DESTINATION 2040

MIDDLESEX COUNTY ◆ NJ
STRATEGIC PLAN

Economic and Workforce Competitiveness
Chapter Framework

MIDDLESEX
COUNTY ◆ NJ

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Action Plan Framework

Economic and Workforce Competitiveness

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The year is 2040. Middlesex County's central location, extensive, well-maintained transportation infrastructure, and state-of-the-art communications and energy networks are second to none in New Jersey and the nation. The County's rich community tapestry championed emerging and expanding businesses and grew our sphere of influence within key targeted industry sectors. Companies know that Middlesex County's workforce is highly educated, multicultural, and has cultural competency throughout the country. The well-trained labor pool is an advantage on which companies can rely.

The foundation of our success is our focus on the elements that contribute to our high quality of life—the arts, history and culture, food from around the world, 10,000 acres of open spaces and parks, thriving small businesses, strong community collaboration, superior healthcare, diverse transportation, universal connectivity and the best schools in the nation with education opportunities available for any career.

Middlesex County life sciences companies and universities developed novel testing approaches and preventative medicine, including the first FDA-approved saliva test and single-dose vaccine that accelerated the timeline for the nation's recovery from COVID-19. The Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey attracts world-renowned researchers and physicians whose discoveries have resulted in lifesaving therapies and treatments. Middlesex County's cross-sector collaboration in infrastructure and programming facilitated partnerships at the intersection of health and nutrition. The County has become a hub for emerging sectors, including the microbiome, medical and functional foods.

The County played a pivotal role in transforming the local food system. Residents have access to locally grown, affordable, and nutritious food from traditional farms, micro-farms, vertical and rooftop gardens. Innovative financing mechanisms and technical assistance programs enable Middlesex County farmers and growers to adopt cutting-edge precision agriculture technologies. Their operations have become some of the most efficient and profitable small farms in the country. Imperfect and surplus crops are diverted from the waste stream and used by food manufacturers in value-added specialty products. People recognize that food innovation and agriculture are connected and technology-driven industries that present many opportunities. As a result, the number of new and beginning farmers in the County swelled.

Companies working on cutting-edge autonomous systems have set up shop in the County, drawn by the opportunity to pilot their innovations in the fields or on busy city streets through the Smart Mobility Testing Ground. The County is the recognized leader in autonomous vehicle software development and logistics management. Middlesex College is a keystone in the County's efforts, nurturing the passions of students who want to make a difference, preparing them to be the leaders and innovators of the newest businesses and industries that will call the County home.

A network of incubators and accelerators anchored by the New Brunswick Innovation Hub and robust workforce training and economic and business development services support entrepreneurs. The partnership between the business and entrepreneurial community and the County's Workforce Development Board has delivered a customer-focused workforce development plan and programming. Our One-Stop Centers offer a dynamic suite of evidence-based, innovative training and approaches and services.

We have prepared the workforce. We have spurred catalytic development. We have fortified our partnerships across municipalities and sectors, which has allowed us to achieve success not only for the business sector but also for Middlesex County residents at large. We continue to be forward-thinking, planning and leading.

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Four overarching principles guide Destination 2040 planning and implementation.

Foster Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
Marginalized groups exist everywhere, which means that some people are excluded from or have limited access to traditional or "mainstream" economic, political, cultural, and social activities. Marginalization can have significant impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Middlesex County is one of the most diverse counties in New Jersey and perhaps even in the United States. Destination 2040 seeks to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion by 1) making marginalized groups, in particular Black and Brown people, feel welcomed and have access to the resources and opportunities necessary to connect, belong, grow and improve the quality of their lives; 2) acknowledging and eliminating disparities along race, class, gender, disability status and other dimensions of diversity; 3) expanding choice and opportunity for Black and Brown people, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of those who have been historically discriminated against and to promote racial and economic integration; and 4) ensuring diversity and inclusion in decision-making processes.

