

TOWN OF MIDDLETON

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

2014-2016

COUNCIL & SENIOR STAFF

VISION:

Middleton is the Heart of the Valley, a community valuing diversity, opportunity and partnership, and proudly serving as a regional centre for business, education, health and recreation.

Index:

Message from Mayor and Council

Guiding principles

Strategic Directions

Strategic Directions Expanded

Strategic Actions

Reporting

“A goal without a plan is simply a dream”

Message from Mayor and Council

Council and senior staff believed that the time was right for the development of a plan, a strategy to help focus Middleton's resources and move the municipality forward. The beginning of the priority setting process took place on November 08, 2014 with a full day session, whereby Council and senior staff openly discussed Middleton's current environment and what a preferred future may look like.

The timeframe chosen reflects this Council's current term of office. However, with annual reviews and updates, future Councils should consider this their benchmark from which to plan. Council and staff are committed to accomplishing the contracted actions, while being steadily mindful of the resource limits that Middleton currently faces.

Existing workloads and fulfilling its mandated municipal responsibilities continues to challenge the organization. Realizing the current restraints and a full capacity box, the opportunity lies with being strategic, working on priorities and, where possible, maximizing partnerships.

In addition to the usual challenges that local Councils and small communities face every day, the environment of municipal government is changing significantly. These changes come from other levels of government and other external forces that require municipal government to adapt to changes in legislation, regulations and funding levels. It will be critically important for the Town of Middleton to consider these changes that are coming, and to make every effort to be proactive and choose its path rather than having change forced upon it. This will require the Town Council and key staff to be engaged and involved at all levels to help find appropriate and productive methods to incorporate change into our plans and operations.

This document establishes strategic directions, strategic actions, timelines and responsibilities based on the current environment and looking into the future as we anticipate it to be at this time. Moving forward, this will provide a sense of clarity and focus as to the expectations and workloads.

Council and staff view this as a beginning to further strategic planning processes.

Guiding Principles

The following statements express our beliefs and values that we will abide by as we fulfil our responsibilities.

- **Transparency** – We promote honest and open communication, providing easy access to information.
- **Respectful** - We embrace diversity and treat everyone with courtesy, equity, and fairness.
- **Engage the Community** - We advocate good citizenship and support the freedom to actively pursue suggestions, ideas, and creative approaches, leading to continuous improvement in everything we do.
- **Proactive** - We actively pursue the identification of citizen needs through citizen involvement to provide effective services to our community with efficiency, accountability, and a caring attitude.
- **Cooperative** – We communicate and work as a team, and we partner with the community to solve problems.
- **Informed Decision-making** – We commit to seeking out complete information in order to make appropriate and evidence-based decisions.
- **Fiscally Responsible** - We provide quality services, of the best value, to effectively meet the needs of our community while being mindful of future needs and opportunities.

Strategic Directions

Listed in no particular order of priority, the following six areas capture our major areas of responsibility and when supported by strategic actions coupled with appropriate resources will continue to move Middleton forward.

- 1. Leadership**

By becoming a municipality of choice, Middleton will continue to support council and staff, training and development. Both Council and staff will be involved in improving relationships with municipal units, provincial and federal government departments.

- 2. Financial**

Middleton will embrace state of the art financial policies and practises, long range planning, community engagement, while maximize funding and partnership opportunities.

- 3. Programs & Services**

Basic community services such as water and sewer, recreation, community safety (both police and fire), health, cultural and business development opportunities will continue to be our focus.

- 4. Planning and Economic Development**

Reducing the red tape, while maintaining appropriate and orderly development, will be accomplished through current planning and development parameters and will continue to support our go forward attitude.

- 5. Communication**

Ongoing open, honest and transparent communication both internal and external to the organization must continue to be supported by all reasonable tools that will decrease any existing divide.

- 6. Infrastructure**

Addressing infrastructure needs such as streets, sidewalks, water & sewer, trails, facilities, parks, equipment, street lights will require a balanced approach of maintaining and upgrading the existing infrastructure while developing new assets.

