

MIDDLETOWN GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

Interested in getting involved in Middletown's local government but not sure how to get started? Use this guide as a resource!

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND A COMMITTEE OR COMMON COUNCIL MEETING?

Participation in local government can take many forms, and taking part in Middletown's many committees and commissions or voicing your thoughts at a Common Council meeting are great ways to get directly involved in the decision-making process of local government.



Middletown's government makes decisions that may directly impact you and your community. The many committees, commissions, and task forces make recommendations to the Common Council, which is Middletown's primary legislative body. The Common Council has the authority to establish ordinances and resolutions, determine the City budget, levy taxes, and more.

There are many ways to participate in committees, commissions, or Common Council meetings if you want to make a direct impact on your community. This guide will walk you through how to get started!

MEETING BASICS

Demystifying questions about all of Middletown government groups (Common Council, committees, commissions, and task forces, oh my!)

What is the difference between the Common Council, committees, commissions, and task forces?	The Common Council is Middletown's primary legislative body (akin to a City Council or Board of Alders), with members elected to 4-year terms. Commissions can make recommendations to the Common Council (ex: Urban Forestry Commission). Some include only Council members, (ex: Finance & Government), others have Council and appointed citizen representation, and some have elected members. Committees typically consist of citizens, and have less recommendation-making power (ex: Complete Streets Committee). Task forces function similarly to commissions (ex: Anti-Racism Task Force). We will refer to these groups collectively as "committees" going forward.
Can I attend a meeting?	All meetings are open to the public to attend. Agendas are published online ahead of time, so email the chair with any questions. Meeting schedules are on the City calendar.
How formal are meetings?	Most meetings follow Robert's Rules* , a formal way of running a meeting. Different meetings vary in how strictly they follow the procedures for public comment (ex: Common Council allows participation only during the comment period; Clean Energy Task Force allows participation throughout). You can ask the chair about meeting procedures in advance.
How long are meetings and how often do they meet?	Most meetings occur monthly on a regular basis (ex: 2nd Tuesdays). Meetings vary in length, with committee meetings generally 1-1.5 hours in length and Common Council meetings 1.5+ hours in length. You are free to come and leave at any time during a meeting.
How are decisions made?	For the most part, only the Common Council has the power to make decisions and committees make recommendations to the Common Council. The Common Council can make 2 types of decisions: a resolution , which is a formal expression of the opinion or will of the legislative body; or an ordinance , which is a rule or law adopted by the city.

*For more information on Robert's Rules, see page 7 or this guide: <http://bit.ly/robertsrules101>

ATTENDING YOUR FIRST COMMITTEE MEETING



FIND A COMMITTEE THAT INTERESTS YOU

Go to middletownct.gov and navigate to Government, then to Boards & Commissions, to find a list of committees. Read through the descriptions, agendas, and meeting minutes to learn more about each one, and consider reaching out to a local nonprofit or advocacy group whose work you support to ask if they are involved with any local committees.



ATTEND A COMMITTEE MEETING

Meeting dates and times can be found on the City of Middletown website general calendar. Most meetings occur monthly on the same day (ex: 2nd Tuesdays). If a meeting is held remotely, the login information can also be found on the website calendar.

At a meeting you'll learn more about current projects—and it's okay to just sit and listen. At your first meeting, you might feel completely lost, and that's okay! Don't be afraid to ask questions during the meeting when allowed, or ask to speak one-on-one to the committee chair or another member post-meeting.

STEP 1



REACH OUT TO A COMMITTEE CONTACT

Email the committee chair, using the contact information from Middletown's website (or p. 9-11 of this guide), to ask for more information about the committee and let them know that you are interested in attending a meeting.

STEP 2



STEP 3

FIGURE OUT IF IT'S THE RIGHT FIT FOR YOU

A good way to decide whether or not you want to continue participating in a committee is to continue attending meetings, as one committee meeting can vary drastically from another.

STEP 4

In addition, ask to get on the email list if there is one. Getting on the committee's email list will keep you informed of important information like committee meeting times, issues at hand, and projects or events that you can get involved in.

GETTING MORE INVOLVED IN A COMMITTEE

There are many different ways to be civically engaged and contribute to a committee. Being involved can be as intensive as you want it to be or that your time allows. Here are some ways you can be active in a committee!

1

Attend, listen, and give your insight at committee meetings.