Support COVID-19 Response and Recovery.
New Jersey and Middlesex County were particularly hard-hit by COVID-19 during the pandemic's first wave. Between March and November 2020, more than 25,000 county residents tested COVID-19 positive, and there have been more than 1,400 confirmed deaths in the County due to COVID-19. These numbers are again rising steadily as New Jersey grapples with a new wave of transmission. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted county residents and businesses. Destination 2040 seeks to help families and businesses cope with and recover from the on-going impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for future health emergencies. Destination 2040 also aims to take advantage of opportunities that have emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Address Climate Change.
Climate change is one of the most pressing issues facing people, communities, and governments worldwide. The gradual warming of the planet is causing climate change. We know from scientists that human activities involving transportation, energy, land development, agriculture, and manufacturing emit greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and methane. Climate change may have many potential impacts on human health, agriculture, natural systems, wildlife habitats, infrastructure systems, and economic activity in Middlesex County. Destination 2040 seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the County. The plan also aims to help residents, businesses, and communities prepare for and adapt to changing climate conditions, more frequent extreme weather events, and related public health emergencies in the future.

Embrace Smart Governance.
The concept of a "smart city" emerged over the past decade. The smart cities movement imagines creating the communities of the future. Smart Cities harness the power of technology and data analytics to improve systems like transportation and deliver government programs efficiently while saving money. Destination 2040 seeks to adapt and expand the smart cities concept to 1) improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness of county programs, services, and infrastructure through technology adoption and data-informed decision-making; 2) help the County and Middlesex County municipalities improve outcomes and save money through shared services; and 3) make governance in the County more collaborative, transparent, and participatory.

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CHAPTER GOALS

1. Build on the County's economic strengths and assets.

2. Help businesses start, stay, and grow.

3. Foster innovation and entrepreneurship.

4. Create a trained, future-ready workforce.

5. Ensure Middlesex County remains a great place to live, work, and explore.

POTENTIAL STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

#	Initiative Name	Key Components	Related Chapter Goals
1.	Position Middlesex County as the center of innovation by attracting and creating a nurturing environment for entrepreneurs and small businesses.	• In partnership with existing service entities, create a comprehensive small and emerging business assistance program that includes targeting women and/or minority-owned or serving businesses. • Explore and implement national models and best practices for growing small businesses.	1, 2, and 3
2.	Target growth within specific industries starting with life science; food innovation; and electric, connected, and autonomous vehicles.	• Create a centralized database of business prospects for the targeted industry sectors. • Provide consistent internal and external business engagement messaging and coordinate across departments.	1, 2, and 3
3.	Deepen partnerships and collaboration related to business retention and attraction.	• Strengthen the CXO roundtable Market Middlesex County's redevelopment areas, opportunity zones, and similar incentive-based districts to businesses, in a manner consistent with the emerging Destination 2040 Strategic Investment Framework.	1, 2, and 3
4.	Invest in catalytic development and infrastructure projects.	• Facilitate and coordinate needed transportation, energy, and other infrastructure investments Work with partners to identify and implement development projects that encourage private sector investments in vibrant communities with mixed-use, live-work-play environments.	1, 2, 3, and 5
5.	Revitalize walkable town centers, downtowns, and commercial corridors.	• Reimagine commercial corridors and identify opportunity sites for development and redevelopment. • Identify and capitalize on community assets as a catalyst for business growth. Curate destination activations to promote business activity and help people experience all Middlesex has to offer.	1, 2, and 5
6.	Strengthen and streamline the awareness and delivery of workforce programming.	• Centralize information and resources related to workforce development programming • Enhance marketing and responsiveness of workforce development programming. Identify and offer opportunities for lifelong learning that anticipate the needs of County workers and employers.	1, 2, and 4

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7.	Ensure that every resident has access to broadband internet by 2025.	Identify broadband access needs and work with partners to address those needs.	2, 4, and 5
8.	Make career-path education and training available and affordable.	• Improve access and market the diversity of career certifications offered to Middlesex County residents. • Enhance One-Stop Career Centers to make services and programs accessible to County residents. • Create employer need-driven job placement and a Youth Transition to Work program for high school, vocational school, and Middlesex College students/graduates Work with State leaders to improve the affordability of education and training programs.	2 and 4
9.	Grow agriculture as an economic driver for Middlesex County.	• Provide next-generation farmers with the support needed to succeed. • Address barriers to farming success. • Increase sales of Middlesex County farm products. Increase the acreage of preserved farmland and land in active agricultural production in the County.	1, 2, 3, 4, and 5
10.	Develop the Arts Institute of Middlesex County into a hub for all arts, cultural and historical programming.	• Open the Middlesex County Folk-Art Center as a physical location to support the established program that promotes traditional arts, partnerships, and public art. • Address disparities in access to arts programming. • Increase the awareness of and participation in arts, history, and cultural programming Improve Middlesex County's ranking on arts education.	1, 2, 3, 4, and 5

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