Strategic Directions Expanded

1. Leadership

By becoming a municipality of choice, Middleton will continue to support council and staff, training and development. Both Council and staff will be involved in improving relationships with municipal units, provincial and federal government departments.

a. Cultural change

- Employer of Choice, by providing a solid and proactive workplace, the Town is able to attract and retain knowledgeable and professional individuals for both paid and elected positions.
- Building Pride – Internally and externally
Employees with pride in their organization are more often more productive, positive and happier individuals which will provide a win/win environment. Employees who support the efforts of their organization will support and promote them in the larger public.
- Build and strengthen partnerships
Partnerships bring broader resources, perspectives and goals to all members of the partnership. In times of declining or restricted resources, working together with stakeholders makes it possible to maintain or increase services and/or service levels in municipal governments and communities at large.
- Joint Council meetings
There is significant benefit to having open and regular dialogue between neighbouring Councils, as well as including the key committees or other stakeholders in the community to promote open communication and to strengthen relationships.

b. Diversity/Innovation

Increasing capacity in our community by welcoming and developing diversity and innovative ideas to meet the needs of everyone in the community makes Middleton a welcoming place for everyone and stimulates economic activity.

c. Organizational Status/Capacity

Benchmarking/Evaluation

Before we can move forward with any number of priorities or plans, it is important for all of Council and staff to know and understand what is currently in place for programming and service delivery, as well as what capacity exists at the current staffing level.

d. Council Development

Education and professional development for Council members to ensure that the roles and responsibilities are known, understood and fulfilled is an important piece of ensuring that the Town of Middleton is governed effectively.

2. Financial

Middleton will embrace state of the art financial policies and practises, long range planning, community engagement, while maximize funding and partnership opportunities.

a. Financial Condition Index

Based on the recent Financial Condition Index report, Middleton does not meet the established threshold in five of the fifteen Indicators. Additional planning will be required to meet all of the indicators put in place by the Province of Nova Scotia.

b. Long-range plan

Continued use of the Debt Affordability Model and other tools will assist the Town in developing a long range financial plan to ensure the most effective and efficient use of financial resources and continue the viability of the community as it exists.

c. Community Engagement

Throughout the budget process, Middleton will engage the community and provide opportunities to influence future operating and capital budgets.

d. Federal/Provincial/Municipal and Other Funding Opportunities

Grants and other programs that can provide funds to meet the needs of the Town will continue to play an integral part of budgeting and developing programs and services. Taking advantage of provincial and federal funds will leverage more funds without the need to increase borrowing, at the same time as completing larger projects than what could be accomplished with municipal funding alone.

3. *Programs and Services*

Basic community services such as water and sewer, recreation, community safety (both police and fire), health, cultural and business development opportunities will continue to be our focus.

a. *Recreation Services*

More programming means more costs if programs are only added. The capacity of the Recreation Department must be considered to ensure that the programming we put in place meets the needs and wants of the community and meets the capacity of the staffing level that Council puts in place.

b. *Protective Services*

Community engagement, communication and evaluation of the policing services and safety solutions provided by our police service will work towards ensuring appropriate community policing standards, along with managing increasing costs for these services. Additionally, fire protection services remain as a vital part of the Town of Middleton. Challenges in infrastructure as well as volunteer recruitment, training and retention need to be addressed as the community moves into the future.

c. *Water and Sewer*

These are critical services that the Town offers to its residents and will continue into the future. Issues around repair and replacement of underground infrastructure, as well as the cost to operate these systems are more thoroughly considered under Financial and Infrastructure Strategic Directions.

d. *Building and Fire Inspection Services*

Building & Fire Inspection Services provides the best professional service in administering and enforcing Nova Scotia's Building & Fire Code Acts. We ensure, safe, healthy and accessible buildings, in which we live, work and play in Middleton.

e. *Bylaw Enforcement*

Town Bylaws are meant to keep our Town clean, health and safe for everyone. The goal of Bylaw Enforcement is to achieve voluntary compliance through education and the provision of information in order to preserve the quality of life to which each citizen is entitled.

f. *Planning Services*

Planning Services is responsible for the long-range planning of the Town, including managing land uses and promoting development.

4. Economic Development

Reducing the red tape, while maintaining appropriate and orderly development will be accomplished through current planning and development parameters and will continue to support our go forward attitude and that Middleton is open for business.

a. Business Development

There isn't an existing plan or dedicated resources to this initiative. Work within the Regional Enterprise Network (REN) model will help address this over time. Focus on repairing and improving current infrastructure will make the community ready for additional development.

b. MPS/LUB Plan Review

Subdivision/Residential Development

Development and increasing the ease of development is quite often heard in many communities. Middleton is no different and a full review of the MPS/LUB is needed to ensure that its provisions meet the needs of the community now and into the future.

c. Streamline process to be user friendly

Planning services is often the brunt of complaints around timing, ease of applications and additional "red-tape".

d. Marketing Plan

Develop strategies to promote and better utilize the existing Industrial Park.
Grow tax base/population.

e. Tourism

Through the promotion of the Town's current assets, develop a strategy to make Middleton a community of choice. In partnership with the residential and business community, develop and promote quarterly events.

