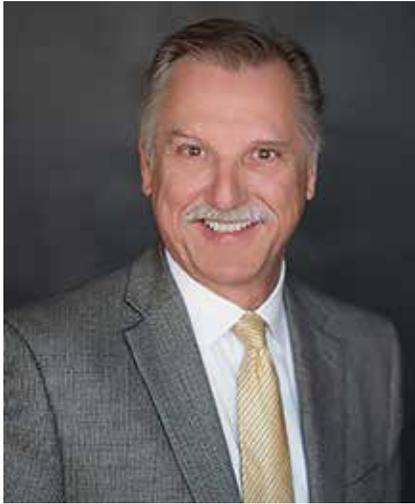


## Community Review

The City of Middletown  
Annual Report 2020

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## Middletown City Manager James M. Palenick



Friends, Colleagues and Neighbors:

To put it simply, 2020 was difficult. Through the early months of the pandemic and as pervasive closings, job losses, death and hardships wore on, it seemed the only certainty was “uncertainty.” Yet, we persevered. We held on, we held together, and we moved forward.

Despite the pandemic, new leaders filled the roles of Police Chief, Economic Development Director and City Manager. We welcomed new members to City Council. We crafted and approved a realistic budget that acknowledged economic uncertainty and also avoided layoffs and service disruptions.

We proactively addressed our deteriorating street network with the passage of a local income tax levy. We relied on federal CARES Act funding for covering unexpected expenses and revenue shortfalls. We provided relief grants to small Middletown businesses working incredibly hard to keep their doors open.

Through the darkest times in 2020, we cared for one another and we held on to hope. By late December we were miraculously vaccinating the first of our at-risk, front-line citizens, with the promise of phased rollouts helping thousands more in 2021.

I firmly believe that there is bright promise to our future, and 2021 can stand as a time for genuine optimism. Middletown has so many opportunities available, and if we continue to join together, we can achieve quality, sustainable growth for our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Palenick', written in a cursive style.

James M. “Jim” Palenick  
City Manager



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# COVID-19: Caring for Middletown



## Local Management of a Global Pandemic

In a year when so much changed so quickly, the Middletown Health Department worked hard to keep the city's residents, employees and visitors as safe and healthy as possible.

Understanding efficiency was essential for a department of seven people serving a population of 48,000, Health Commissioner Jackie Phillips and her team committed to media interviews, outreach to local organizations, daily social media posts, and placing community resources online.

In addition, the City installed handwashing stations throughout downtown and in parks, and the fire department distributed free masks. The City partnered with the Middletown Visitors Bureau to create a website dedicated to encouraging patronage of restaurants and small businesses remaining open during the pandemic.



In 2020, the Health Department recorded 3,402 cases of COVID-19 and 53 COVID-related deaths among Middletown residents.

As we move into 2021, the Health Department is still at-work for Middletown. The Department began distributing COVID-19 vaccinations in January 2021 and provided more than 2,100 doses to first responders, medical teams, teachers and more in the first six weeks of the year.



Community resources and vaccination information continue to be available on the City's website at [www.cityofmiddletown.org](http://www.cityofmiddletown.org).



# COVID-19: Financial Impact & Response



## Federal Funding, Local Stewardship Help City

The City of Middletown received more than \$3.5 million in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act support.

This funding – along with a cautious budget and careful management – helped to cover many unexpected expenses and revenue shortfalls caused by the pandemic. In Middletown, the CARES Act funding supported:

### Police

- Painting the jail and jail floor with anti-bacterial paint
- New heating and air system for the jail
- Updating the air ducts in the jail
- New air system in dispatch to improve air circulation
- Portable polygraph machine to reduce number of individuals coming to the police department
- New gas masks and communication headsets for the Special Response Team to protect them from the virus during search warrants

### Fire

- A second set of firefighting gear for all 81 Division members; this allowed each member to have a spare set of gear available while gear was being decontaminated
- Replacement of the portable and mobile radio communication systems
- Purchase of seven LUCAS devices used for emergency cardiac care

Additional federal pass-through funds awarded \$400,000 in critically-needed economic relief grants to small Middletown businesses. The City also distributed grants to small businesses through the Support Award for a Vibrant Economy (SAVE) program and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Small Business forgivable loan programs.