One of the best ways to get involved is to show up to committee meetings, listen, and give your insight. As a resident of Middletown, you can offer your suggestions on how committees should proceed with certain topics or give voice to issues you find important during public comment. You can regularly show up to committee meetings or come to one-off meetings about particular issues. Additionally, you can express your views to the Common Council.

3

Propose a project or effort to a committee.

You may have ideas for projects, which you can bring to a committee to discuss, regardless of whether you're a member or not. If you are not sure where to start, Sustainable CT, which Middletown participates in, includes project ideas within their certification process. Don't be afraid to propose your idea!

2

Join a subgroup for a project a committee is working on.

If a committee is working on tasks such as an action plan or projects like an application for a certification, the committee may form a subgroup for individuals interesting in working on the task. Depending on the committee, a subgroup may just be a more formal name for a group of individuals working on a certain project.

4

Commit to a long-term, formal role

If you feel familiar with a committee and are willing to hold long-term responsibilities, you can become a member (some memberships are elected; most are appointed; and some have specific positions for students). This is a great way to get involved in a larger capacity, but it is best to participate for some time first. There may be other valuable ways to get involved in extended projects, so be sure to discuss your intentions with a committee member.

ATTENDING A COMMON COUNCIL MEETING

The Common Council is made up of twelve elected individuals who represent the City. It is Middletown's legislative body and has the authority to establish ordinances and resolutions, determine the City budget, and levy taxes. Public participation is welcome, but the public is limited to speaking during certain times. Here is a quick guide to attending and speaking at a Common Council meeting.

ATTENDING A MEETING

Meetings take place on the first Monday of every month from 7-10 PM (on WebEx and phone until further notice, otherwise in the City Hall Council Chambers, 245 deKoven Dr., 1st floor). While meetings are scheduled for three hours, you can stay for as little or as much time as you would like. You can attend a meeting without participating in the public hearing (you can just come to listen), or you can choose to participate. The agenda and login information for meetings can be found at middletownct.gov/AgendaCenter/Common-Council-14. Meeting minutes (notes) are posted at this same link several days after each meeting, so you can see what has been discussed if you cannot make the full meeting.

SPEAKING AT THE MEETING

The **only** time the public (that includes you!) is allowed to speak during the meeting is during the **public hearing**. This portion of the meeting usually starts within the first 15 minutes of the meeting. Each person has 5 minutes to speak.

If the meeting is in person, you go up to a podium and speak at the next opening to do so. If on WebEx, you must participate by using the "raise your hand" function and will be unmuted when it is your turn to speak. You will need to give your full name and address (required for the public record; if you are a Wesleyan student, give your campus address). Your video will not be shown via WebEx.

TIP: Public officials often listen to many speakers every evening, so keeping your comments clear and concise is much more likely to get attention than a long explanation. Many people also write their comments out in advance so that they are prepared to speak. Also, it is completely fine to simply say, "I strongly agree with the last speaker."

TERMS TO KNOW

GETTING TO KNOW THE TERMS YOU MAY HEAR

COMMITTEE

Advisory in nature with both council member and citizen representation.

COMMISSION

Advisory in nature and almost exclusively composed of council members.

COMMON COUNCIL

Middletown's primary legislative body with members elected to 4-year terms.

MEMO

Memorandum

A document that analyzes or offers recommendations on an issue or situation, or educates or persuades the reader to take action, or become involved.

MOU

Memorandum of Understanding

Defines the responsibilities of each party to an agreement.

ORDINANCE

A rule or law approved by the Common Council. Put simply: municipal laws and regulations.

POCD

Plan of Conservation and Development

A 10-year plan required by State statute on how a town wants to develop, consisting of economic development, natural resources preservation, housing, land use, and public services.

RFP

Request for Proposals

Outlines the requirements for a specific government project. Contractors and agencies then bid to win the contract.

RESOLUTION

A formal expression of the opinion or will of the Common Council.

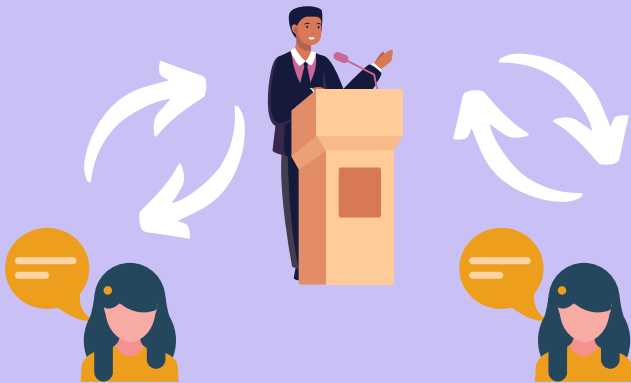
ROBERT'S RULES

A formal style of meeting procedures used in some capacity in all Middletown meetings. For more information, see page 7 or bit.ly/robertsrules101

WHAT ARE ROBERT'S RULES?