5. Communication

Ongoing open, honest and transparent communication both internal and external to the organization must continue to be supported by all reasonable tools that will decrease any existing divide.

- a. Communication Plan/Strategy
The development of clear communication methods, tools and processes will improve internal and external communication.
- b. Town Promotion/Branding
A defined and consistent brand and message about the organization and the community will assist in letting others know what we are doing and what we have to offer.
- c. Community/Volunteer Engagement
The core of many communities is the volunteer base, and Middleton is no different. Recruitment, retention and appreciation for our volunteers will ensure the continuation of many events and programs, and builds civic pride.
- d. Communicating/Partnering with other Governments
Partnering with those who have more or different resources than the Town of Middleton allows a sharing of experience and knowledge. A solid network with other municipal units and other levels of governments ensures that Middleton has access to all of the resources that are possible in meeting the needs of the community.
- e. Annual Joint Council Meeting (Council/Committees)
Continue efforts around meeting with other municipal governments in the Annapolis Valley, and continue to focus on finding common ground, sharing information and finding solutions to benefit the region as a whole.
- f. Website Development/Social Media
Dynamic, current and user-friendly website and social media sites are critical to share information and allow for engagement in municipal government and the events and programming that we offer.
- g. Reporting/Accountability
Consistent and regular reporting from staff to Council and from Council to the public ensures that the organization operates in an open and transparent manner, which meets a significant role of municipal government.

6. Infrastructure

Addressing infrastructure needs such as streets, sidewalks, water & sewer, trails, facilities, parks, equipment, street lights will require a balanced approach of maintaining and upgrading the existing infrastructure while developing new assets.

a. Water and sewer infrastructure replacement

Middleton continues to experience failing underground infrastructure that will require significant investment to ensure a proactive approach into the future. Capital funding will be a challenge as the infrastructure deficit continues to grow.

b. Asset management/inventory/replacement

A strong and defined asset management plan will aid in determining priorities and future years funding. It will assist in capital planning and prioritize the areas of need.

c. Facilities

A review of all the Town's facilities is important to consider. Buildings are aging, needs are changing, space is at a premium for offices as well as aging recreation facilities in some areas. In this context, facilities include sidewalks that ensure safe and welcoming environments for all, and trails, outdoor spaces and recreation facilities which enhance the attraction of this community for people to live, visit, and participate in physically active events and activities.

d. Industrial Park Services

Middleton is one of a few towns that has an industrial park to attract business of that class to its area. This is an asset that has been under-utilized and needs to be promoted more vigorously.

e. Fire Service Plan/Strategy

The needs of the fire service will need to be strategically examined to ensure the fire department remains viable with recruitment and retention of its members.

Strategic Actions

1. Leadership

By becoming a municipality of choice, Middleton will continue to support council and staff, training and development. Both Council and staff will be involved in improving relationships with municipal units, provincial and federal government departments.

- a. Conduct a Council/Staff survey to determine current levels of satisfaction with the administration of municipal operations, processes and job satisfaction.
- b. Support both Council and Staff opportunities for engagement with all levels of government.
- c. Hold annual joint Council meetings within the Valley region.
- d. Hold joint meetings as required (a minimum of twice per year) with service providers and agencies. i.e. fire, police, tourism, economic development etc.
- e. Develop a cultural event to acknowledge and support Middleton's local talent.
- f. Hold annual budget priority setting community input sessions.
- g. Conduct an efficiency audit/gap analysis to evaluate and align current employee skill sets and find ways to streamline operations.
- h. Council will support community events by attending, participating and encouraging public participation.
- i. Develop a policy that commits to training and development opportunities for staff and volunteers.

Initiative	Q4-2014	Q1-2015	Q2-2015	Q3-2015	Q4-2015

2. Financial

Middleton will embrace state of the art financial policies and practises, long range planning, community engagement, while maximize funding and partnership opportunities.

- a. Develop a budget timeline framework that reflects the capital budget approval prior to the commencement of the budget year and provides for approval of 50% of the total of the previous year's operational budget.
- b. Develop plans necessary to address any areas which did not meet the Municipal Indicators threshold. (2011/12 – five red flags, 2012/13 – four red flags, 2013/14 – three red flags)
- c. Move toward long range capital and operational budgets. Use the Provincial debt affordability model.
- d. Access other funding opportunities as appropriate.
- e. Develop cost recovery models for services currently being subsidized.
- f. Establish by policy when conditions exist that make contracting out services a better option for the Town.
- g. Build reserves as appropriate to the long term needs of operational and capital budgets.
- h. Implement the seven core best practices for financial management as developed in partnership with the Municipal Finance Corporation.