The Community Development Department distributed necessary funds for non-profit programs and helped establish the work readiness program with CBI Middletown. CDBG and Community Development will continue to work on creative solutions to help citizens throughout the pandemic.



# Economic Development



## Businesses Pivot, Open with City's Support

Chris Xeil Lyons joined Middletown as economic development director in March, renewing the department's dedication to creating jobs and new investments in the City. In addition to supporting businesses through the uncertainty of a pandemic, the Department:

- Developed a Small Business Assistance micro-grant program to support purchases like new signage, equipment and building improvements.
- Collaborated with the Warren County Port Authority and Towne Mall Galleria owners to create a public-private partnership for redevelopment. Preliminary concepts will be finalized in early 2021.
- Created new communication tools (ChooseMiddletownOH.org website, social media channels, newsletter) to provide streamlined updates and pandemic-related funding opportunities to businesses, developers and community partners.



In late 2020, the 75 Logistics Center, a 612,730 square feet speculative industrial building announced that Cintas Corporation would be its first tenant. This location will serve as a First Aid & Safety Distribution Center. Cintas signed a 10-year lease on 255,214 square feet and anticipates hiring 100 new employees.

The Middletown "Smart Cities" network providing free public Wi-Fi launched in October. The network stretches along Central Avenue from Main Street to Clinton Street within the Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA) district and is designed to help connect businesses and visitors.

### Recently opened businesses include:

- Charlie + Will Provisions
- Vitori's Market & Deli
- Merkel's Tavern
- Annie Up Boutique
- Hook Fish and Chicken
- Middletown Aquatics & More
- Higher Faculty
- BAAB's
- Octane Outlet
- Bandanas Italian Eatery
- Midwest Ammunition
- Chipotle
- Fast Lane Subs
- Marie's Crafty Hut
- Brent's Smokin' Butts & Grill

# Middletown Regional Airport (MWO)

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Butler Tech opened its Aviation Exploration program at MWO in fall 2019. This hands-on educational experience allows students to work with aircraft and drones while still in high school, providing instruction in aviation theory and navigation, principles of meteorology and forecasting, and more.

With the aviation industry impacted by COVID-19 and with aircraft technicians expected to be an in-demand role over the next 20 years, Middletown Regional Airport will continue to work closely with JobsOhio and regional education and aviation partners to prepare a post-COVID, skilled workforce.



## **Additional investments and highlights for MWO in 2020 include:**

- Utilizing federal and state transportation grants, MWO replaced its PAPI (precision approach path indicator) lighting system of runway markings.
- Fuel sales at MWO rose by 19 percent in 2020, even with an eight-week system-wide slowdown in March and April due to COVID. Half of the increase can be attributed to a new self-serve system installed in 2019, with the other half due to a substantial increase in contract sales from referrals and new corporate relationships.
- The airport has filled all available hangar spots and has started a waitlist for the first time in recent memory.

MWO is in a federally designated Opportunity Zone, which permits substantial tax benefits for developers. The Economic Development department will continue its work with potential developers to build out additional aviation facilities.



# Public Safety

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## Serving and Protecting Middletown



### MIDDLETOWN DIVISION OF POLICE

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Police Chief David Birk began his new role in late 2019, and in 2020, he led the department to reinstate a Community Oriented Policing unit and add two additional officers through federal grant funding.

Using the Community Oriented Policing approach, officers are involved throughout the city in leading community relations efforts, patrolling by bike to increase police visibility and accessibility, analyzing crime data, creating prevention plans and more.



One example of the Division's community-focused efforts was a bike helmet giveaway program. Hosted in September in memory of Cain Adkins, a Middletown fourth-grader killed in a bike accident, the event supplied more than 400 children with free, fitted bicycle helmets.

The Middletown Police Academy graduated seven K-9s in 2020 after training them for 12 weeks in narcotics detection, firearms, and explosive detection. K-9s from the City of Monroe PD, Trenton PD, and the Warren County Sheriff's Office were among graduates. This Middletown program has trained dogs and handlers for more than 50 years.

### MIDDLETOWN DIVISION OF FIRE

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Throughout the year, the Division of Fire accepted six retirements from career firefighters and paramedics with a combined 159 years of dedicated service to the City.

Response protocols were revised with the pandemic in mind, and new procedures were put in place to assure the safety of both emergency response crews and citizens. CARES funding provided for invaluable updates and protections for the Division, as detailed earlier in this report.

The Division received its second prestigious American Heart Association Mission Lifeline Gold Standard Award for excellence in emergency cardiovascular care in the pre-hospital setting.

In true 2020 fashion, even Santa and Mrs. Claus adapted to the changing times. Rather than the traditional Santa Parade, Middletown Fire and Police joined together for "Santa Express" and carried the Claus couple throughout the city by fire truck.



# Planning & Zoning

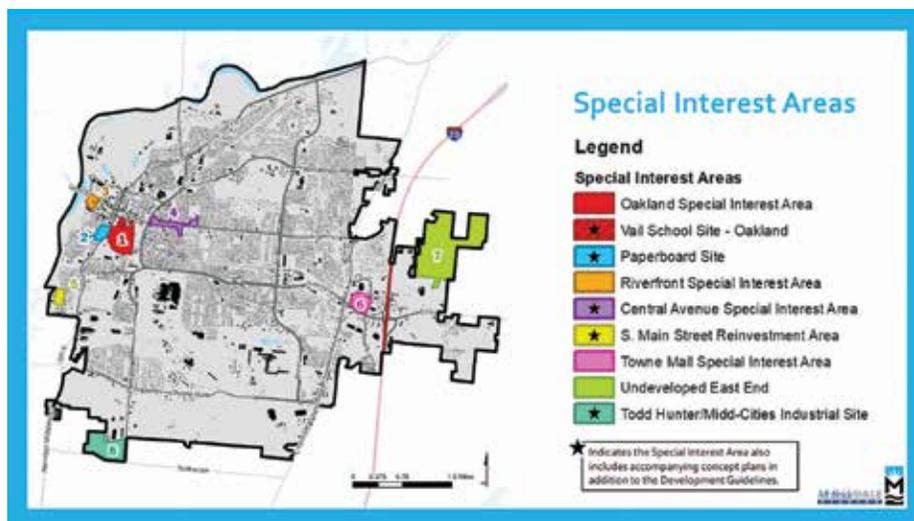


## Preserving the Past, Preparing for Tomorrow

In May 2020, the City received the Certified Local Government designation, becoming a partner in the Federal Preservation Program through the State of Ohio Preservation Office and National Park Service. This designation is an important tool for obtaining grant funding to support the City's commitment to preserving its history.

The Oakland Neighborhood was designated as the City's first Historic Conservation District in April 2020. This designation allows the City to preserve the distinctive character of the neighborhood while also promoting its growth. The goal for this neighborhood is to expand its walkable amenities and offer high-quality residential and mixed-use properties on the old Vail School site. A reimagined Oakland Park will serve as a community anchor and gathering space.

Planning & Zoning also worked with the departments of Economic Development, Public Works, Fire and Police to better understand future needs and partner on strategic planning efforts. Together, the groups are aiming for thoughtful, practical implementation of infrastructure (transportation, parks, public safety stations) and land use that allows Middletown to grow, businesses to flourish, and residents to maintain a high quality of life.



# Public Works

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## Building a Better Middletown

Public Works completed a \$2.8 million project with the August re-opening of Sunset Park. New play equipment, a pedestrian bridge, concrete walking paths and numerous accessibility improvements have been a welcome addition for families and other residents.

The Lakeside Redirect project is underway and includes new water main, curb, sidewalks and storm sewer to begin to address overflow issues into the Great Miami River. This project is a \$12 million investment in the City's future and is part of the Middletown Current work, which is the Long-Term Control Plan with the Environmental Protection Agency. Learn more at [middletowncurrent.com](http://middletowncurrent.com).

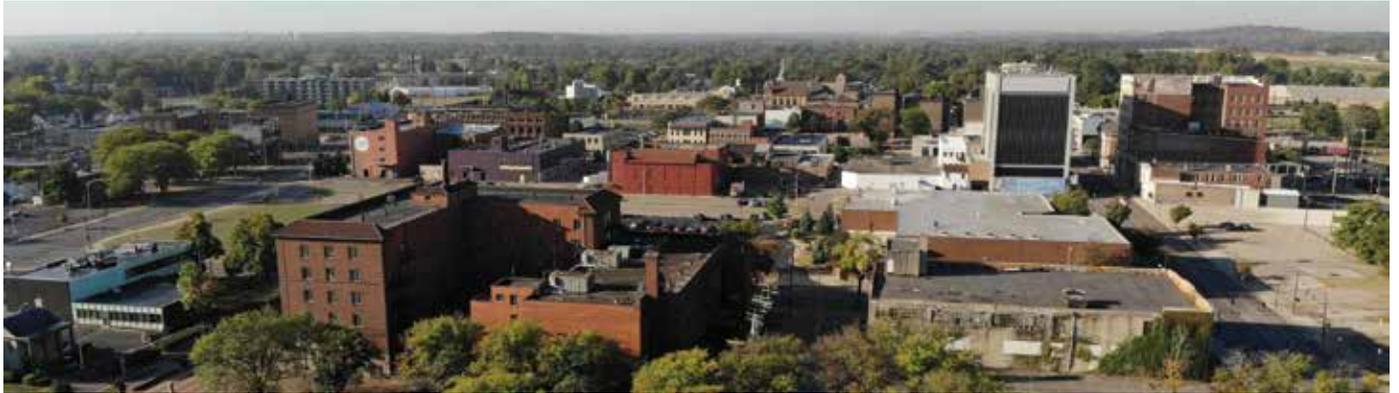
Construction began in fall 2020 on the final phase the Great Miami River Trail through Middletown. This joint project with the City of Franklin will extend the existing paved multi-use trail 1.4 miles and add a retaining wall between Ohio State Route 73 and the Great Miami River. The project will connect Middletown to 80+ miles of trail north to Piqua, Ohio. This \$2.4 million investment is expected to be completed in September 2021.

To help improve a deteriorating street network, residents voted in November 2020 to pass a one-quarter of one percent local income tax levy dedicated exclusively to street maintenance. This decision by City voters provides more than \$31 million for pavement improvements. Work is anticipated to begin in May 2021 and continue through the end of 2022.



# Future Projects & Planning

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## Creating a Future for Middletown

As the City continues to grow and evolve, several priorities have been identified for 2021 and beyond.

The City Council held a strategic planning session in February 2021 to discuss potential plans for a City reservation funds policy, new fire stations and a jail.

### **Additional projects in process include:**

- Paving efforts made possible with the 2020 tax levy
- Lakeside Redirect Project
- Adoption of the City's Comprehensive Plan
- Parks Master Plan
- Mixed-use redevelopment of Towne Mall Galleria site



**Did you know paying your water and utility payments is easier than ever? In March 2020, the City began to use InvoiceCloud, a service allowing residents to set up autopay or pay-by-text. [www.invoicecloud.com/middletownoh](http://www.invoicecloud.com/middletownoh)**



### City of Middletown Council

Pictured left to right:  
Joe Mulligan, Vice Mayor  
Monica Nenni, Council  
Nicole Condrey, Mayor  
Ami Vitori, Council  
Talbott Moon, Council

City Council meets on the first and third Tuesdays of each month in Council Chambers at the City building at 5:30 p.m. and streamed live via the City's YouTube channel.



### Keep in Touch!



Find us on social media or online at:  
[www.cityofmiddletown.org](http://www.cityofmiddletown.org)

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