Robert's Rules define a formal process for introducing, discussing, amending, and passing legislation.

Adapted from Policy Through Play's "WTF are Robert's Rules." See more here: bit.ly/robertsruleswtf



THE ROLES

The **chair** moderates the discussion of the **members**. Members have the right to speak and vote, and direct their conversation through the chair.

Guests (non-members) can speak only when allowed by the chair, and cannot vote.

THE LANGUAGE

"I move to..."

Let's vote on this proposal

"I second"

I agree: let's vote

"I move to amend"

This proposal needs to be changed before we vote

"Point of order"

We did something wrong here

TRANSLATING ROBERT'S RULES

While Robert's Rules are formal, they have a commonsense purpose—to keep a meeting running smoothly.

Let's get dinner!

Amendment
or change



What about
pizza?

How about
sushi instead?

Amendment
or change



Sure! Let's go to
Hachi.



Amendment fails

KEEP IN MIND...

A discussion ends in two ways



"I call the question"

We should vote on whether or not we are moving forward.



"I move to table"

Sounds like we can't decide, so let's postpone to a future time.



An amendment pending means that you can't vote on the whole resolution.



However, a motion can be tabled at any point.

GETTING INVOLVED AS A WESLEYAN STUDENT

Getting civically engaged as a Wesleyan student is a great way to contribute to the greater community as a Middletown resident. It is also important to be aware of your position as a temporary resident of Middletown. Think about the Cardinal Community Commitment as you get involved.

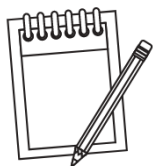
CARDINAL COMMUNITY COMMITMENT



4 Ways to Be Engaged

GET FAMILIAR

What's already happening in my community? How can I get involved? What do I need to do to prepare?



PRACTICE ONGOING SELF-REFLECTION

Why do I want to get involved? What do I expect to learn? What do I hope to contribute? Am I practicing self-care?

EMBRACE A SPIRIT OF HUMILITY

How can I center the needs of my community? How can I be accountable to their expectations?



BE AN ADAPTABLE COLLABORATOR

How does my work fit into the larger ecosystem of community support? How do I work together with community members?

How can I be a conscious collaborator?

Listen and learn.

There's always a lot going on in Middletown, so plug into what people here are already thinking and talking about! Attend political forums, talk to elders in the community, and even join community Facebook groups or other relevant social media pages.

Reflect on your own positionality.

Be aware of your distinct position as a Wesleyan student. Most students are temporary residents of Middletown, and are not affected in the same way as permanent residents.

Commit! Don't be flaky.

It's okay to attend different committee meetings to learn about a variety of issues. As you start working with community members, stay in consistent communication, especially during school breaks! If you need to take a step back, communicate that and ask how you can help from afar.

Make it last.

How am I going to ensure that this project lasts beyond my time as a Wesleyan student? Is the aim to make the project sustained by permanent residents, or actively pass on the work to other students?

Use Wesleyan's resources for good.

Wesleyan's educational capital and student labor power can be helpful to the larger community. How can you leverage resources like funding, awareness, transportation, professor support, student support, time, and energy for Middletown's benefit?

Check out wesneat.org to learn more about building solidarity between Wesleyan and Middletown!

Find out more about the Cardinal Community Commitment at bit.ly/cardscommitment!

COMMITTEES & COMMISSIONS

CITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

MIDDLETOWN COMMISSION ON THE ARTS

Pamela Steele
pamelaroose@sbcglobal.net

Purpose: Maintain programs to encourage interest and participation in the arts.

COMPLETE STREETS COMMITTEE

Lisa Liesener
lisaliesener@gmail.com

Purpose: Encourage safe, convenient, and equitable biking, walking and transit on Middletown streets for all users.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Vincent Loffredo
vincent.loffredo@middletownct.gov

Purpose: Planning and implementing development projects using public funds.