Initiative	Q4-2014	Q1-2015	Q2-2015	Q3-2015	Q4-2015

3. Programs & Services

Basic community services such as water and sewer, recreation, community safety (both police and fire), health, cultural and business development opportunities will continue to be our focus.

- a. Conduct a program and service audit to determine the current level of activity, resources and financial capacities.
- b. Complete Recreation Master Plan.
- c. Annually review policing services to determine program effectiveness.
- d. Fire services need to be funded appropriately by the areas served by the Middleton Fire Department
- e. Intermediate and Standard classifications participate in the “COR Evaluation Cycle”. This involves internal (performed by the Town) and external (performed by the NSCSA) COR Evaluations. This occurs on a three-year basis and repeats on year four as follows:
 - Year 1 – Internal COR Evaluation (the Town) followed by an external COR Evaluation by the NSCSA.
 - Year 2 – Internal COR Evaluation (the Town) submitted to, and reviewed by the NSCSA (Anniversary COR Evaluation)
 - Year 3 – Internal COR Evaluation (the Town) submitted to, and reviewed by the NSCSA (Anniversary COR Evaluation).
 - Year 4 – Returns to the beginning of the cycle.

The NSCSA performs random spot COR Evaluations on approximately five percent of the anniversary COR Evaluations submitted to help ensure adherence, and the integrity of the process.

Initiative	Q4-2014	Q1-2015	Q2-2015	Q3-2015	Q4-2015

4. Planning and Economic Development

Reducing the red tape, while maintaining appropriate and orderly development, will be accomplished through current planning and development parameters and will continue to support our go forward attitude.

- a. Update as per legislative requirements Middleton's LUB and MPS.
- b. Assign resources to work with the Regional Enterprise Network to support the efforts of the REN and assist the organization to bring value to the Town of Middleton.
- c. Develop a Marketing plan to attract potential business opportunities to Middleton's industrial park.
- d. Communicate to the business world that Middleton is "open for business".
- e. Develop a tourism attraction plan that highlights Middleton's assets.

Initiative	Q4-2014	Q1-2015	Q2-2015	Q3-2015	Q4-2015

5. Communication

Ongoing open, honest and transparent communication both internal and external to the organization must continue to be supported by all reasonable tools that will decrease any existing divide.

- a. Develop an overarching communication strategy
- b. Establish Council policy on “public input sessions” at regular Council meetings
- c. Produced monthly news from the Council table
- d. Support with resources, the upgrading of the Towns web site
- e. Hold an annual appreciate night for community volunteers
- f. Communicate annually, Middleton’s strategic priorities.
- g. Hold regular staff and Management meetings to share information and collaborate.
- h. Use SharePoint task lists to ensure work requests are initiated and completed.

Initiative	Q4-2014	Q1-2015	Q2-2015	Q3-2015	Q4-2015

6. Infrastructure

Addressing infrastructure needs such as streets, sidewalks, water & sewer, trails, facilities, parks, equipment, street lights will require a balanced approach of maintaining and upgrading the existing infrastructure while developing new assets.

- a. Conduct a complete asset management review/plan, building on recently completed assessments. Study to include all infrastructure including facilities.
- b. Develop a capital and IT upgrade, replacement and new construction policy.
- c. Establish an equipment capital replacement program.
- d. Through the completion of the Recreation Master Plan address the parks and trails program for the town.
- e. The Town of Middleton should have ready, at all times, two or three shovel – ready projects. Shovel-ready is defined as a project for the Town that has specifications and engineering already prepared and awaiting approval for funding.

Initiative	Q4-2014	Q1-2015	Q2-2015	Q3-2015	Q4-2015

Reporting/Accountability:

- ✓ This document will be updated annually by Council and senior staff.
- ✓ Staff will reflect in their annual budgets and business plans the priorities as noted in this strategy.
- ✓ Staff will update the CAO monthly on the progress of priorities contracted by them for the current budget year.
- ✓ CAO will update Council bi-monthly the organizations progress on contracted actions.
- ✓ Council will update the community on a quarterly basis on the progress being made on the strategic directions as approved.

Parking Lot

Items placed here are objectives that have been identified through the initial or subsequent planning processes but that have not yet had resources or timeframes allocated to them.