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

Stephen Devoto
dermomyotome@gmail.com

Purpose: Regulate zoning of buildings and designing the Plan of Conservation and Development.

For a complete list of all committees and commissions, visit
<https://www.middletownct.gov/27/Government>

MEETING TIMES

All meetings are once a month (excluding Planning and Zoning). Double check meeting times and locations online!

- **Complete Streets:** 2nd Mondays, 7 PM
- **Economic Development:** 2nd Tuesdays, 6:30 PM
- **Planning & Zoning:** 2nd & 4th Wednesdays, 7 PM
- **Arts:** 4th Wednesdays, 7 PM

COMMITTEES & COMMISSIONS

RACIAL JUSTICE & EQUITY

ANTI-RACISM TASK FORCE

Sacha Armstrong-Crockett & Darnell Ford
sacrockett@wpsir.com

Purpose: Work on issues regarding systemic racism within Middletown and its policies and practices to achieve racial justice and equality for all.

COMMITTEE CONCERNING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Catherine Lechowicz
cathy.lechowicz@middletownct.gov

Purpose: To monitor and report on any complaints or violations regarding rights for individuals with disabilities and ensure that the needs of individuals with disabilities are met.

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Faith M. Jackson
faith.jackson@middletownct.gov

Purpose: To advise the Mayor, Common Council, Department Heads and Directors on ensuring that all City residents have equal access to economic, political, and educational opportunities, service protection, and accommodation in all business and public agencies.

LGBTQIA+ COMMISSION

Anthony Mangiafico
anthony.mangiafico@middletownct.gov

Purpose: To advise the Mayor and Common Council regarding issues actually or potentially affecting persons within the LGBTQIA+ community, with the aim of improving the ability of the City of Middletown to serve, support, and promote the LGBTQIA+ community.

For a complete list of all committees and commissions, visit
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MEETING TIMES

All meetings are once a month. Double check meeting times and locations online!

- **Anti-Racism:** Meeting date varies, see calendar, 6 PM
- **Concerning People with Disabilities:** 1st Tuesdays, 6 PM
- **LGBTQIA+:** 3rd Tuesdays, 5:30 PM

COMMITTEES & COMMISSIONS

SUSTAINABILITY, CLEAN ENERGY, CONSERVATION

COMMISSION ON CONSERVATION & AGRICULTURE

Elisabeth Holder
eholder007@gmail.com

Purpose: Research land utilization, index all open areas, and recommend plans and programs for the acquisition, use, and stewardship of such areas.

INLAND / WETLANDS & WATERCOURSES AGENCY

Joseph Carta
jcarta17@comcast.net

Purpose: Protect and preserve the wetlands and water courses in Middletown for future generations.

RESOURCE RECYCLING ADVISORY COMMISSION

Krishna Winston
kwinston@wesleyan.edu

Purpose: Assist with the development and implementation of City-wide waste management, resource conservation, and sustainability programs.

CLEAN ENERGY TASK FORCE

Anna Salo-Markowski
asalomark@gmail.com

Purpose: Research and make recommendations to improve energy efficiency and conservation and promote renewable energy.

URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

Jane Harris
treefanatic@gmail.com

Purpose: Providing for the regulation of the planting, maintenance, and removal of trees and shrubs, and the oversight of City-owned forested areas.

SUSTAINABLE MIDDLETOWN TEAM*

Jane Harris
treefanatic@gmail.com

Purpose: Promote sustainability and action on climate change within the City.

*not an official committee

For a complete list of all committees and commissions, visit
<https://www.middletownct.gov/27/Government>

MEETING TIMES

All meetings are once a month. Double check meeting times and locations online!

- **Conservation & Agriculture:** 3rd Tuesdays, 7 PM
- **Clean Energy:** 1st Wednesdays, 6:30 PM
- **Inland/Wetlands & Watercourses:** 1st Wednesdays, 7 PM
- **Resource Recycling:** 4th Mondays, 7 PM
- **Sustainable Middletown:** 1st Wednesdays, 5:30 PM
- **Urban Forestry,** 4th Thursdays, 4:30 PM

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Wesleyan Jewett Center for Community Partnerships

Wesleyan Sustainability Office

WesNEAT

All those who read and provided feedback

This guide was created by Wesleyan students Cat Xi '21 and Shaya Tousi '22 in 2021.

Please contact sustainability@wesleyan.edu if you have any updates, comments, questions, or suggestions for this guide.

GET INVOLVED IN YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT!