

DESTINATION 2040 OUTREACH

Set the Table! Summary Report



DESTINATION 2040

MIDDLESEX COUNTY ♦ NJ
MASTER PLAN



RUTGERS
Edward J. Bloustein School
of Planning and Public Policy

About *Set the Table!*

Set the Table! is an innovative outreach strategy created by the Public Outreach and Engagement Team (POET), a group within the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC) at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Rutgers POET combined two outreach strategies, civic dinner party and “meeting in a box,” to create *Set the Table!* By combining community conversations with friends, colleagues, food and refreshments, this unique outreach method fosters authentic engagement by recruiting hosts to facilitate a gathering that is also fun and lively. Hosts invite their own guests, whenever and wherever they want to gather, aided by materials customized by Rutgers POET to organize and simplify their discussion.

Rutgers POET is a multi-disciplinary group within VTC with expertise in planning, public policy, marketing, communication and public engagement techniques. Rutgers POET specializes in innovative outreach methods tailored to the specific demographic and community profile of the target population. Rutgers POET worked very closely with Middlesex County to design, deliver and implement *Set the Table!* for Destination 2040, the County’s update of their Master Plan.

Acknowledgments

- Middlesex County Freeholder Director Ronald Rios and the Board of Chosen Freeholders
- Middlesex County Office of Planning
- Middlesex County Marketing
- Middlesex County Communications
- Middlesex County Public & Government Affairs
- Middlesex County Ambassadors
- Destination 2040 *Set the Table!* hosts and their guests
- Community organizations throughout Middlesex County that helped with host recruitment
- Venues for *Set the Table!* host training: Blazing Star Cultural Arts Center, East Jersey Olde Town Village, Middlesex County Fire Academy, and the Plainsboro Preserve

Table of Contents

Background.....	1
Recruitment.....	2
Host Training and Orientation.....	3
Discussion Kit and Activity.....	5
Demographic Summary of Hosts and Participants.....	7
Summary of Discussion Topics.....	9
Topic Reports.....	13
Transportation.....	13
Economic Opportunity.....	25
Land Use and Housing.....	35
Parks and Open Space.....	48
Environment.....	58
Arts, Culture, and History.....	68
Health, Safety, and Services.....	78
Technology and Innovation.....	90

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Background

Middlesex County Office of Planning (MCOP) partnered with the Public Outreach and Engagement Team at Rutgers University (Rutgers POET) to deploy *Set the Table!* which is a component of the extensive public outreach campaign for Destination 2040, the County's update of their Comprehensive Master Plan. Feedback gathered from the outreach efforts will be used to inform the Master Plan. *Set the Table!* is a unique spin on the "meeting-in-a-box" outreach format, encouraging individuals who live, work and/or study in Middlesex County to host social gatherings of friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, etc. to discuss issues in their community that are important to them and contribute to priorities for how the county will grow and change over the next 20 years. Rutgers POET provided each host with a Middlesex County Destination 2040 Host Kit, which included everything needed to organize and hold a gathering, including a \$50 stipend to offset the cost of food.

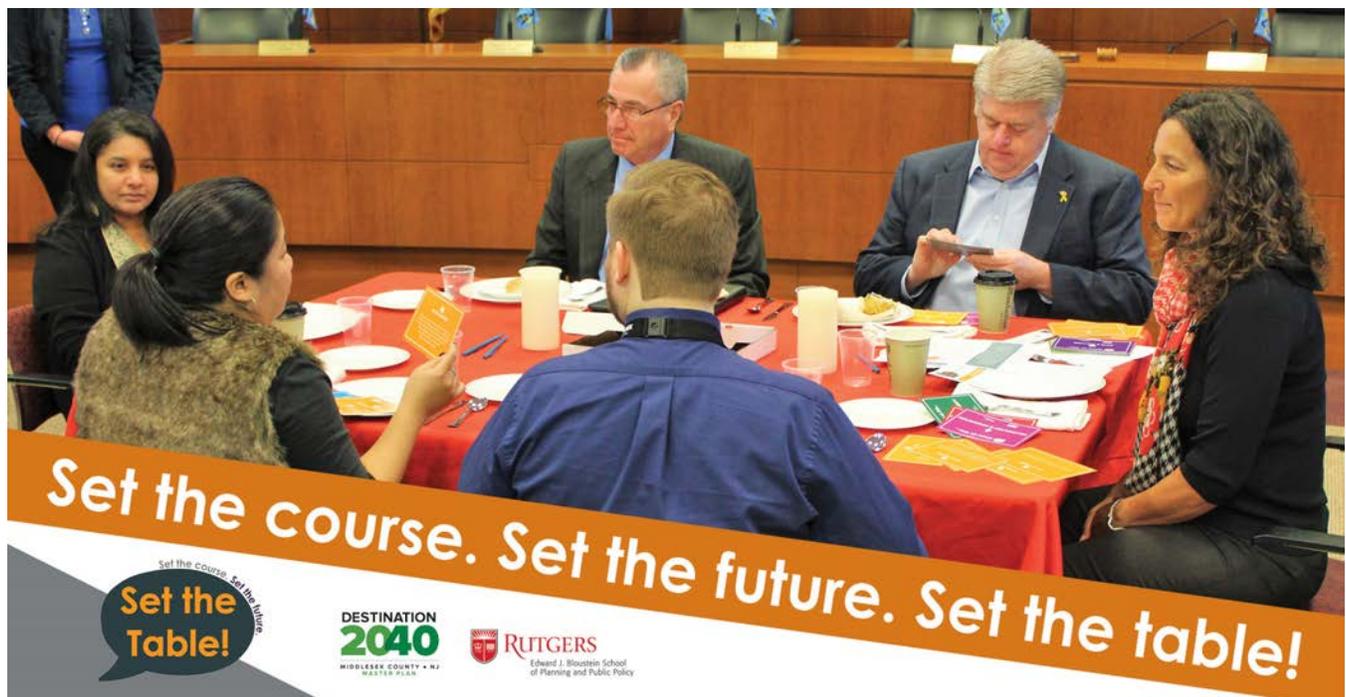


Recruitment

Rutgers POET used a variety of promotional strategies to recruit *Set the Table!* discussion hosts. In collaboration with the Middlesex County Office of Communications, Rutgers POET shared the opportunity to host a discussion on County social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and in the County's monthly electronic newsletter. In addition, Rutgers POET reached out to community organizations throughout the county for assistance in distributing the information to members and constituents. Rutgers POET also posted flyers and left information cards in libraries, County offices, and local businesses throughout the area.

Area news media also contributed to publicizing the *Set the Table!* program and attracting discussion hosts. The Office of Communications distributed a press release to media outlets, and Rutgers POET followed up with members of the media via email and phone calls. Several outlets published information on the program, including many local *Patch* and *TapInTo* news websites that serve municipalities around the county. In addition, *NJ.com*, the largest New Jersey online news platform, ran an opinion page guest editorial on *Set the Table!*, which was written by one of the host participants who is also a Middlesex County employee. Project staff, including a representative from the Rutgers POET team and the County, participated in a live interview on WCTC, a local radio station during which they discussed *Set the Table!* and the host opportunity. *Destination 2040* and *Set the Table!* were also featured on a television program, *Spotlight on Middlesex County*, which is shown on local cable access and hosted by Freeholder Director Ronald Rios.

Those interested in participating were directed to an online application that screened for their county of residence and age (over 18 years), collected contact info, and identified whether they were available to attend one of several host training and orientation sessions. Qualified applicants then received an introductory email and worked with Rutgers POET staff to establish how they would retrieve their host kit and training if they could not attend one of the orientation sessions.



Host Training and Orientation

Participants had several options for how they could retrieve the *Set the Table!* host kit. They were invited to attend one of several orientation sessions scheduled at various times and days of the week at locations across the county. Information on the orientation sessions is provided in Table 1.

If a host was unable to attend any of the orientation sessions, they could meet with Rutgers POET staff for one-on-one training by scheduling a brief meeting at Rutgers POET’s office at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy in New Brunswick.

The host orientation sessions included a brief presentation about the *Set the Table!* program, background information on Destination 2040, and a mock *Set the Table!* gathering where participants could take turns practicing facilitating and participating in the events. These trainings were fun and casual, giving hosts a sense of how their own *Set the Table!* events could be structured. At the conclusion of each host training and orientation, Rutgers POET distributed host kits and stipends. The hosts were asked to sign a letter of agreement before receiving the \$50 stipend.

Hosts were also invited to a closed Facebook group so they could post pictures from their gatherings and share suggestions and tips for facilitating discussions.

Table 1: Locations of *Set the Table!* Orientation Events

Location	Municipality	Date	Time
Middlesex County Administration Building	New Brunswick	Wednesday, February 27, 2019	8:00-9:00 am
New Jersey Audubon Plainsboro Preserve	Cranbury	Friday, March 8, 2019	10:00 am-12:00 pm
Blazing Star Cultural Arts Center	Carteret	Thursday, March 14, 2019	6:30-8:30 pm
East Jersey Old Town Village Tavern	Piscataway	Sunday, March 24, 2019	1:00-3:00 pm
Middlesex County Fire Academy	Sayreville	Saturday, April 6, 2019	10:00 am-12:00 pm
POET offices, Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy	New Brunswick	As needed	As needed



Discussion Kit and Activity

Set the Table! hosts received discussion facilitation materials in a kit distributed during the orientation sessions. Each host kit was packaged in a small pizza box with *Set the Table!* and Destination 2040 branding and was comprised of the following materials:



1. **“Chew on This” cards:** Engagement questions were presented as multi-colored game cards, named “Chew on This” with each color representing a different topic area of the Comprehensive Master Plan. The engagement questions are listed on pages 10-12 of this report. The host used these question cards to facilitate a conversation with the guests. Hosts were asked to cover a minimum of five topics during their discussion, allowing for some flexibility so meeting topics could be tailored to the interests of participants while still providing the County with robust feedback. The deck of cards contained 3-4 discussion questions per topic. The topics were:

- Public Services and Facilities
- Technology and Innovation
- Historic Preservation
- Parks and Open Space
- Public Safety
- Environment
- Economic Opportunity
- Transportation
- Public Health
- Arts and Culture
- Land Use and Development
- Housing

2. **“Food for Thought” cards:** The host kits also included “Food for Thought” cards that provided approximately 40 interesting and thought-provoking statistics and facts about Middlesex County. The cards were used as a tool for hosts to prompt conversation, provide interesting background information to guests, and as ice breakers at the beginning of the discussion.
3. **Feedback Forms:** Participants and hosts recorded their comments/takeaways from the discussions on a “Feedback Form” provided for each of the twelve topics. On the form, one side could be used for notetaking during the discussion, and the other provided space to summarize the top three “Big Ideas” that the group discussed. Hosts were asked to provide feedback on at least five topics of their choice. After their discussions, hosts sent these forms back to Rutgers POET in provided postage-paid envelopes.
4. **Host instructions:** The host instructions described the items found in the kit, as well as guidance for how to facilitate the gathering and suggestions for making the event both fun and productive. The host instructions also included some recommendations and planning tips for organizing the *Set the Table!* event, such as suggested language for invitations and what to look for in a venue.
5. **Participant information cards:** Hosts were asked to provide Rutgers POET with basic information about their guests. Questions on the guest information cards included occupation, age, municipality of residence, name, and email address. Name and email address were optional, and participants only submitted this information if they wished to receive email updates about Destination 2040.
6. **Return envelope:** A pre-addressed and postage paid return envelope was provided to all hosts. Hosts used these envelopes to return the Feedback Forms and participant information cards to the Rutgers POET team for compilation and analysis.
7. **\$50 stipend:** Each host received a \$50 participation cash stipend to offset the cost of hosting their gathering. Middlesex County and Rutgers POET provided the stipend to minimize the cost burden of participating in the program and as an incentive for participating. Hosts were asked to sign a letter of agreement upon receiving their cash stipend.
8. **Other:** The host kit also included a Destination2040 notepad, “I gave feedback” stickers for all participants, some snacks for the event, pens, and information cards about Destination2040.

An online, PDF version of the host kit was also available on the Destination 2040 website for those individuals who wanted to host a gathering but could not attend a host training or pick up a kit in New Brunswick. The online host kits were also available in Gujarati and in Spanish. The POET team also produced a limited number of physical host kits in Spanish. These Spanish kits included all the components of the English kit translated into Spanish.



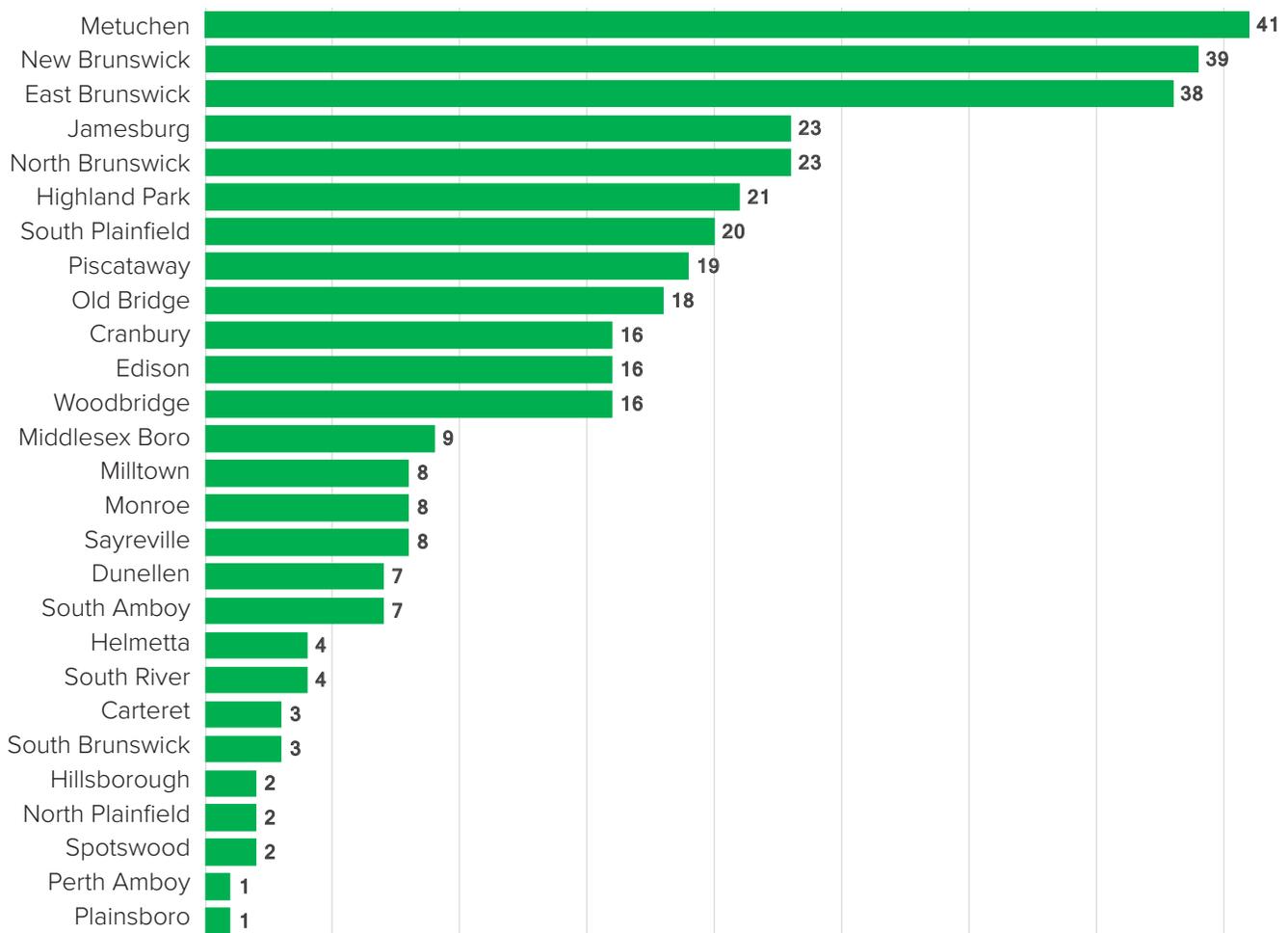
Demographic Summary of Hosts and Participants

Rutgers POET received a total of 381 participant information cards. Some hosts did not return their participant information cards, therefore the actual number of participants likely exceeds 381. Based on the participant information cards received, 64 participants were hosts, and 317 were guests.

Based on the demographic data collected from the participant information cards, *Set the Table!* hosts and guests reside all over Middlesex County. Figure 1 below shows the municipalities in which participants reside. The municipalities with the largest number of participants are: Metuchen (41), New Brunswick (39), and East Brunswick (38). Participants and hosts are from all municipalities in the county except Sayreville. Participants who do not reside in the county work or study in the county.

The ages of participants range from 17 to 87. The largest number of participants are between the ages of 46 and 65. Figure 2 details the distribution of participant ages by age segment. Participant occupations cover a variety of industries. Figure 3 summarizes participant occupations in a word cloud. The most commonly reported jobs are in education, government, engineering, and finance.

Figure 1: Participant Municipality



Summary of Discussion Topics

Hosts and participants were asked to discuss at least five out of the twelve topics included in their host kit. Hosts could either select the topics to discuss, or they could ask the participants to select the topics that most interest them. Some groups discussed more than five topics; however, they were only required to discuss five. The topics are listed in Table 2 and ordered by how frequently they were selected for discussion.

Subsequent sections of this report present the specific comments that groups made about each of these topics. They include the verbatim comments received, as well as a summary of themes commonly discussed under each topic. These topic-specific reports are ordered by how frequently the topic was selected for discussion. Within these topic-specific reports, some of the topics listed below are combined (such as Land Use and Development and Housing or Arts, Culture, and History) as comments were similar, comparable, or corresponding.

Table 2: Discussion Topics by Selection Frequency

Topic	Selection Frequency
Transportation	49
Economic Opportunity	47
Housing	47
Parks and Open Space	38
Land Use and Development	37
Environment	34
Arts and Culture	33
Public Safety	32
Public Health	30
Technology and Innovation	29
Public Services and Facilities	24
Historic Preservation	23



Listed below are the topics and the questions from “Chew on This” cards that participants were asked to discuss:

TRANSPORTATION:

- Is it safe for children to walk and bike to school in your area?
- What works well for you as far as getting around the area? What’s most difficult about getting to the paces you want to go?
- Are you ever concerned about safety when you are getting around by car, transit, bike or waling? In what way?
- If you could choose how to get around what would you prefer (walk, bike, train, drive, etc.)?

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY:

- How could the County better communicate how it uses your tax dollars? How would you most like to see your tax dollars spent?
- What do you think is the best way to attract small businesses to Middlesex County?
- What jobs, shopping or recreation opportunities would you like to see in Middlesex County that are not currently abundant here?
- How can we better prepare students and jobseekers for the workplace?

HOUSING:

- What, if any, trade-offs did you make when choosing to live in your current residence?
- Do you plan to stay in Middlesex County for the foreseeable future? Why or why not?
- What is the most important factor for you when choosing a place to live?
- How satisfied are you with the housing choices (like apartments, single-family houses, condominiums, duplexes, etc.) and affordability in your area?

PARKS AND OPEN SPACES:

- How much do you value the preservation of open space and farmland in Middlesex County? Where would you like to see more preserved open space?
- What activities would you like offered throughout the County parks system?
- What is your favorite park, greenway or trail in the county? Why?

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT:

- Describe your ideal community.
- Where should new development in the county (like housing, industry, shopping, etc.) occur? Should we prioritize building new developments or building in existing neighborhoods?
- Is it important to you to have stores, jobs and/or recreation within walking and bicycling distance from your home?

ENVIRONMENT:

- How can the County help make your community more environmentally friendly?
- What kind of environmental issues (such as pollution, air quality, water quality, etc.) affect where you live, and how do they impact your community?
- Is flooding an issue where you live? If yes, how can the County help?

ARTS AND CULTURE:

- What arts or cultural programming would you like to see in the county?
- What is your favorite thing to do in your area on the weekend?
- Where is the first place in Middlesex County you would take a new visitor?

PUBLIC SAFETY:

- Do you feel safe in your community? What would make you feel safer?
- Are you satisfied with the police presence in your community? Why or why not?
- What is your greatest safety concern where you live?



PUBLIC HEALTH:

- Do you feel it is easy to lead a healthy lifestyle in Middlesex County? What would make it easier?
- Do you think that Middlesex County is a good place for seniors to live? Why or why not?
- Is it easy or hard to find healthy food where you live?

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION:

- Do you have access to reliable, quality internet connectivity at home?
- How do you see technology (such as electric vehicle, smart homes, telecommuting innovations, etc.) changing the way you live, work and get around Middlesex County?
- What new technologies are you most excited about?

PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES:

- Does your area have adequate waste and recycling collection? What could make it better?
- How prepared do you feel for another natural disaster? What could the County do to make you feel more prepared?
- Are there services your town provides (like emergency services or the school system) that could be shared with nearby towns?

HISTORIC PRESERVATION:

- What does the history of Middlesex County mean to you?
- How can we better inform residents and visitors about Middlesex County's history?
- Do you think it is important to preserve historic buildings and places? Why or why not?

Transportation

Feedback regarding transportation in Middlesex County reflects on expanding and improving public transit options and bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure, creating safer conditions for roadway users, and ensuring that roads and bridges are maintained. While some groups point out that driving is often the most convenient transportation option in the county, they also welcome changes to decrease driving. Traffic conditions in the county are a popular topic for discussion, with groups recommending more studies to better understand the causes of traffic. Groups also express interest in expanding the use of electric vehicles and using technology to improve traffic and parking management. Others would like to see better transportation options for people with disabilities and elderly residents.

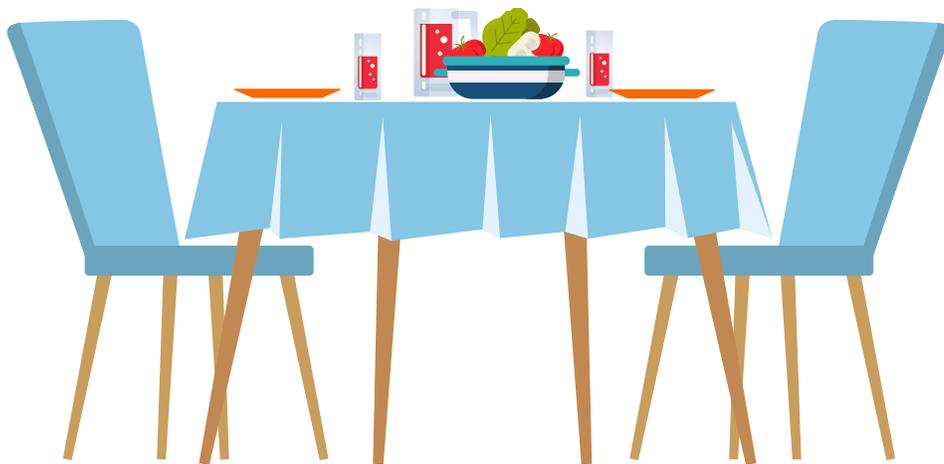
We prefer environmentally friendly transit like bikes and buses, but bike infrastructure is lacking and bus schedules aren't frequent enough.

Stop truck congestion during rush hour.

Increase crosswalk safety for pedestrians through curb extensions and flashing signs.

Comment Subcategories

Expand Transit Service	50%
Shuttle Service	12%
Transit Development	9%
Transit Improves Quality of Life	7%
Information	7%
Other	5%
Fare Pricing	3%
Service for Seniors/	3%
Bus Stop Improvements	3%



Public Transit

Most comments on public transit relate to expanding services in some way, either through the addition of more routes and stations or through increased frequency of service. Groups name a variety of transit modes as possible options to improve service in the area, including trains, buses, shuttles or jitneys, ride-hailing services, monorails, ferries, and light rail. Groups also want better information about transit options, as well as transit connections to shopping and employment. Several groups suggest connecting residents to shopping hubs through shuttle service, while others encourage integrating residential and commercial development with public transit stations. Groups also are concerned about County transportation services for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Expand Transit Service

- The “last mile” is an issue. How one gets back quickly to station of origin is problematic. Parking at train stations are limited.
- Train service is good, bus lines are good, but need to have more frequent service
- Amenities for electric cars are nice, but public transit is a higher priority.
- Just improve the public system in general. Clean it up and update it - and make sure it's accessible to all.
- Need routes from downtown to suburban malls and highway stores-for employment and shopping.
- More public transportation available. Some areas don't have any public transportation at all.
- Need better services from local busses around town
- We would like to see an inter-river ferry
- We would like a bus service that had many options for getting around the county
- We need more rail transportation throughout the county
- Weekend transportation is not existent. Volunteer service groups provide transportation. An improvement is needed, but service groups make up a big difference. Uber/Lyft can also be used. Maybe monorails.
- Aside from driving, need more transportation alternatives for traveling within town and county
- More public transportation so that we can have options. We don't fee like there are many option right now, so we end up driving. Public transportation needs to work. If my car breaks down, have to use uber.
- Bus system is lacking and it takes entirely too long to get to your destination.
- Need more/buses and better routes (MCAT).
- Need more rush hour trains (NJTransit) at regular intervals.
- The train station in North Brunswick and transit village should be realized (3)
- We need more light rail connections

- We would like to see bus hubs with efficient bus service on bus-only lines.
- Public transport needs to be reliable. Less bus, more trolley?
- More frequent service would help but not enough investing and old infrastructure.
- Coordinate bus travel
- Need convenient access for transportation
- Possibly develop a monorail to connect all of Middlesex County
- More transit and connectivity
- There should be a direct cross-connection between routes 130, 1, and 27 possibly a direct connection to the turnpike at least for busses
- Better transit overall
- Huge variations in local transportation options in county. Metuchen is well served, but not places like Cranbury and Monroe. Uber and Lyft hold some promise.
- Commuter rail services collaboration to include commuter rail service from New Brunswick to South Amboy - access to NE Corridor and NJ Shoreline. How? Using the Old Raritan River Rail Road



Shuttle Service

- There is jitney service between key facilities and residential areas, especially for aging populations
- We would like to see a free shuttle provided to local businesses and grocery store
- Have a mini bus on Saturday at a location in different parts of Piscataway that can go to the supermarket or just shopping for a few hours.
- More transportation to get to stores (e.g. jitney)
- Open space for park and ride with vehicles connecting to shuttles
- Develop transportation to and from shopping centers and downtown areas, including busses, shuttles, trains, and communal biking paths. Get the people to the shopping without requiring more cars on the major highways.
- Providing free shuttle services to public transportation facilities

Transit and Development

- Our state is built for highways.
- We suggest hubs near transportation facilities for high tech jobs, transit villages for commuters
- Not enough transportation near apartments
- Build housing in areas that allow residents to take public transportation not be car dependent.
- We are too car dependent
- Many want to have access to NYC/Jersey City and Hoboken with access via public transit. There is not enough walkability and there's a lack of an ecosystem (interconnectivity).

Transit and Quality of Life

- I prefer the train because there is no traffic
- More investment in mass transit may convince more people to use buses or trains, and that would result in less cars on the road, less traffic congestion and less air pollution.
- Improved public transit connections between work centers and transit hubs to ease congestion and reduce pollution.
- Transit alternatives are needed for people to connect to home and work.

Transit Information

- We need to know what transportations (including buses) is available. There is information missing about Keep Middlesex Moving.
- There should be electric live screens to display scheduled and estimated actual arrival of next bus for each line
- Make sure transit (especially bus services) are well advertised
- County should work to ensure all county residents are educated about transportation options



Service for Seniors and Disabled

- Access Link is impossible if you have a job. Long, unpredictable waits. Hard for people with “handicaps.” Not much better on fixed route buses-drivers can be nasty to passengers with visual impairments. Can’t even get easy fare information.
- The county needs better coordination in its transportation systems. Local transportation for seniors and disabled should be consolidated in a county wide system. Trains, buses and paratransit should work in a seamless manner.

Bus Stop Improvements

- Each bus stop can have a little library. When you take the bus from bus stop A, you can take a book and leave it to the bus stop that is your destination (e.x. in Europe)
- Bus stops should be clearly marked and preferably have a small shelter.

Fare Options

- We would like to see an all access pass for transportation. Direct routes bus/train and more bus transit routes would enable better work place opportunities to those who use mass transit
- There should be a flat rate for trips as opposed to zones (maximum \$3 per single trip)

Other

- Engineers should come up with quieter rail service
- Trains never run well in heat. Magnetic trains?

Street Safety

Participant groups offer comments on how safe they feel while walking or driving in the area. Pedestrian safety is mentioned frequently; respondents feel that pedestrians practice unsafe behaviors like jaywalking and that better pedestrian infrastructure is needed. Respondents are divided over whether their area is safe for kids to walk or bike to school. Safety issues relate to speeding, distracted driving, reckless driving, and traffic congestion.

- Enforce driver speed (3)
- Unsafe for children to walk (3)
- Feel unsafe walking at night (3)
- More and/or better trained crossing guards (3)
- Need better lighting on streets (3)
- General safety concerns on roads (3)
- Where I live it is safe to walk and bike to school. Many kids walk to school where I live. The buses are in safe areas for the kids, too.
- I am not concerned about safety where getting around. Rush hour is the hardest so I prefer staying until its clear.
- Downtown New Brunswick are awful. Need better enforcement of stop sign and matching but for pedestrians
- Some say yes safe for children to go to school; some say no-widen sidewalks
- Use county assistance for planning and implementation of pedestrian safety measures
- Education program (e.g. DARE) for children to be taught safety and road rules
- Is it safe children to walk to school? Yes, we love that South River is a walkable town and yes we let out kids walk to and from schools and we feel safe doing so. We love that many kids walk so our kids don't have to walk alone. Great community building.
- Also, talked about how you can't drive down Cranbury Road - too many tractor trailers, too many lights that aren't timed. As warehouses continue to grow, we need to be aware of the impact.
- Yes we feel our neighborhood is safe for children to walk in. We love that South River is a walkable town and yes we let out kids walk to and from schools and we feel safe doing so. We love that many kids walk so our kids don't have to walk alone. Great community building.
- Need to find ways to educate people on how to be a pedestrian: how to properly cost streets, not jaywalk, stop distracted drivers, use grants to install flag programs.
- Raise the speed limit
- Not enough signals and signs
- Increase crosswalk safety for pedestrians through curbs extended toward street and flashing signs

- NJ Bottleneck roadways are terrible for traffic and potentially dangerous
- Elderly should be retested at 70 for driving (safety concerns)
- In Metuchen, put “yield” signs on all highway entrances. There is confusion.
- Providing cross walking signals for pedestirans to cross the roads safely
- More street lights, more speed bumps on residential roads, neighborhood watch, more bussing to school even if its 2 miles away from the school
- My greatest safety concern where I live is the trucks that park in the parking lot because I have children and you never know who they are and they can take my kids and go right on the NJ turnpike and be gone.
- More traffic lights South of Amboy Avenue (currently none) in Metuchen to improve safety and traffic. Lights can blink red at night-there is less traffic.
- Main safety concern of reckless drivers
- Safe bike/walking paths that connect more towns to commute/to work at, also safer for kids, more attention to open space, greenways, parks
- Concerned about pedestrian safety while crossing streets with stop signs



Bicycle and Pedestrian Amenities

Some participant groups express a preference for getting around by walking and biking. They describe benefits of walking and biking such as reduced environmental impacts and getting exercise. Some say that they would walk and bike more if conditions in their area were safer. Others comment broadly that the area's transportation system is designed for private vehicles and commuting. Groups recommend expanding and connecting the sidewalk system, adding protected bike and pedestrian paths, and making it safer to cross streets. Two groups encourage more bike share options.

- Would love to bike. Rather not drive, walk or train
- We prefer environmentally friendly transit like bikes and buses, but bikes infrastructure is lacking and bus schedule isn't frequent enough. Also, infrastructure/enforcement to discourage unsafe driving (e.g. blocking the box @ Raritan and River Road)
- Connect routes over Raritan-some nice pedestrian pathways and abruptly in narrow roads with no sidewalk (esp. routes to Buccheleuch Park)
- Expand bike infrastructure and make it more convenient (6)
- More sidewalks or bikeways for kids to get to school (3)
- There is no sidewalk, no pathway, no crosswalk on Route 130
- Would prefer to walk. It's a great workout and better with the traffic problems all around.
- Safe to walk-not ride bike, Piscataway (not as safe)
- Walkover Parsonage Road from Target to Menlo Mall
- If all streets had sidewalks, we would walk more; We want to walk but don't like walking in streets; We need more bike paths
- More sidewalks - connect the whole county.
- More public/rental bikes (like Metuchen lime bike)/need bike lanes and awareness
- Have a pedestrian crossing at each intersection at each intersection
- Our preference: walk, train, bus, car
- Busy roads should have under and overpasses for pedestrians
- Improving and creating new walk ways and bike ways
- We need guardrails on roadways for pedestrian safety
- Edison needs to have sidewalks on all streets to improve safety and accessibility
- Need better pedestrian and bike safety, including more assistance on planning and resources
- secondary road traffic and lack of sidewalks and bikeways
- More crosswalks on county roads (e.g. In South River - main street needs more to safety cross North Main); think about bike paths/running paths, we have old infrastructure need to be more pedestrian friendly.
- Make Middlesex more pedestrian friendly

- Access to safe roads and sidewalks; extended buses from New Brunswick to Rt. 18 and Ryders Lane Corridors
- There is a demand for stitching together towns by looking at mobility factors, such as walkability and other transportation options
- Addition of bikes to rent as Metuchen has added
- Our state is designed for highways and commuting, we need more pedestrian friendly and shared motorized electric bike/scooters



Traffic

Groups comment on poor traffic conditions both on highways and secondary roads. They encourage traffic analysis studies to better understand the problem. Solutions discussed include opening up shoulder lanes, limiting truck traffic during rush hour, better scheduling of road work, building elevated highways, and increasing telecommuting.

- A concern with traffic jams on highways or generally (9)
- A concern with traffic on residential or secondary (2)
- Lot of back roads in county to get to your destination. Traffic is a main concern especially with municipalities that cut down all of the trees on land to build.

- Better traffic management - alternate ways to reduce volume (e.g. drive on shoulder)
- Do a survey of county roads at high traffic times - why is the volume occurring? Can anything be done to find out why and what can be done to fix it?
- Stop truck congestion during rush hour
- Eliminate too many trucks on major roads
- Increase number and design of roads to adequately handle the density of population and cars
- Analysis of which roads need to be worked on an a coordinated effort to schedule fixing the roads so as not to be tying traffic up all over
- Divert traffic with elevated highways
- Traffic is a problem at Kilmer/Sutton by Edison train. Too much jammed into one area without enough roads. "Shortcuts" jam up everyone--avoiding Plainfield Ave.
- More investment in traffic management: traffic near the high school is always really bad
- Better traffic management
- More employees should offer and encourage telecommuting to help reduce traffic congestion and pollution. Traffic congestion in commuting to work is a factor for many when considering where to reside.

Road and Bridge Repair

- Fix the roads and potholes (8)
- Will Landing Lane Bridge be redone?
- Need to either build new bridges or fix them
- Finish the 287 loop-add the Northbound entrance on Rte 27 so both North and South bound traffic is accommodated. This clears Metuchen traffic a lot
- Road work should only be done at nighttime
- Make it easier and faster to implement road repairs and improvements
- Improve and speed up road and highway repairs
- Road expansions need more consideration before being built
- Better roads

Driving is Convenient

- We prefer to use our cars. It's more convenient.
- I would choose to drive because it is the most convenient method.
- If I had a choice I would drive because it's safe to be in my own car than next to strangers. It's much faster because you choose how fast and slow you want to go instead of driving in someone's vehicle.

- I like to drive to get around
- I like driving because accessibility to move than 1 location in same trip; used to driving, especially with kids; driving from place to place is faster
- Driving is the preferred mode of transportation
- Driving works best for me as far as getting around the area. Most difficult is driving during rush hour.

Technology

- Add motion sensors for the lights. Generally increase technological abilities of traffic lights.
- Traffic lights at Calvert & Grove and left turn lights are a concern. The light on Thornall is not synched correctly.
- A good tool may be a mobility on-demand app for parking availability, train station info, delays, police, bus service, Waze, Google Maps, and NJTRANSIT in a central place for making informed decisions.
- Create an app that can help people with disabilities find ride share opportunities throughout Middlesex County

Parking

- There should be reduced rates in public parking in towns, where residents of town can pay the reduced rate.
- Parking is not adequate in downtown Metuchen.
- Need additional public parking in crowded areas; we spend too much on parking.
- More parking and smart parking
- Make parking easier

Electric Vehicles

- Have more charging stations for electric cars. It will make them more accessible. Also, there should be tax breaks for having them.
- Improve access to electric vehicle charging stations - county program to initiative 1 or 2 for all towns to get all on board
- Add electric car charging stations in work/shopping centers

Accessibility

- Create a stop where people with disabilities can get transportation to grocery stores, malls, and movies in their town. Perhaps a trolley or self-driving vehicle.
- More handicap accessible parking in all areas.

Other

- We need ride shares, education, and encouragement for annual awareness event.
- Our group finds it difficult to go East to West in the county. Going East or West means getting on major North/South routes than local roads. East/West road expansion and development would help alleviate North/South traffic.
- One needs to have a car in gated neighborhoods
- County, state, and local transportation needs to work more closely together and promote use-authorized routes
- There should be a water taxi from Carteret to New Brunswick
- No more 710 ton trucks on River Road is good, but is there spill over onto Easton or Stelton? Our group is interested in transparency and frequent reporting about traffic impact studies. Put these on social media.
- We would like better access to local business and services



Economic Opportunity

The *Set the Table!* groups that discuss the topic of economic opportunity focus on developing programs for students and graduates to expand their skills and explore careers, finding new ways to make Middlesex County an attractive place for existing businesses to expand and new ventures to establish, and making sure that government within the county is spending its funds efficiently and wisely. Groups also emphasize the need to ensure that the county is affordable in order to retain existing residents and attract new residents. Several groups also point out opportunities to collaborate with other counties and communities by sharing services, thus making the larger region economically stronger.

Comment Subcategories

Education & Career Development	44%
Support Business	18%
Attract Business	16%
Financial Transparency	15%
Cost of Living	3%
Shared Services	3%
Other	1%

Address disparities in education that disproportionately impact lower income communities. Ensure that all schools in the county prepare students for the workplace.

Give incentives to small business to come to Middlesex County (tax breaks and lower prices for leasing of space for business)

Use social media and “Your tax dollars at work” signs to communicate how tax dollars are spent.



Education and Career Development

The participant groups make recommendations towards ensuring that all students have the ability to develop job skills as part of school curriculum. Groups suggest setting up workforce development programs and job fairs to ensure that county residents at any career stage have access to resources that help them learn new job skills and be matched with job opportunities.

Youth Career Prep

- I think students can be better prepared for the workplace after high school by making it a mandatory graduation requirement to have a written plan as to what they want to do immediately after high school and their plan to get there. Schools need to teach more “learning” skills, not just “studying” skills. More working in groups and teams should be a focus.
- More practical skills should be taught in schools
- Offer skill practices (certain classes), such as internships in high school
- Offer the “strong” test (aptitude test to assist decision for future)
- Coordinate a partnership with industry and education; collaborate earlier in partnerships for internships and mentoring programs; teaching realistic expectations; provide better career paths
- Many teens lack basic skills, and participants highly recommend that area schools incorporate more life and professional development into their core curriculum since familial commitments and economic challenges often prohibit area teens from participating in community programming (Whereas they do attend school as regularly as possible).
- Bring back career days in middle and high schools
- Renewed emphasis on teaching/learning skills and trades
- Invest in programs that offer both skills and trade opportunities and traditional higher education (e.g. college)
- Give more options for career counseling in high school; not all kids go to college
- Paid internships: connecting the small businesses with students; educational programs
- Need financial literacy and budget management taught in schools, starting at a young age; need to understand budgeting so people don’t learn the hard way
- Better school age exposure to training
- We suggest more opportunities in higher education past high school
- We suggest training programs, apprenticeships, and career counseling
- Colleges need better career services
- Provide more programs and curriculums for the students to be able to have the skills for the workforce, including being taught to sell themselves.

- Participants were especially interested in how local private and public entities can support economic opportunities and employment/professional development of area youth



Adult Job Skills Training

- Skill up best programs
- Develop workshops in communities to aid the community with preparing resumes, cover letters, and to help develop interviewing skills
- Add typing classes
- Coalitions/groups to help build up folks with mock interviews, including proper clothing. Need volunteers to assist.
- Increased job coaching
- Have training programs at restaurants for employees that have culinary experience, paid for in tax dollars and using county residents
- Make job training accessible throughout the county
- Job seekers and students lack the communication and organizational skills that translate to real world experience
- Better communication for job seekers on help
- Provide work training
- Accommodate growing jobs in engineering/city planning

Create Job Opportunities

- County needs to work more closely with cities to provide more opportunities for work
- Equal job opportunities for everyone. Get the job for what you know, than for who you know?
- Need better/more information for job/career training and opportunities in county; end up hearing about the opportunities after door closes; needs to be broadcasted (not just on the internet), but targeted announcements
- Increase workforce in public services in order to speed up and make a better customer service experience for the residents
- If a company gets tax incentives, they must agree to mentor or take on interns (paid) at least 2 (for small companies: 15-50 employees); 3-5 (companies 51-100)
- Require all major employers to hire a certain number of local workers
- Provide incentives to large technology companies to bring more jobs in the technology field to the county (e.g. Amazon)
- Green infrastructure, work force development, storm water utility

Provide Equal Educational Opportunities

- Address disparities in education that disproportionately impact communities of lower income. Ensure that all schools in the county prepare students for the workplace.
- We should make sure there are low tuitions
- Rutgers appears to have some established programming that is helpful for first-generation college or immigrant families learning how to navigate and prepare for higher education. Perhaps this can be expanded or shared with our educational institutions.
- Support and expand opportunities for kids
- Parentings classes and job training for low-income families
- We want more subsidized education in Middlesex County; if so, college and continuing to work in county for a certain number of years, their education should be subsidized
- Schools are good, especially for the affluent and educated families

Vo-Tech Schools

- Develop a county-wide Vocational-Technical school. We have STEM and other classes
- Fortify the vocational and magnet schools
- Increase of vocational schools that are geared in preparing students for work and responsibility versus preparing them for college. There are no guarantees with preparing a child for college, but learning a trade/skill will allow students to be able to work and sustain their own living.
- Expand the Vocational-Technical system, consider carefully the location of “academics.”

- More vocational and magnet schools
- Improve and build more magnet and alternative schools for kids with specialized talents and interests (arts, music, science, languages, etc)



Importance of Good Schools

- School systems for kids and community are important to me
- Infrastructure for kids in schools is a necessity
- Good school systems are offered in town and is an incentive to live in the area
- There should be more programs provided to the schools to better our kids.
- The next largest factor in choosing a long-term residence in or around Middlesex County was the educational to professional transition. It's great here, from Rutgers right into major engineering related manufacturers or businesses: Colgate, Johnson & Johnson, L'Oréal, etc. We hope to see the relationship of the county with these major companies improve and grow. It makes us want to stay.

Jobs for the Disabled

- Classes and information for disabled citizens to create businesses
- Train businesses to work with and hire citizens with disabilities
- Open a hiring agency to work with and help find employment for young adults with disabilities

Job Fairs

- Hosting job fairs, or workshops of preparing resumes, workshops of responsibility, and the importance of work.
- Provide a class at the library or community center to prepare students and open job fairs
- More job fairs with specific industries

Other

- Establish an actual arts high school
- Promote “life-long learning more vigorously. Create more opportunities in local communities beyond Rutgers OLLIRU.
- Focus on building schools to accommodate the housing developments - is in a state of imbalance (just one superintendent per county)
- Abolish school boards instead implementing a municipal department
- Emphasis on learning with a critical look at other educational staff
- Outsource simple supportive services
- Employment Service in New Brunswick is the worst. Most employees there are only there for a pay check and give you a bad attitude
- After school programs should be better advertised to parents

Support Business

Groups are not only interested in ways to draw in new businesses to their community, but they also want to see the county enhance the competitiveness of existing businesses. Many of the comments involve streamlining the ways businesses interact with government.

- Create environment for co-work spaces and provide resources to support these businesses
- Add work-share facilities for office and research activity for tele-commuters and independent contractors
- Are landlords incentivized to hold out for higher rents, which discourage small business?
- Support remote work and other lifestyles
- Lower rent to bring more businesses here. Small businesses don't get good tax breaks and

they pay the highest taxes.

- Support small businesses
- Encourage more small businesses to open in Middlesex County
- Increase low-rent rates to attract small mom and pop businesses
- Make zoning requirements easier
- Getting more help from zoning government agencies
- Zoning laws should be more flexible for mixed use
- NJ taxes on businesses are out of control
- Streamline planning board and zoning (applications, permit, and paperwork); keep codes up to date
- Emphasize buying local in order to support local economy
- Clean up to attract patrons
- Clean curb appeal with good lighting
- Incentivizing retail business; small bus grants; create pop-up stores or co-op retail
- Businesses should be able to have permits to have outside seating to attract more customers
- Local government has to be more pro-business
- Metuchen was almost anti-business
- Eliminate anti-competitive permit and licensing requirements
- Hire ad campaign to “buy local”
- We support the expansions of liquor licenses into grocery stores and supermarkets
- Rethink Liquor License laws. We need more social bar spaces like “backyards” at bars. Relax, enjoy a drink, and play games (e.g. live music)
- Make liquor licenses more accessible so restaurants can stay in business
- Add a rotating beer and local beer garden in Metuchen
- Does the tax structure encourage or discourage small business occupancy?
- Eliminate red tape (make processes easy and accessible)

Attract Business

Groups suggest that the best way to ensure that the county remains a center for business growth is to promote the county's assets and develop incentives to attract new businesses. Many comments focus on the importance of developing small businesses, both for the employment opportunities they present and the benefits they bring to the consumers in Middlesex County.

- I think the best way to attract small businesses to Middlesex County is by boasting about our university, our hospitals, our location near New York and Philadelphia, and our diversity. We need to keep our data on businesses, large and small, up to date. Businesses will be impressed the graduation rate at Rutgers University and our hospital scores. We have a lot of research and development going on here, and continue to grow economically.
- Diversify types of workplaces/industries
- Add more to an accessible website
- More focus on entrepreneurship
- More opportunity for families and individuals to rehabilitate or reinvigorate businesses or properties that did not succeed. Grants, loans, and awards for county residents. Also add a checks and balance system to avoid real estate companies buying in excess.
- Provide annual conferences, awareness, education, and empowerment to reinvest, own, and preserve in our communities
- Give incentives to small business to come to Middlesex County (tax breaks and lower prices for leasing of space for business)
- Give incentives to larger companies to hire employees within the county to get more jobs for area residents.
- Create a virtual storefront for local businesses, so people can shop online and pick-up in store
- Engage corporate entities in county-level planning exercises and planning implementation
- We need to preserve small town life and attract businesses so we can continue to walk or bike to support towns
- There is a need for industry
- Infrastructure development: businesses will be attracted to an area where it is easy for them to move goods and for people to visit their business
- We should provide more tax incentives
- There should be incentives in the form of low rent tax breaks
- Provide incentive programs for taxes
- Provide low interest business loans and grants
- Make rents lower, provide financial incentives and tax breaks, and invest in those areas with main streets so those small businesses can have a sustainable future.

- Host a county/municipal exposition for businesses to showcase what they offer, a kind of meet and greet/business fair
- Have less regulations and licenses to attract business with affordable and accessible marketing opportunities
- Lower taxes
- Investment funds that supported seasonal/lifestyle business in the offseason
- Provide tax incentives to attract small businesses
- The best way to attract small businesses to the county by having ads, a newsletter, and business article papers about the county's benefits.
- College-aged and young population is the prospective customer. Therefore, Middlesex County should attract small businesses for these groups.
- There should be better preparation for economic growth

Financial Transparency

Groups would like to see their tax dollars used effectively and wisely. Though groups express different priorities for how tax dollars should be spent, all want to ensure that funds are being used efficiently. Many suggest better informing the public on what programs and amenities their tax dollars ultimately fund.

- Want to see an itemized of all of the expenses on a quarterly basis
- Corrupt politicians need to go
- I am not sure what is in place now to inform county residents how tax money is being used, but possibly sending each resident that pays taxes a quarterly or yearly report would be beneficial. I think it's important for tax money to go to helping other people, so I guess social services is more important for how our tax money are used.
- Taking votes with county residents. Tax dollars should be spent on fixing and remodeling torn down places. We should develop children programs.
- Tax dollars needed to pay emergency services
- County should oversee financial statements of every town. There is too much collusion/ friendships among town.
- Administrative staff can be reduced
- There should be more responsible budgeting
- Tax Dollars should be spent more on helping the homeless
- Get rid of corrupt cops and politicians
- County to be more transparent in spending tax dollars; being accountable; county providing better follow-up and customer service

- Better use and communication of tax dollars
- Less waste by government; need fire trucks and elaborate fire stations
- Social media and “Your tax payer dollars at use” signs to communicate what tax-payer dollars are being used on
- Stop handouts to large corporations
- Lower cost of infrastructure
- Governance/transparency issues at local level management can be eased somewhat by county
- Economic development project update - faded on the store fronts
- Local social media as alternative to twitter to connect directly with politicians and policymakers to understand outcomes
- To explain county tax spending, include a pie chart and explanation with municipal property tax assessment matters (our borough breaks its spending down, but we just see an overall percentage for county tax share)
- Add infrastructure costs to developers costs (roads, schools, utilities)
- increased transparency on budgets, salaries, and benefits of elected officials
- Restructure pension packages
- Health care plans for retirees should be changed to Medicare

Cost of Living

- No high taxes
- Unaffordable housing is a concern
- It is too expensive to live. We should lower taxes/increase incomes
- More diversity in economic groups in Middlesex County

Shared Services

- Streamline municipal and school facilities to save taxes
- Shared services: some communities do, but maybe the county could gather what towns need to share and what towns are looking to share
- More collaboration and incentives for cooperation
- Reciprocity between towns, across the county in inspections

Other

- Increase grant money
- Increase the amount of affordable loans

Land Use and Housing

Participant groups express concern about the affordability of housing in Middlesex County. While many desire to stay in the county, they feel that without a diverse range of options for high-quality, affordable housing, it would be difficult for them to do so. Groups also express that high property taxes contribute to the uncertainty many feel about staying in the county, and they highlight the need for increased housing for seniors and disabled residents. Groups highlight the diverse set of factors that contribute to their decision of where to live and their characteristics of an ideal community.

Groups share a wide range of opinions on the level of development that they believe communities should pursue. Some believe that the County should control development and stop over-crowding, while others believe that the best course of action is to encourage development and increase density, especially in downtown areas and near transit stops.

Provide incentives to those buying their first home in Middlesex County. Help us stay.

Develop mixed-use neighborhoods with plazas and green spaces that are served by affordable transit, bike-lanes, and essential stores within walking distance.



Comment Subcategories

Affordability	20%
Downtown Development	13%
Where to Live	9%
Property Taxes	9%
Rehab and Reuse	8%
Density	7%
Ideal Community	7%
Housing for Seniors and Disabled	7%
Overdevelopment	6%
Other	6%
Diverse Housing	4%
Community	2%
Shared Services	2%



Affordability

Participant groups discuss the need to keep the cost of living, particularly the cost of housing, affordable for those in a wide range of income levels. They want to see affordable housing that is also quality housing.

- Most people living at Spring Street plan to stay. It's cheaper high-rise living than Manhattan, Jersey City, and Hoboken and is walkable to the train, restaurants, and theaters. However, we need better shopping.
- Add more public/affordable housing near transit and essential shopping
- We need more affordable housing for families and students when they graduate from college
- There is overpriced rent for apartments, communities, and duplexes.
- I love my house and community. Want to stay, but a town like Metuchen can be hard to afford in retirement (or early adulthood) and expensive for young families.
- The county is not affordable
- Most plan to stay, although some have moved out because of cost
- Housing prices (both renting and buying) are way too high. It's difficult for young families to commit to this area when costs/taxes are so high, especially without consistent/accessible transportation in most areas (or increasing NJT prices).
- With high prices and not a lot of options, we and most people we now feel like we have little to no choice when it comes to renting/buying. We feel stuck with whatever is available-and it isn't much. I don't like much about my apartment except its location.
- The area is expensive. Couldn't afford to buy current home if purchased in 2019. Taxes are high - cost of housing is high.
- Buying a house is expensive
- I don't plan on staying in Middlesex County because of taxes. Middlesex homes are very expensive; I won't be able to afford it.
- Build more affordable houses
- We need more affordable housing
- Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the lack of affordable in safe condition (well maintained, free of rodents, with working utilities) is the greatest injustice faced by residents in this community
- Post-recession climate has still made it challenging for making long-term purchasing decisions, such as buying a home. Millennials, who are paying off student loans and need access to jobs in their degree, are less interested in buying homes.
- Provide incentives to those buying their first home in Middlesex County. Help us stay.
- Develop an organization that can help people come up with ways to save for housing
- Affordability is a big concern

- Affordable housing for the working middle class
- Maybe start up housing scholarships
- There currently is not enough affordable housing to meet the county's needs. Most housing is not affordable for working middle class people. Rent prices are too high.
- Though when choosing housing neighborhood, safety and parking are priorities, affordability trumps all preferences. Most neighborhoods that are first choices are not neighborhoods we can currently afford to live in.
- Since affordability for housing in NJ is pretty much non-existent, we suggest pursuing efforts to create small, affordable homes in settings close to walkable downtowns
- We need more affordable housing. All construction downtown New Brunswick is luxury; gentrification needs to be curbed
- There is a need for affordable housing
- More affordable housing to new rentals
- Use existing buildings and turn them into affordable housing instead of tearing them down
- We love Middlesex County - it's a great mix between open farmland, small town and urban. That said, housing is so unaffordable. We completely lucked out with our living arrangements, but a lot of friends aren't as lucky. We understand that property taxes are important, and that housing is in high demand, but there has to be a way of redistributing the burden so that there's more upward mobility for families to be able to afford homes. Maybe some kind of credit towards people who buy and refinish fixer-uppers.
- Hard to find truly affordable housing as a young person/student or as a senior citizen living on a fixed income
- I would stay as long as its affordable and the taxes are low
- There is diversity in home choices, but cost to high
- There is still a huge gap and dire need for appropriate housing for low income and seniors (70+); rent cap; no rent higher than \$800 at age 70
- Offer incentives for first time homebuyers for affordable housing
- The first opportunities offered to lower and middle income families to purchase foreclosed properties; eliminate vacant property
- More public housing should be built.



Downtown Development

Many participant groups appreciate walkable communities and want more development within walking and biking distance to downtowns. Groups describe positive examples of “downtown” development around the county and would like to see it emulated in more places.

- Our community has everything we need in walking distance, so we are content.
- We would like to see more recreation, stores, jobs, and bike infrastructure within walking distance
- We would like to be able to be in bicycling and walking distance to schools
- Middlesex county should develop more walkable, livable, and sustainable towns
- Develop walkable downtowns with stores that the community actually can use

- Add walkable spaces/downtown
- Create town centers for towns that don't have a downtown – this creates a more sustainable environment
- Develop more walkable communities near mass transit. Attract better amenities to downtowns
- Developing the “downtowns” of smaller, accessible towns to attract businesses and pedestrians, etc. (Somerville’s closure of Division St. is a good example)
- Create destinations, “placemaking” to act as economic anchors and attract investment
- Create more pedestrian malls (like the one in Somerville)
- New development should be re-development; mixed use, different sized housing, stop trying to build on every piece of open land, re-use spaces
- Encourage more development near transit
- Develop mixed use neighborhoods with plazas and park-like green space with a town feel served by affordable transit, bike-lanes, and essential stores in walking distance
- Local services near home are great for older residents. Look at Woodmont in Metuchen. Other places would like to have that walkability and convenience. Mixed use and mixed price points, need to have both.
- More downtown areas. There are other counties that offer more opportunities to shop, eat or just walk around (e.g Somerville). It would give a sense of community
- More areas with a downtown area that offer restaurants with entertainment
- Develop “The Spot” in Metuchen as center of county’s arts and entertainments. This makes sense given train line from NYC.
- Very important to have stores, and/or recreation within walking and bicycling distance from your/my home. Gives a great reason to enjoy nature, environment, give some extra time to go on a job, or workout.
- We would like to see shopping and recreation nearby
- Have stores, restaurants, offices in a center and the living area around it so it is walkable as well as drivable
- We love open spaces and the idea of more shops/restaurants within walking distance - that’s difficult to navigate. Love the idea of repurposing old, unused buildings, but also love the quiet. In keeping that in mind, we think that developing new/old neighborhoods should get input from everyone involved to find a compromise. The environment is important, but so are people.
- Milltown is great because you can walk; stores and recreation are all around town; also many work in neighboring towns and New Brunswick, but walking and bike riding is really not safe in areas due to traffic

Factors in Choosing Where to Live

Participant groups differ about how content they are with Middlesex County's offerings. Many enjoy living in the county and plan to stay, while others wish the county was more affordable. Some feel that where they live and work is too congested and lacks some of the assets they look for in a place to live.

- Cost of living and dense population are not what I personally am looking for
- In the foreseeable future, I don't see myself living in Middlesex County. I want to live in a more comfortable, affordable setting.
- Taxes too high, it's too congested, the cost of living is too high, school funding formula is unfair, and there is overdevelopment
- Great access to everything from our area, including NYC/Philly. Want to stay put, need to figure out how to afford it.
- For choosing where we want to live, borough services and emergency services, a central location, and cost of living are important.
- We look for a place to live with our family roots and relationships, have access to NYC, Philly, Jersey Shore; NJ Turnpike GS Parkway, great arts program, great restaurant and nightlife
- Most important factors to live: school district, taxes-highest taxes in Middlesex, places to shop locally, crime rate, safety, parking, transportation
- When I choose a place to live, I think about safety, school system, property congestion, land elevations, and nearby shopping. Taxes (property) are another consideration. It's very expensive in New Jersey, not just Middlesex County.
- We are long time Highland Park residents and have traded personal space for a walking town with a sense of community. We pay high taxes but we don't have stable houses
- Ensure there are no broken down buildings (e.g. Ford Avenue); clean/safe/good water that isn't cost repressive; all utilities need to be affordable and clean/green as much as possible, family friendly, safe, robust parks
- The most important factors I look for when choosing a place to live are first safety. I want to make sure my kids can go outside and play safely. I also would like the neighborhood to not look congested with parking and housing. Housing that is somewhat spaced out with yards and gardens in more appealing and enjoyable to take care of. More parking and a driveway makes it more convenient.
- Participants plans on staying in Middlesex County in future
- Participants are satisfied with living and/or working in Middlesex County
- When considering where to live, our group cared most about the distance between work and family. That includes commute. One couple chose not to live in Middlesex County, and chose Hillsborough because of Rt. 1 traffic alone. Housing decisions rely so heavily on the freedom of movement, and without significant changes to the major roadways in Middlesex County, people are looking elsewhere.

- We chose middle sex to be closer to work and school
- I chose Middlesex County to cut down on my commute
- Us living in Middlesex County is dependent on job security. Most of us would look into moving elsewhere if we were to lose our current job/position.



Property Taxes

- Property taxes are too high
- East Brunswick housing is satisfying, but these taxes are very high.
- I would stay in Middlesex County as long as property taxes do not rise. Very expensive for a small house like mine.
- For reasons to leave: taxes are too high; stabilize taxes, lower taxes; for reasons to stay: central location
- Reduce property taxes
- Cut taxes
- Keep taxes down
- Many are leaving due to taxes.
- Lower property taxes
- Regulated taxes, no additional taxes minimum tax or no tax after the age of 65 regardless of if you are working or not, you are still expected to pay taxes

- Once your children are no longer school age or age 21, you should not have to pay school taxes or if you do not have children, you should be able to have your reallocated to retirement funds
- Taxes and housing are too high in Middlesex County
- Lower the taxes or increase salaries to mediate the high taxes. Yearly cost of living wages increase.
- Some way to reduce property taxes or freeze them
- Taxes are too high. It is very difficult to afford while trying to enjoy quality of life
- Taxes are too high. Residents are finding it very difficult to keep up. Some say that they are only staying for personal reasons such as family



Rehab and Reuse

- Redevelopment where there is infrastructure exists.
- Better plans for redevelopment
- Upgrade existing instead of new
- Don't build, improve on existing land
- Rehab instead of new build
- Build in vacant spaces - turn them into attractive shops (e.g. mom and pop shops); bunch of vacant shops on Rt. 27 and Rt. 18
- Prioritize development of existing neighborhoods
- Prioritize redevelopment as opposed to building new. Concentrate growth (less car-centric)
- Emphasize smart, green redevelopment
- Fix what we have
- Just stop building. If we don't allow new building developments, we will have to look at fixing existing.
- Repurpose developed areas or make small parks or green infrastructure because of continuous development or redevelopment
- Utilize unused store fronts instead of approving new development
- It's important to redevelop thoughtfully. The Residence at Roosevelt is a good example of reuse. Need to redevelop/develop what's not beautiful, and preserve open space.
- Rehab for community, not business

Characteristics of an Ideal Community

- We appreciate the small community feeling and good school
- Section off city space for educational and public purposes; cultural, historic promotion; town hall educational meeting; shopping marts for each town
- Our preference is a safe, green neighborhood/community with a downtown, greenspace, volunteerism, and less than 10,000 people
- Our ideal community has a clean downtown with curb appeal; it is also safe and walking friendly, access to mass transit, small, medium and large retail options (excluding big box), generally business friendly, well lit, diverse food/restaurant options, green and smart, theater and arts program, low taxes, quality educational for all, and has parks and recreation
- My ideal community is well kept with a maintained downtown; it has an inviting atmosphere for small businesses, is a safe community with a good recreation program, has community active police, music in the park, and keeps schools included with the town
- My ideal community has local markets, supermarkets, home grown stores, shops that serve the local community, specialty stores and food stores. Infrastructure investment grants

needs to be accessible for municipalities to beautify the community. Local hubs for culture, performing arts programs, community center growth; programs for young people hands on constructive

- The ideal community provides social support and fluidity between groups as ideas and people change
- An ideal community is not overdeveloped with reasonable, control on traffic, perhaps staggering schedules to eliminate rush hour
- Our ideal urban environment has amenities at nature
- Kids being able to play outside and being safe. Having this feature would make a community ideal.
- We would like to see lower taxes, more on main street, more small businesses, lower rents, especially for business, and uniforms in school
- Metuchen is the ideal community

Housing for Seniors and the Disabled

- Some in the group are staying for mixed age community with many resources and cultural opportunities
- Create affordable housing for citizens with disabilities in the communities they live in across Middlesex County
- Create housing where elderly parents and children with disabilities can co-habitate
- Transition housing for seniors that don't meet criteria for government housing (near poor), but need a senior housing facility (e.g. middle class)
- Middlesex county needs more affordable housing for seniors and the disabled
- Improve senior housing options within existing developments and urban areas
- The community must provide more housing options for seniors that are affordable and of good, safe quality in order to retain this important sector of the population in New Jersey
- More up to date housing that is affordable, senior, and handicapped friendly. Some New Brunswick living areas are old, and not updated
- In trying to stay local, what about co-housing, intentional communities for retirees, boarders? Creative ideas to keep older residents remain in town would be great. Woodmont is an example.
- There is very little senior housing
- Create group homes with easy access to recreational opportunities and employment in Middlesex County
- The minimum wait for building more senior houses is too long

Over Development

- No more building in neighborhoods and we prefer new land development with shopping malls that have parking decks.
- Don't build anymore – there is too much development, preserve what we have, tear down and rebuild
- Protect existing communities from development
- We are over developed
- There is overcrowding and traffic – the county is building too many apartments
- We need better control of building in county and to center the rise of taxes on the poorest homeowners
- Find a way to stop present homeowners when high apartments and townhouses complexes are built, bringing in more school children and taxes on poorest homeowners
- Reason for leaving: taxes, development, congestion
- Need to better control development
- There should be a moratorium on new housing. This will lessen all kinds of pollution in this area. With all the over-development, animals (e.g. deer) are losing their natural habitat
- Become the “garden” state: less people more resources

Density

- Building up preserves open space.
- The last point here split us. Half the group loves the sprawl. We want NB to go up and up. Bigger. We love the train to NYC. We want more express trains. We want more of the city here. The other half feels like you have to go farther and farther from NB to find “suburban” homes. “Suburban” setting in the county are being built up, resulting in more density. The county is moving towards urban/rural. How can we ensure that strong “suburban” towns persist?
- Replace older smaller single family with multi-unit homes
- Allow new multi-unit homes
- One may move to a city with more density for convenience
- We think that all new buildings should include a requisite “patch of green.”
- There is not enough space for homeowner hobbies or gardens
- The county should densify
- The group liked driving to stores, jobs and recreation; we do not want walking distance and like the residential feel of where we live
- The county should rezone for density
- The county should maximize density

Other

- “Geographically gifted”
- Buildings must be environmental efficient- build for the future
- More development on rock
- Acquire fair and sincere input from a local community regarding new construction
- Carteret has poor living development. Shopping centers are very small. There is nothing for me to do in that community. It looks old, trashy.
- Implement mandatory vacant lot cleaning
- Better and more timely plans for Middlesex County
- Coordinate development with transportation
- Stop building jails
- Need for warehouses vs affordable housing (bring in revenue with warehouses)
- Need more shopping centers

Diverse Housing Options

- More low cost housing developments instead of large mansions
- Need more family homes/cities - many are less than adequate in New Brunswick, but need better transportation to get to recreation areas
- Middlesex County offers diverse housing options for most stages of life (single, family, etc.) While Middlesex County is not exactly affordable to live in compared to most of the country, it is affordable in comparison to most of New Jersey.
- The county should develop different housing options which are more affordable
- There is lots of variety and availability of housing
- There are plenty of housing choices
- We would like to see more options beyond luxury apartments, high density/saturated in luxury apartments
- There is lots of new constructions (older homes being knocked out), but we need in-between new homes for reasonable prices

Community

- Our group plans to mostly stay in the county because we are vested in our communities
- Some complexes might not have the appealing sense of community that makes living in county truly worth it
- Develop town “Welcome Wagons” to help new residents with information on recycling, etc. and maybe a gift card to a local restaurant to encourage support of local businesses
- Moved from NYC to Sayerville because it is a good area to raise a family and has an easy commute into the city

Shared Services

- County should encourage municipalities to share services (even schools) to reduce municipal tax burdens
- County services should be shared for senior and children in small municipalities
- Small towns should coordinate to make resources available. Make sure Dunellen doesn't lose its small town feel.

Build More Housing

- Build more building complexes, the prices will go down
- Build newer homes surrounding East Brunswick or renovate existing homes
- Keep investing in housing. It's the most important factor when looking at new homes

Parks and Open Space

Participant groups express a desire for a wide range of events and activities in Middlesex County parks, as well as new amenities to host events and activities. For both new and existing parks, groups agree that it is important to ensure that residents are informed about park amenities, that the parks are safe at all hours of the day, and that they are well maintained. Many groups mention specific favorite parks that they feel add to their positive experience in Middlesex County. Several groups express a desire for more new parks and additional paths and greenways. In addition to this feedback, groups emphasize the importance of conserving natural habitats and maintaining a balance between development and open space.

There should be a way for volunteers to participate in maintaining parks.

Since trips to the shore are not always an option, residents would greatly benefit from outdoor community pools and splash parks.

Advertising, advertising, advertising. Our group kept saying this over and over again. We want to hear from the county about their parks.



Comment Subcategories

Event and Activity Suggestions	29%
Preservation of Natural Spaces	17%
New Amenity Suggestions	14%
Favorite Parks	10%
Other	8%
Maintenance and Improvements	7%
Paths and Greenways	6%
Information and Promotion	5%
Safety	3%
Accessibility	1%



Event and Activity Suggestions

Participant groups provide many suggestions for expanding the county's event and activity offerings. The suggestions include community gardening, boating, plays and cultural events. Groups also talk about adding more options for seniors, dog owners, and those looking to exercise. Many name favorite parks in the county and what activities they currently participate in. However, some are concerned about cleanliness and managing nuisances like poison ivy.

- Add a botanical gardens/rose garden and miniature golfing
- Add boating activity groups (paddle boating, kayak, etc.). This would get a new group of people together and maybe people would learn about/respect the bodies of water our county has.
- More hiking trails on the Raritan River Waterfront
- More accessibility to horseback riding
- Place a high value on preservation; I would like more country sports for kids and competitive programs
- More community gardens and related programming
- More summer programs for children to keep them busy
- Open up kayaking and canoeing on the Raritan River
- Add art classes throughout the parks
- Provide free summer activities for kids like soccer, baseball, football, and face painting. Divide kids by age. Provide fences and guards.
- Not really an idea, just prevalent themes: Roosevelt Park is underutilized-folks want year-round programming
- Activities: open air performances in all county parks; canoe/kayaking/watersports, dining options; promote farms/goods; wineries; NJ is the garden state-we should have farm market stands and promote or create garden shows, host agricultural events-bee keeper activities
- Activities: concerts, plays, races (walk, runs) for all ages
- Large outside ice skating outdoor area
- Love parks with a range of activities
- Monthly activities (e.g. movies in the park), culture day, Easter Egg hunt, etc
- I like the city, but it can provide more activities in the park, so young people can have an array of choices of things to do
- More activity - make better use of space
- Offerings such as paddle boats, minigolf, picnic sheds, bandstand, campfire pit
- Add swimming, boating, bike path/lane; theater in the park, concert series/plays in the park, more food truck festivals

- Create a Middlesex County annual park day or open space day
- More programming; camps, nature hikes, more senior and kid programs, family movie nights
- Plays in the Park is great! (Newsletter is helpful)
- Music, plays in all towns for free
- Our group is also interested in more reasons to “hang out” in the park with adult friendly activities - opening up park spaces up for more music festivals, parades, live performances, fitness events. Things like community dance classes, and even “Adult” play ground or fitness equipment.
- More special events at parks
- Add open air events for arts, culture, and historic preservation
- Would like to see more foreign festivals/cultural events (e.g. Mardi Gras)
- More cultural event performances
- Create a bike tour throughout the towns to make residents aware of bike lanes
- Resurrect the Horse Show that used to been in Johnson Park
- Resurrect something similar to the Park Town Outing that Highland Park used to have on Labor Day
- Host plays in the park, concerts, ice skating, paddle boating, bike/walking trails, food contest, flower shows community flower plating in Thompson park
- Add more courses and classes in county parks
- Develop an interactive garden and plants, specifically plants with a purpose (herb garden) and having art to interact with in the gardens
- Park header (maybe internship), who can work with kids during summer. This person can organize activities for kids. Each person will be assigned to a certain park to work at.
- More programs for geriatrics and seniors
- Parents can volunteer for these summer activities. Just provide an opportunity for parents to choose which area they would like to volunteer for. We would like to see better service like access to bathrooms.
- There should be a way for people to participate in and maintain parks
- Embrace the Raritan River and incorporate it into plans for expanding parks and recreational activities



Preservation of Natural Spaces

Participant groups express concern about development reaching too far into open spaces and natural assets. They would like to expand farmland preservation efforts and create more green space in Middlesex County.

- We value open space; open space also stops over development; no more traffic; problems are going to arise when they develop “Frost Woods” in East Brunswick. Our kids go to Spotswood for school, which is a traffic nightmare
- Green space: help municipalities, seal up waterways; create green space in all downtowns; water and farm preservation; all downtowns should have open space for programming, open air opportunities to promote more destination options
- Better development of open spaces and less use for warehouses
- I wish there was more open space
- The south of the county is well preserved in terms of space. Towns like East Brunswick and

New Brunswick are overly congested and there is not a lot of land left. Areas like Frost Woods should be left alone since there is already a space and an overpopulation problem.

- Preserve more in Cranbury to relieve pressure elsewhere (Southwest corner and Middlesex); farmlands should be big spaces, not broken in private pieces
- More preserved open space in South Brunswick because it's overdeveloped.
- Don't allow development in preserved spaces
- More preserved open space; more parks and fields
- Success of farmland preservation; out county is doing a great job
- Preservation of Johnson Park, Middlesex Greenway, and others
- Preserve the wetlands in Edison
- Develop conservation in and education for the wetlands
- Preserve more open space (e.g. Ford Ave needs to be increased to 6 acres and all future redevelopment not standard "4" acres)
- Develop more open space and farmland preservation
- Instead of expensive land purchases, purchases should be done through zoning
- Preserve open space because new development adds to congestion
- Preserve open space
- Keep development in existing areas of density - preserve open space
- Conserve preservation spaces; only build in existing spaces
- Keep open space and redevelop on already built on spaces; use open space funds
- We want to keep land preserved, not built on
- Better balance for open space preservation and new development

New Amenity Suggestions

- More dog friendly areas in parks
- Some of the activities that could be added in county parks would be skating rink
- More activities: paddle boats, better marked walking and hiking trails, theater in the park, drive in movies, ice skating, steam activities, recreation model aviation, more lake activities, concession stands, summer camp, goose patrol
- We could use a public golf course in the Metuchen/Edison area
- No dog parks have shade and flood in rain and are generally lacking dog park amenities (stuff for dogs to chase around or loops to walk dog)
- There should be shaded playgrounds with ziplines and swimming options
- More interesting parks/points of interests (e.g. flowers, zoo, dog park, pond, more publicity about events happening)

- Create cultural and educational center for the community and visitors to the parks
- Improvements to golf courses including club moves
- Build more YMCAs, which would provide more access to athletics (pools, basketball courts). Put more basketball courts in our parks
- Add options for ice cream and hot dogs in parks.
- Especially because trips to the shore for larger water parks are not always an option, residents would greatly benefit from outdoor community pools and splash parks
- Add adult exercise equipment
- Develop parks in urban areas with plenty of seating, water features, greenery, and playground equipment
- More parks that have play areas, senior seating area, and walking areas
- Add county sponsored small farms on small open spaces



Favorite Parks

- Favorite parks; Johnson: lots to do: animals, bike paths, program/East Jersey Olde Town; Bicentennial, Rutgers Gardens
- Parks in Jamesburg, Cranbury, Plainsboro; we like passive use parks (we didn't know about parks in the north part of county)
- Favorite trail: Raritan Bay, Boyf Park, Roosevelt Park, Thompson Park, Johnson Park, Foerder Farm

- My favorite park is Morrill Park in Colonia. We take our kids to feed the animals. We play soccer, baseball and football there. It's a big park and is kept very clean.
- My favorite park is Fords Park in Fords. Since I do not drive or have a license so this park is very convenient for me. My son plays football, baseball, and plays at the park all the time. The park could use some updates and be a little cleaner especially with the dogs using the bathroom in the grass. My kids would like updates to the basketball hoops and a skate park added. Also add more drinking fountains.
- My favorite park is Fords Park because it's close to where I live and it's spacious, so you can play more than one activity.
- My favorite parks are Sewaren Park and Roosevelt and Merrill Parks. Kept clean and safe.
- I enjoy the butterfly park in East Brunswick as well as Johnson Park
- We like recreational parks, exercise stations, and specifically Mercer County park is nice
- Favorite parks: Johnson Park, Roosevelt Park, Spring Lake
- Roosevelt Park is a favorite
- Favorite parks are Roosevelt and Colonial
- The first place in Middlesex County I would take new visitors is the waterfront pier in Perth Amboy. It is relaxing and has a beautiful view. Across the street there is an ice cream place called Bayside Creamery.
- Roosevelt Park is the first place I would bring a visitor

Maintenance and Improvements

- Improve the area around lake
- Recreation areas need to be expanded and updated (very run down, outdated); especially in crowded ones (e.g. New Brunswick), more recreation outdoors for kids; update of bathroom stalls in public areas; if updated, may help with obesity role.
- Preserve good county parks - seem better maintained than are NB city parks, much are not used enough because of safety concerns.
- There is an issue of poison ivy
- We would like to see more garbage cans in the public parks
- The water in parks is not clean enough to go into
- Municipal parks need to take better care of their parks, but in order for that to happen, they need help
- More parks that aren't "trash land" in flood plains. More diverse landscapes: hills, forests. Possibly add some cliff climbing.
- Need more and better bathroom Facilities
- Work with larger cities such as New Brunswick, which does not budget well for parks and open spaces, to provide and preserve paths and open spaces

Other

- Generally aim for a planned community, reduction of distribution centers, more open spaces, variety of shops and services, traffic control, and expand roads before buildings
- There is a need for affordable housing or open space
- We enjoy visiting county parks
- More flexible hours for parks in winter; keep restrooms open, especially in winter, and keep the lights on.
- Take assets we have and make them bigger and better
- Difficult to find parks with open spaces and cover from the sun
- Parks are too loud with noise from cars
- Maybe find ways to form partnerships with corporations
- Jamesburg is surrounded by Monroe Township, who makes decisions that Jamesburg has to live with
- The animal havens should get more public attention. Telling their stories will have people connect with them more, as many are not aware what they do/where they are.

Paths and Greenways

- Highland Park is a good place to live because of the parks and walkability
- Create gardens in open spaces and paths to walk or bike
- There are lots of parks, but reaching them requires a car
- There should be greenways and open space connected with dedicated bikeways
- Work with rails to trails to parallel each other better
- Our group was really invested in more bike paths, dog friendly park spaces, and communal garden spaces. Essentially, more biking surfaces, and ways to get to the parks via bike, and more fenced areas for gardening and pet activities.
- More paved area for biking and other outdoor activities
- More hiking trails, Greenway is paved, but this is not as cool as unpaved
- Connect trails from “park to park”, “town to town” to encourage active lifestyle

Information and Promotion

- We would like to see better advertising for park events/activities; more new media (social) than old media
- Advertising, advertising, advertising. Our group kept saying this over and over again. We want to hear from the county about their park. What’s going on today at Johnson Park? Not just Facebook. We want to see the county on Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook stories, etc.

- Rutgers Gardens: awareness, make it more accessible
- We would like to know more about what county resources are available to us in a fairly dense urban environment. Increase awareness of county resources?
- Increase education to school districts on park offerings
- Need better communication about community events in Parks
- County media - get information out to people (county, tv station, marketing, radio announcements)



Safety

- Security cameras should be added on the greenway
- Add additional lighting and patrol offices
- Develop safe areas around that insulate, protect, and attract people to parks
- Improve security in parks

More Parks

- Multi-use parklands: community farms/gardens near population centers.
- More community parks and gardens
- More parks and nature reserves

Accessibility

- Need handicap accessibility and seating in the park area
- There should be county shuttle to local parks for seniors

Shared Services

- Collaborate on purchasing to have towns have more cost effective to replace park equipment. Have a program to reduce costs.



Environment

Feedback regarding the environment touches on water management, pollution mitigation, public engagement on environmentally friendly practices, and better recycling and waste management practices. Groups express the belief that it is important to prepare for and integrate emerging technologies such as electric vehicles and home renewable energy installations. Some groups mention concerns about development reaching too far into natural areas and open space, and some support increased development density in order to preserve natural lands. Groups want more effective enforcement of environmental laws and regulations to make sure Middlesex communities are protected from the effects of pollution. Several groups suggest the creation of local gardening initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of the environment, increase green space, and provide fresh produce to the area.

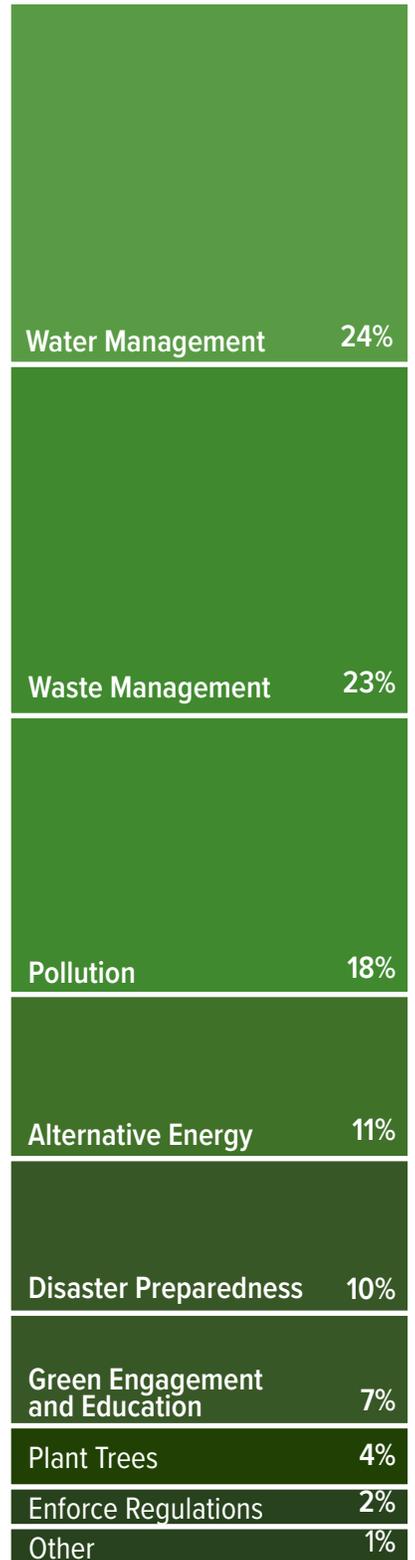
The County should encourage all municipalities to follow the lead of North Brunswick in requiring electric charging stations in new buildings.

We need mixed recycling, more public recycling, and compost pickup.

Help municipalities set impervious cover reduction goals.



Comment Subcategories



Water Management

Participant groups express concern about drinking water quality and flooding issues. They would like the County to use better drinking water filtering practices, install preventative measures against flooding, and better assist flood victims. Groups also discuss the need to protect bodies of water from pollution.

- Improve waterways
- Drinking water tastes horrible; mineral deposits on plumbing - 20 years propose have been working to remove tractor trailers from River Road. Improvement in AG/Noise but this has shifted problem from Piscataway to New Brunswick; air pollution means environment, especially on Rover Road is affecting the river
- Environmental degradation should be avoided, quality drinking water protected, noise pollution should be reduced
- Help municipalities set impervious cover reduction goals
- Less building to make it so that there is more places for water to go
- Rain gardens in increments of 5 years, preserve vegetation, less paving more open spaces
- Sewer infrastructure in New Brunswick needs work - heavy rains cause flooding
- Finish the flood project and get out of flood zone
- Dredge the South River
- Develop rain gardens and cisterns to help with water
- Where's the environmental inventory for New Brunswick? So much construction. Rutgers University is also doing flooding and run off streets. Flooding is bad. What efforts are being done, who is the county working with? How can we make it more transparent?
- There are dismal swamp homes and the park gate roads are a concern
- There is new market flooding and add a pumping station
- Flooding is a concern
- Middlesex County needs more innovative measures to be adopted (using porous asphalt, implementing community rain gardens, etc.) more forward thinking environmental initiatives
- There are too many chemicals in the water
- Have better water filtration for drinking water to make it more safe and drinkable
- Design better drainage at underpasses at the Metuchen train station
- County roads should have more drainage installed/catch basins for towns
- Begin historic hydrologic research: what were the streams before we built upon them and cultivated them?
- Overdevelopment of new housing in flood zones (crowded in higher risk areas)



- Do all evaluations at a watershed basin - look regionally
- Flooding is a huge issue but towns don't know how to measure and manage it
- Enforce impervious concrete regulations
- Water quality is good
- Ground water should be replenished, along with a restriction of herbicides and pesticides
- New Brunswick water smells, is discolored, and the water is expensive. The cost to consumer has gone up so much. There has to be better way to help the town/county
- Water filtration should be enforced. Old Bridge has fluoride
- Integrate porous parking services
- I don't want to buy a house if it's in a flood zone because the insurance is ridiculous
- We have a concern for sea level rise and its impact on coastal communities
- Ensure clear storm drains and pavement grading
- Better assist victims of floods
- Rahway river release in Cranford is doing a great job!
- Plan for sea level rise and flooding; don't built on flood plains

Waste Management

Participant groups suggest making recycling easier, as well as expanding the number of types of material accepted for recycling. They also suggest adopting policies that restrict the availability of single-use plastics and expanding composting programs to handle food waste.

- Lack of composting availability; need water and air quality improvement; elimination of open space is a problem for people and wildlife
- Re-open Metuchen recycling center and expand options for regular and toxic waste; change the shape of recycling cans
- Highland Park used to recycle more items. They no longer do so. They should go back to that
- Reduce waste, reduce single use plastic, develop better packaging, and create electronic recycling options
- Make recycling as easy as possible, and push for campaigns against single-use anything and everything.
- Develop community composting
- We need mixed recycling and more public recycling, including compost pickup
- The garbage dump smell and affects town and surrounding areas throughout Middlesex County with a methane/rotten egg scent
- Enforce local plastic bans
- Create a landfill cap and develop parks. They need better maintaining.
- Make sure that there is adequate recycling
- Have containers every few years with a deposit
- Although we have come a long way with the number of people that recycle, we need to do more, and somehow make it mandatory. We could accomplish this by charging a fee for garbage, pick-up or pay people a small money amount for bringing in their recyclables.
- Apartments or communities, any group housing arrangement, must be held more accountable for recyclables, at either a municipal or county level. It sucks to separate recyclables only to have the apartment complex put it all into the same truck.
- Develop better communications for recycling
- Expand garbage bin power-washing to more towns
- Help seniors with their waste and recycling collection. It is still overall a pretty good system.
- Hire more people to help with the recycling process
- It's not clear how to recycle electronics, TVs, and the rules for recycling keep changing
- Letting us know if these waste, and recycling collection can be replaced.



- Make Middlesex County a hub for recycling/upcycling; incentivize business to use and process recyclables
- More recycling opportunities for items not regularly accepted such as electronics, paints, etc.
- Need for more leaf collection and tree removal that can then be used for mulch
- Our area does have a certain place for waste and recycling. It could be better by having more garbage cans, so we can put all the garbage in there instead or sometimes it's going on the floor.
- Our group was all about recycling on this topic. Single-stream appears to be useless to us. Bring recycling education back into schools.
- Make it so we are able to recycle plastic bags
- Recycling should be picked up more than twice a month
- Some Edison residents pay for garbage pickup. We do not see an amount deducted from our taxes to offset this
- We suggest more public garbage cans and public recycling
- The dumpsters can be dumped out more often
- Unfair that some county homeowners have to pay for private garbage pickup
- Waste and recycling in Milltown has been good; however, recycling has recently become more restrictive; is stuff really getting recycled?
- Make it so that waste and recycling reduced by banning single-use plastics
- We'd be willing to fund more recycling centers or prepare a place or places. We want more of this.

Pollution

Participant groups express concern about pollution on several levels, including in the air, water, and ground. Several groups identify the need for better clean-up practices and restrictions on the use of chemicals and materials known to be harmful to people and nature.

- There are many environmental issues (water, air, etc)
- Air quality is my main environmental issue. Carteret is specifically having to deal with these issues
- Ensure clean water and air
- There are water problems, the air quality is bad, Spray tek is a concern
- Get rid of JR Reed and Spray tek
- South Plainfield has a superfund site that contaminated the ground soil and water
- There is so much garbage around the town. Maybe the county can initiate a day each year to encourage a county-wide clean-up
- Have the county help with mandated clean-up of underground storage tanks
- Offer financial aid to county residents with these clean-ups
- Pollution of all kinds (noise pollution, litter, chemical pollution) is a growing concern. We've all seen untreated pollution over the past few years - not sure if people are getting more careless, or if there has been less enforcement
- Testing air quality during peak and off peak times
- Have an annual test for water and air in all towns
- Enforce pesticide control
- Remove carbon dioxide and other toxic gasses from the environment
- Regulate carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere. That will reduce the effect of global warming and climate change
- Clean up contaminated areas
- Restrict herbicide, pesticide, lawn fertilizer, and flushing medication
- Air quality has negatively impacted my health
- I am concerned about water quality and would like to swim in local waters
- I am concerned about airplane air residual like fuel fallout
- Hudson river pollution is travelling downstream
- Air pollution is a concern
- We reduce our car emissions, while adding more cars to the road.
- The air quality causes deviated septum, lung, nose and throat conditions. Leave NJ for a few

days and many are sick for days upon return

- The water is toxic with csb ions
- Less dumping and reclaimed waters
- Using technology to decrease pollution (e.g. incentives to consumers to buy more eco-friendly cars)

Disaster Preparedness

- Communication needs to be enhanced during storms
- We don't think we are prepared for a natural disaster. We need to be updated and keep up with disaster preparation
- Every building should have a panic room
- I don't think we're prepared for another natural disaster
- Make the public aware of what the emergency plans are
- More people need to have backup generators
- We feel prepared for a natural disaster. Through the Greebrook flood project we prepared ourselves
- Distribute a newsletter about safety during natural disasters. Keep community in the loop about natural disasters.
- Increased readiness for national disasters
- Social media is the way people connect now, and the tight-knit neighborhood communities are fading. To prepare for natural disasters we can use schools or churches events to bring our neighborhoods together. We can discuss plans in the event of an emergency, so we are all connected with the same information.
- The disaster is not the problem, the cleanup is too long
- We don't feel the county is prepared (e.g. the hospital, police department, fire departments may have plans but the general public is not aware of those plans)
- Develop a municipal community alert program to keep residents apprised
- Communicate disaster readiness and recovery plans at the county level and across towns, including any coordination and reliance between towns
- One concise and timely emergency notification system throughout county (e.g. Nextel, Nextdoor); that has a variety of filters (e.g., by county, town, neighborhood, crime, weather)



Alternative Energy

- Make it easier to go solar/green. Use incentives to do so
- Spread the use of solar panels
- Start solar farms - for energy
- Reduce energy consumption, maximize alternative energy
- Initiate solar farms, change zoning practices, and expand senior housing
- We see electric charging stations being built at malls and restaurants. Keep stations away from priority spaces as most don't drive electric cars
- Start solar farms - for energy
- Promote electric cars and more sustainable energy sources
- Increase investment in more renewable resources
- Promote solar and alternative energy
- Integrate solar enabling on public buildings

Green Engagement and Education

- Have an incentive for businesses to adapt greener practices
- Create a way for students to do something for the environment that is attached to graduation (e.g. plant trees and flowers, take class at Duke Farm and learn about the environment in Middlesex County)

- Have classes available in our local libraries about the environment
- Create a program with free plants and trees to plant at your home or garden in Middlesex County
- Create events to promote cleaning (air and water); events by business and funds for additional removal of garbage
- Develop events and activities by local and nonprofit business such as an annual cleanup day, literature for children, and events to promote cleaning the environment
- Support global environmental initiatives
- Distribute information on sustainable jersey certification grants
- Encourage environmental awareness: recycling, cycle, walk, add solar panels, plant trees
- “How can the county help make your community more environmental friendly?”
- Have the county put together a website where polluted areas within the county are listed and what the status of these areas is

Plant Trees

- Save the trees, they help reduce the speed of the wind, lessening destruction during storms
- Replace missing plants and trees. Trees that were cut down by a utility company need to be replaced
- Plant more trees
- Plant more trees
- We want the county to create a program for tree planting
- Maintain trees on county roads

Electric Vehicles

- Encourage all municipalities to follow the lead of North Brunswick and its requirement for electric charging stations as regulated for new buildings
- Use green vehicles for county use to cut down on pollution (e.g. electric cars)
- Develop electric charging stations for county residents
- Require all new corporate business to include electric charging stations
- Higher efficiency and electric vehicles implementation and incentivization

Enforce Environmental Regulations

- Some existing regulations (like anti-idling and recycling initiatives) don't have any enforcement measures in place. We wish there were more ways to support regulations
- Strengthen state and develop county environmental protection agency.
- Develop enhanced penalties for littering

Other

- Build nature into communities: wild natural gardens, fruits and bees, vertical farming, and less lawns



Arts, Culture, and History

The *Set the Table!* groups that discussed the topics of art, culture, and history in Middlesex County focus on expanding the county’s arts and cultural event offerings, raising awareness about the county’s history and historical sites, and aggregating information about events taking place within the county. The groups describe enjoying events such as Celebrate Middlesex Day and Plays in the Park, as well as historic sites such as East Jersey Old Town. In addition to focusing on events and activities, groups hope to see more area dining and shopping amenities, specifically more “mom and pop” establishments rather than “chain” stores. Overall, they feel that there is plenty to do in the county and they appreciate the county’s ethnic and cultural diversity. The respondents want opportunities to restore and reuse old buildings and encourage incentive programs to save historic sites.

Need someone at the county level to help municipalities keep historic preservation alive and help homeowners understand the value of historic preservation.

I showed my group the Middlesex County Youtube channel and videos. They loved them, want more, and want them to be more visible.

Improve salvage practices when demolishing historic buildings.



Comment Subcategories

History Education and Promotion	21%
Fine and Performing Arts	17%
Event and Activity Suggestions	12%
Activity Information and Promotion	11%
Restore and Reuse Old Buildings	8%
Lots to Do	6%
New Amenity Suggestions	5%
History and Sense of Community	5%
Funding	5%
Restaurants and Shopping	5%
Small Town Feel	1%



History Education and Promotion

Many of the participant groups identify the historic sites and events that they feel add value to life in Middlesex County. Groups also suggest raising awareness about county history events and historic sites through various forms of media, both online and offline. Additionally, groups suggest that placards and informational displays should be installed at historic sites throughout the county to further connect residents with the area's past.

- Excited for expansions to East Jersey Old Town Village. East Jersey Old Town, "After Dark," recreates the Drake Taven for adults, for instance.
- Make stories of local history more available via web, postings, outreach, etc. Teach local history in high schools with curriculum that includes Middlesex County. Use historical maps, too.
- You can inform residents and visitors about Middlesex County history by doing carnivals and/or block parties by showing them different booths (each with a different historical item/place) in one section.
- Need to inform residents
- Towns can develop historical displays in their town centers with various facts for which the town is known (e.g. well-known or not so well-known to residents)
- Hire reenactors who can play various historical figures and they can make appearances at primary and elementary schools and talk about themselves as that historical figure and answer questions from the kids
- Install more historic markers (plaques that identify) and signage that notes dates, etc.
- Need someone at the county level to help municipalities keep historic preservation alive and help generate ideas to help homeowners understand the value of historic preservation.
- Need for more education programs and access to historic places in the county (especially in New Brunswick)
- Restore the history of Middlesex County
- Highlight occupied historic buildings with descriptive tablets
- Make history of the county more comprehensive and accessible
- Inform public with placards with enlightening information, virtual tours, facebook fun facts, and apps
- Encourage reenactment of original 1778 fireworks over the Raritan annually on July 4th. Make it a big festival in New Brunswick/Middlesex County in the forefront on July 4. Make it a destination
- Historical fairs are good

- Use East Jersey Old Town better: better programs, better advertising of them. The Edison Tower in Edison is a wonderful asset that needs more promoting and programming for a wide audience.
- East Jersey Old Town and other museums/houses are great
- Expand Old Town
- Middlesex County Museum is great
- Develop preservation groups in town to save historical sites and buildings
- I am worried about the Manhattan Project and clean up
- Advertise through websites, newspapers and flyers to inform visitors about the county
- Increase promotion of history through plaques
- Promote history through social media
- Newsletters, Internet, for sale/open houses in the county should include some sort of newsletter as to why one would want to live here.
- More awareness of historical preservation efforts at community events; booths for East Jersey Old Town, Edison's laboratory, etc. at the fair grounds, annual parade events, Celebrate Middlesex, etc.
- Again, social media presence. More Youtube, Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook stories. Short, sweet, good content showing this stuff off.
- Allocate public funds for radio and advertising and awareness of landmarks. Free tours and days when factories and warehouses are open to the public
- Public funds for TV, programs to show tours, and show the aesthetics of workplaces, churches and schools to promote education of landmarks
- We need social media grants and promotion for tours, community organizations, non-profits, schools and work places for the voices in social media (e.g. Church of the year, building in the area that has been around for ages)
- There should be tourist offices in cooperation with Chambers of Commerce. These offices should be well-marked from highway exits
- Historic buildings provide beauty and bring visitors to the area.

Fine and Performing Arts

Participant groups identify many assets regarding fine and performing arts that they enjoy throughout the county and make suggestions for improving and expanding these assets. Many are looking forward to area cultural projects that are in the process of being completed, while others want a greater number of more easily accessible entertainment options in the area.

- State Theater is the best place to take people who are visiting. New Brunswick has a lot to offer in terms of entertainment
- Encourage parking at reduced rates for theater goers
- Develop an ability to reserve parking when a theater ticket is purchased
- On weekends, I like going to the Stress Factory Comedy Club in New Brunswick. They get a lot of big name headliners and have good food.
- Middlesex County should have better quality concerts
- Create a county play troupe
- We have the Baron Art Center as well as plays and music in the park. I enjoy the local fairs on Main Street and car shows. My son loves fishing in parks and bay.
- Have more exposure to local artists/local artistry-painters and musicians.
- I like museums
- I appreciate the theater, especially in South Brunswick
- I like to see painting, sculpture, and opera
- State Theater in New Brunswick is an asset
- Plays in the Park, diners, concerts are all enjoyable events
- Murals make the town better
- Arts and Crafts clubs are valuable assets
- Expand exposure of literary works, books, CDs, art, music, entertainment and literary from specializing in culture, diversity topics and culture education. Implement these mediums in curriculums in elementary school
- We like free/community Theatre - less expensive
- Develop more jobs in the arts
- Integrate displays of arts, science, technology and history - to help interpret what we are viewing.
- The State Theater is an asset
- Thomas Edison Center at Menlo Park is an important cultural feature
- The Barron Arts Center is an asset
- Plays in the Park are good to have

- Foreign films, independent film (movie club) are enjoyable
- Looking forward to New Brunswick arts center
- Develop more entertainment options

Event and Activity Suggestions

The participant groups propose a range of event and activity ideas. Several groups suggest that Middlesex County parks and public spaces are good places to host concerts and festivals. Specifically, many respondents are interested in events that highlight the county's diverse cultural groups, that include musical and dramatic performances, and that raise awareness amongst residents about existing local cultural assets.

- Middlesex County should have their own fair where the county makes and promotes the programs the county offers
- Develop a cultural fair that lets each culture exhibit their dress, food, dance, etc. South Plainfield has a "multi-cultural" day. The county should have a day like this.
- Create more street dancing and festivals with food and entertainment
- Concerts in every park, not just the three in which they are currently presented during the summer
- Foster programming with all municipalities and arts organizations
- Develop an annual field trip for school age children as early as age 5: trips to museums, art festivals and music festivals.
- Host a county culture week (annual) specializing in artist entrainment. For example the days of the week could be: Monday (Polish), Tuesday (Latinx), Wednesday (Irish), Thursday (African American), Friday (Caribbean), Saturday (Asian)
- We need more festivals and arts catered to specific culture; more African-American cultured events; following up idea #1 - if we already have these festivals, more residents need to know about them
- Host movies in the park in the summer
- Foster programs for school age children for events in the county. Increased programming at the library.
- More community cooking classes - we love cooking on the weekends, and helps keep in budget. Would definitely pay entry to help pay for countywide things.
- It would be great to have county/community events geared towards couples - there's a ton of stuff for families with kids, but much less for adults.
- Regionalize programs
- Develop local hubs for culture, possibly a "Municipality Day". Each municipality would have access to their local county park (small grove) to commemorate the occasion. An event like this would help foster performing arts programs and a sense of community

- Host events for local musicians and artists to create together, meet, and share with locals
- Host a free events that connects music and nature
- More events and activities generally
- Host free music concerts on the weekends



Activity Information and Promotion

Groups suggest ways to improve the promotion of Middlesex County cultural assets and events. Many groups specifically point out the need for a unified, county-wide resource (a calendar, brochure, and/ or newsletter) for all events. They also want to raise awareness about the locations of cultural assets to both residents and visitors.

- Develop wayfinding and kiosks at train stations, with branding efforts for all, not just county destinations. Enhance the text culture, via advertising, or through partnerships that are willing to promote a “web button”
- Develop one website containing one county-wide calendar containing activities and places to visit. This would be very helpful when searching for things to do.
- This wasn’t one of our topics, but after all the talk about needing more social media, I showed my group the Middlesex County Youtube channel and videos. They loved them, and want more, and want it to be more visible.
- For the County Arts Newsletter, what about joint advertising? For how to get word out about all venues and their programming in place they should use both online and hard copy resources.
- In terms of communication of all countywide events of local communities, maybe top 10 things to do in Middlesex County this weekend; we would like to see promotion of all county playhouses/ theaters, big and small

- Develop an inventory of what we have across all towns (not just New Brunswick), and then build new options including: sports/film events, night life options, theaters, museums, performances, dance, etc.; include way-finding to locations
- Public libraries can be a central outlet for accessing county information. It is one of the most accessible venues in each town and where the public (residents and non-residents) can visit during the days generally and during events.
- We need better promotion of local performances
- We need an information center in populated areas for events taking place. We don't know what's going on in the county; there is a need for signage and mailings in Middlesex County, especially for new residents; mailings can be sent by category, such as kids events; we are tired of trying to look everything up on the internet and spending hours in it
- Better advertise free/low-cost events happening in town
- Advertise events in the county that are free or available to all
- Improve communication with residents so we know what events are going on
- Have a traveling show to visit parks and see when one should visit parks
- Develop an arts calendar similar to the Princeton calendar
- Develop a quarterly or annual "what's happening" brochure
- More awareness about what arts and cultural assets are available
- There should be one county-level resource for residents to access the services and resources available (e.g. senior centers, arts & cultures, events, walking trails, recycling events, etc.)

Restore and Reuse Old Buildings

- Very important to preserve buildings
- Develop incentive programs to save historic site
- Find adaptive uses for historic buildings
- Improve salvage practices when demolishing historic buildings
- Restore only useful historic buildings, avoid "empty shells"
- Repurpose large structures
- Preserving vs. Progress -- preserve the "old town charm" while making it modern to appeal to younger generations
- Restoration helps draw people and keeps town attractive and well-kept; reduce red tape
- Preserve buildings of special value: reflect commercial, industrial, and technical sense of community
- Create public/private partnerships for restoration/education and outreach
- Maintain historic buildings and sites before they become unsalvageable (historic cemeteries)
- Restore and maintain facilities like Boyd Park canal locks

Lots to Do

- My favorite thing to do is go to Woodbridge Mall and go shopping and hang out with friends.
- I would take a new visitor to downtown. In New Brunswick, specifically the Rutgers University buildings, State Theater, restaurants, night life, diversity and culture.
- I would first take a visitor to New Brunswick, Rutgers Gardens (Farmers Market), South River - River Thai (best Thai food ever), and Downtown Cranbury
- My favorite thing to do on the weekends is visit the South River Community Gardens, Rutgers Football Games, South River Movies in the Park, Woodbridge Wednesday's, Rutgers Gardens, taking kids to various parks, family hikes, Johnson and Thompson Park zoos
- I enjoy going to the Thomas Edison Museum, Rutgers (football stadium, gardens, Zimmerli Art Museum), Roosevelt Park (Plays in the Park), and town redevelopment area
- Regional highlights for me include the Children's Museum and Arts Center and drive-in movie theater
- There are plenty of cultural and social opportunities
- Favorite thing to do on the weekend is to stroll/walk around town, DraHend, Stress Factory for laughs
- Many of the options at Rutgers are overlooked
- I enjoy taking my grandchildren to the park for cultural and heritage elements and teaching them about arts and culture
- There are many parks and other favorite destinations within the county or nearby at the shore which benefit the community and allow residents to enjoy nature.

New Amenity Suggestions

- Drew a blank on regional places to bring a visitor, most attractions are in NY or Princeton
- Diversify cultural assets; Cricket stadiums, sporting amenities (e.g. competitive entertainment venues, Top Golf); highlight Rt. 1 and Rt. 18 corridors and not just Northeast Corridor train areas (New Brunswick, Metuchen, Woodbridge), create regional arts messaging)
- Include more music venues, gardens, bowling alleys and night life
- Need more community spaces for events (particularly inexpensive or free)
- Learn from other counties – Develop grounds for sculptures in our county.
- Integrate play in certain spaces. Art and nature development.
- More plazas like Metuchen just put in
- More dog friendly businesses and places
- We need more libraries, sporting events, and arts attractions



History and Sense of Community

- I think it is important for Middlesex to preserve historical building, so that our new generations may be able to see great buildings and continue to learn about our history. Growing up in Perth Amboy, I was able to see a lot of history in my hometown.
- It means everything. I live in Middlesex County and its history is an important aspect of my life. Being raised, and yet still living here. is meaningful.
- Preserving historic buildings, and places is very important because it has a story. A story for those who have never been, or recently moved in the county should learn.
- Historic preservation cultivates patriotism and connection to the community
- We need to respect the history of the town/county; history was not meant to be erased; more funding would help; historical enrichment for students; historic trails are equally important
- Buildings are important because history is interesting, real, did exist, reminds us of how far we've come, and also are cool looking and fun to appreciate
- The history of the county doesn't really have any meaning to our group
- Figuring out what to save is hard. We lose our memory of what was there "before" if we don't document and share it. Great to see history walls at Boyt's drugs and at Woodmont.

Funding

- Identify if we can have tax policy that encourages contributions to NGO cultural and art organizations; further develop incentives and grants
- Reevaluate regulations for historic buildings to make them easier and more accessible to more people
- Move buildings when practical in cost
- We love that the Forum will be preserved-although it's an expensive proposition at \$3.5Million. It's a balancing act between what should be saved and the cost of doing it.
- Some old buildings are structurally unsound, and could be a danger; it's very expensive to restore and maintain
- Expand/use resources from Middlesex Cultural and Heritage; this organization already is a solid foundation
- Improve grant accessibility for local, small municipalities (Bucklew House in Jamesburg)
- It's important to preserve our history. Maybe if we didn't have to pay prevailing wage rates to restore these buildings it would be more cost effective to preserve and maintain the buildings; Bucklew House needs grant money to help preserve the building

Restaurants and Shopping

- Dining is important
- Participants overwhelmingly agreed that they enjoy and frequently taking visitors to the wealth and diversity of restaurants in New Brunswick. The city is a dining destination.
- Most felt eating out is the prominent option for entertainment in our town
- We love supporting local bars and restaurants. We would be twice as likely to go to a fundraiser/ county event if it showcased our local favorites.
- Plenty of good restaurants, Frog and Peach in New Brunswick specifically mentioned
- Plenty of good restaurants, Frog and Peach in New Brunswick specifically mentioned
- Facilitate new restaurants in the county, especially in smaller municipalities
- Get the shopping to the people-more shared and communal spaces in municipalities that vendors or "pop-up" shops can populate.

Maintain Small Town Feel

- Most felt the need to leave our town to go do activities, but most don't mind as they don't want more traffic or people coming to their area
- The county has some great downtowns; we could dream bigger in terms of entertainment but want to maintain small town vibe - invest in existing stores/establishments. Don't want urban vibe of Montclair, Maplewood, Westfield

Health, Safety, and Services

Feedback regarding health, safety, and services focuses on a variety of different topics, ranging from public safety and police relations to the need for more senior services throughout the county. Groups discuss the need for increased police presence and opportunities to improve relations between police and the community. Groups propose providing assistance to residents with substance abuse issues, as well as ensuring healthy food access for all residents. They suggest holding events and activities to encourage healthy lifestyle habits, such as cooking classes or walking clubs. They also recommend that the County facilitate information sharing and public education about public health issues.

It is easy to find healthy food in our area, but we have lived in areas where it was not easy. Bring healthy food to food deserts in Middlesex County.

Everybody feels safe in the community, but we would like to see greater police presence.

More mobile units or satellite health clinics that are affiliated with the hospitals for seniors, low income people, or people who are unable to drive.



Comment Subcategories

Public Safety	32%
Healthy Food Access	19%
Aging and Disabled	13%
Healthy Lifestyles	7%
Health and Human Services	7%
Health Education	5%
Addicton and Drug Use	5%
Other	3%
Animal and Tick Control	3%
Medical Care Access	2%
Promote Diversity	1%
Healthy Housing	1%



Healthy Food Access

Participant groups express the importance of having access to healthy, fresh food in their communities. Some groups agree that they have easy access to healthy food, while others feel the need for more options, especially for economically disadvantaged families. Suggestions for improving access to healthy food include creating community gardens, limiting the number of fast food restaurants, and establishing farmers markets.

- Access to healthy food options is key to BMI and health. Diet is 75% of health. New Brunswick has an all-in-one model; medical fitness center, café/juice bar and supermarket. We need all-year round farmer's markets.
- We would like to see a community garden and co-op
- It is easy to find healthy food in the Cranbury area
- Increase of authentic farmer's markets. Increase in the number of supermarkets in small municipalities.
- Foods in neighborhood may be healthy, but they are not fresh
- With all of the people that live here, where are all the great grocery chains?
- Have greater access to healthier food establishments (e.g. supermarkets, food trucks)
- It is hard to find healthy food
- It is hard to find healthy foods; bring more locations and knowledge
- Is it very easy to find healthy foods where I live because there is the newspapers and the internet to help us find where the stores are.
- It is very easy to find healthy food where I live. I usually shop at ALDI's and there is an abundance of organic produce and food selection. ALDI's also carries no synthetic colors or synthetic preservatives, and no artificial flavors.
- It's easy to find healthy food in our areas, but we've also lived in areas where it wasn't. Bring healthy food to food deserts in Middlesex County.
- Living in South Brunswick is easy because of the farms nearby.
- Maybe host a children's farmers market training where kids learn how to grow fruits/vegetables for free
- Have more affordable food sources and better access
- More fresh farmers markets with fresh fruit
- Need more food banks
- Need more small food vendors in walking distance
- Healthy food distribution is improving in New Brunswick and Cartaret; there are more healthy food choices for underserved; We would love some more farm stands; it is easy to find healthy food but its easier to find unhealthy food

- Organic and healthy food has become more readily available in supermarkets and farmers markets, but is expensive and you need to drive
- The presence of food deserts is bad
- Regular vegetarian restaurants are needed, not just one for Asian food.
- There is high interest in healthful eating, so the community must consider the affordability and familiarity of available options. For all residents, esp. the economically disadvantaged and immigrant families.
- There should be more farmers markets that use local farms
- We would like to see a community gardening opportunity
- There should be more food markets and shared garden communities
- Too many fast food restaurants for a healthy lifestyle
- You can find healthy food, but most of it is more expensive and everyone can't afford to buy and keep the healthy lifestyle. Also, the cheaper not-so-healthy foods are everywhere and more convenient.



Police Presence

Many participant groups are pleased with the level of police presence in their communities, while others want to see more police patrols to better address recent crimes and improve safety. Some feel unsafe in their neighborhoods, such as when walking in the dark during early mornings or at night, and suggested ways that the County can help increase security.

- We would like to see additional patrol officers at transportation hubs and at stores open after midnight (e.g. Walmart)
- Areas have had robberies and yet no routine police presence
- Everybody feels safe in the community, but we would like to see police driving around and doing surveillance.
- We are happy with the police presence
- We would like to see increased police patrol in the neighborhood.
- We would prefer less traffic police and more neighborhood enforcement
- We would like to see more community policing
- We would like to see more police on foot or bikes in the neighborhood to be more interactive
- We are not satisfied with the police presence in South Plainfield. They pull people over for things they do. They also don't drive around often just to show their presence.
- Participants agreed that increased police presence, especially foot patrols in neighborhoods, as well as environmental modifications such as improved lighting, reduced litter/blight, and even the availability of emergency call boxes would increase the sense of safety and reduce anxieties.
- We feel safe in the community; the police presence is strong
- We should have a web surveillance system in Middlesex County
- Some don't feel safe; we need more patrols in early morning and late at night in streets and public parks (especially for runners, bikers, walkers); We are afraid someone will break into houses and would like to see classes begin on how to protect yourself from individuals on the street
- Install town surveillance cameras, spot checks at patrols, especially during holidays and peak season
- We have a very high police presence where I live. I live close to City Hall, and also where the county gases up their vehicles, so we see police often.
- We need more police patrols and more in-town EMS. Getting to a medical center in traffic is a worry. We should not have to also worry about EMS getting to us.
- Improved safety would be ideal
- Participants noted that the climate and environment on Rutgers' campus is very distinct, and participants wished that residents who live mere blocks away had similarly safe surrounding and crime rates as those on campus.



Police/Community Relations

- Patrol assignments should not include routine “construction watching”
- Take each assault seriously to the next level. Local levels cover up their crimes.
- Train police on community oriented policing and work with the disabled and mentally challenged individuals
- The greatest safety concern is when a crime happens, the town/cops don’t get notified. People should be notified if an incident happens in their neighborhood.
- Have a consistent, continuing, and meaningful police community outreach to foster awareness of and approachability by the community
- More public awareness of incidences - transparency with police
- The new cops feel like they are above the law, cops are on their cellphones yet they are stopping us, cops are being cops for the title of it not because they care about the community
- There should be police outreach programs in the schools and neighborhoods to show a friendly police presence
- Police should communicate with the community more to get involved and have more knowledge of what’s going on.
- The police should have video accountability that is publicly accessible
- Public approval of all police should be required
- Transparency is a big concern

Health and Human Services

- Diabetes patients are not being taken care of, between prices, cutting down on testing strips, etc. Public health should be combating this with community initiatives.
- Meals on Wheels is a good program using transportation to bring meals and friendly faces. There should also be transportations for minors to use parks, when parents are not available. We would like to see private corporate support for transportation.
- Use local clinics for health education
- There should be mandatory vaccinations, blood work, and oral hygiene check-ups; to do this there should be more more encouragement at jobs, churches, schools, and community public spaces; possibly host health fairs, free screening and etc. (education)
- Create more housing/shelter for homeless and needy
- There should be mandatory vaccines
- More mobile units or satellite health clinics that are affiliated with the hospitals for seniors or low income people or people that are unable to drive
- Vaccinations need to be mandatory for school children. Since we have places like New Brunswick, and Edison with lots of traffic and epidemics on the rise, it can't be risked. Religious factors can't play into it for the sake of "public health"
- There should be mandatory health screening for mental health (annual); integrate this initiative with health insurers, Medicaid or Medicare for group or private therapy; have sessions at least once every three months, particularly after grief, loss, and life changing circumstances
- Address homelessness
- Create additional local and community facilities (e.g. visitor center, food pantries and emergency shuttle and education center for emergency)

Senior Services

- There should be better food for senior lunches
- A good program would be day trips to community events for socialization for healthy living
- There should be a discount on groceries for seniors
- Middlesex County is expensive; consider communal living for seniors (e.g. "The Golden Girls"); we have senior transportation, but is it enough?
- Middlesex County is a great place for seniors; many senior services
- Help seniors with better transportation
- There is a high cost of living for seniors, especially because of taxes
- In Highland Park/Middlesex, walkability enables aging in place. RWJ Hospital and St. Peter's are good for Medicare. Bucchleigh Park and Donaldson have good exercise facilities. Not always ideal for getting good produce within walking distance.
- Middlesex County is not a good place for seniors because of the high taxes along with having

to pay bills.

- We would like to see more public health for low income residents and quality care for seniors
- Seniors are getting served better and stuff in Middlesex meets their needs; access to hospitals, healthcare, senior centers, programs, senior communities, and tax breaks are all important for this



Healthy Lifestyles

- It is easy to lead a healthy lifestyle
- Environmental factors can help improve outdoor fitness options in towns. TVs, videogames and order-in food have limited our interest to be outdoors. There is a need to reduce stress and improve mindfulness. Active living standards could help.
- We would like to see more healthy lifestyle and cooking classes for people to attend to help change the way they eat and exercise
- More sidewalks = more opportunity to exercise.
- Provide free fitness centers to encourage exercise and nutrition
- Tax unhealthy food and drink
- We would like to see more gyms, parks, bike paths. and farms.
- It is difficult to live healthy lifestyles
- Lower cost of living and shorter work days or 4 day work week to have more family time
- Develop more activities for kids (e.g. PAL)

Safety Concerns

- We do not know what is in the train containers; label trains with symbols.
- I am concerned about dangerous situations with obstructed views
- Crime largely not a problem except for construction thefts
- There is a concern with porch mail theft. Community looters are a big symptom of the heavy difficulty in earning a living wage
- Robbery policing is often just information taken down. We feel no detective work or follow-up is done.
- Almost everyone has installed security alarms and cameras due to break-ins
- Residential burglaries are a big concern
- American criminals target easy victims, elderly and undefended who are mom and pop businesses, vulnerable and already at risk
- We would like to see less invasive drug enforcement and more protection from theft.

Health Education and Information Sharing

- Have dashboards and reports that are public facing, e.g. U. of Wisconsin County Health Rankings. Get this info out!
- Need better local media to get issues out. County should create a media channel
- The county can take an active role in advertising/communicating communal events that engage different groups. Focus on inclusivity of different age groups and interests (e.g. Burbio)
- Do a better job of engaging local medical industries in advancing regional public health goals
- Make grant opportunities more available/known (Edison took care of 15 parks with 1 grant)
- Create marijuana awareness programs
- There should be collective information sharing -- list of community groups and activities, as well as a county medic
- Education classes would be helpful

Other

- We feel safe, especially in comparison to NYC, in home or out and about; we don't think too much about it
- Learn English before getting citizenship.
- Middlesex County should not be a sanctuary county
- Emergency services are stressed, overpriced, and overburdened
- Police should be trained for longer times
- Security is the most important factor
- Libraries are important
- When applying for public service there should be a short waiting period. Help should be received within 72 hours (min. 48 hours, max. 72 hours)

Addiction and Drug Use

- Drugs are a big concern
- There should be more drug prevention and education to stop the epidemic.
- Narcotics transactions are happening near schools
- There is still a persistence of drugs in the town. We have concerns about delivery of packages left at front doors; there should be more police presence - visibility
- Participants expressed great concern about the prevalence of violence and crime, especially the very visible usage of drugs and prostitution. These behaviors may become normalized

for children and not all communities sense that prevention programs are designed for their needs/backgrounds

- There should be more control over the drug problem and more places to get help
- While there is an opioid epidemic, what are we doing for the chronic pain patients who were wrongfully affected by it? There needs to be a focus on that initiative.

Shared Services

- Emergency services could be shared with nearby towns.
- Municipal first aid and fire departments should be shared and professionalized
- Police departments should be regionalized
- A county force with each town being beneath the county umbrella should be started
- We have volunteer EMS and fire; response time is getting longer; volunteer only; merging of surrounding districts? Not necessarily a bad thing-Milltown is small, costs high

Animal and Tick Control

- There are many deer and other animal problems
- We are concerned about the deer and ticks issues – maybe start a public offering for tick spray on properties (case when West Nile Virus was in New York); this won't be a public issue unless a large scale Lyme disease study shows that it affects many in the area
- There is a need for more animal control (e.g. picking up of dead animals)
- There is a need for tick and mosquito control
- There is a need for coordinated animal control efforts

Volunteer First Responders

- We would like to see a county marketing plan to get more 1st responder volunteers
- There should be more citizens on patrol, less cops
- We would like to see recruiting residents (including school kids) to do neighborhood “policing.”
- There should be a tax incentive for volunteer 1st responders

Accessibility

- We need infrastructure investment. To do this there should be accessible grants for municipalities to beautify their communities and bring back local home grown stores
- The lack of transportation brings huge issues – we also need access to services
- Need more adaptive parks/schools, etc. for people with disabilities (only have bare necessities now; need to update and expand), (bathroom stalls need to be widened and updated so people can get in easily.)

Access to Medical Care

- Middlesex County provides good access to healthcare within the county and with access to New York/Philly for specialized care. Increasingly, New York health provides opening sites in New Jersey, too.
- New Brunswick has numerous health services and other related resources that may attract residents from other parts of the state
- We need lower health care costs and mandatory health, property, and life insurance. To do this there should be checks and balances for life insurance, health care, and other companies that charge excessive amounts. If life insurance is not used in a calendar year, money should go toward co-pays for medical expenses



Healthy Housing

- We wish that the county would use “Best Practice” with repair and development. This is important to monitor levels of asbestos and lead
- Poor housing conditions are associated with short-term and long-term mental and physical health concerns. Thus, housing must be addressed as a public health emergency in our community.

Safety Technology

- Blue light posts would be an improvement
- More cameras in public areas, parks, and downtown areas

Promote Diversity

- We should have diversity and inclusion classes so children can understand differences
- Parent groups needed to diffuse hate



Technology and Innovation

Participant groups discussing the topics of technology and innovation focus primarily on optimizing internet service and affordability along with effectively sharing technological services between communities in the county. Many want more competition between internet service providers to lower costs and improve speeds. Groups also suggest opportunities to make the services they rely on better and more efficient through collaboration between Middlesex County municipalities. Other prominent themes include keeping users of technology safe and limiting violations of privacy, improving transportation infrastructure (such as adapting to electric vehicle use), and implementing initiatives to ensure that a wide range of residents can afford new technology and learn the skills to use it.

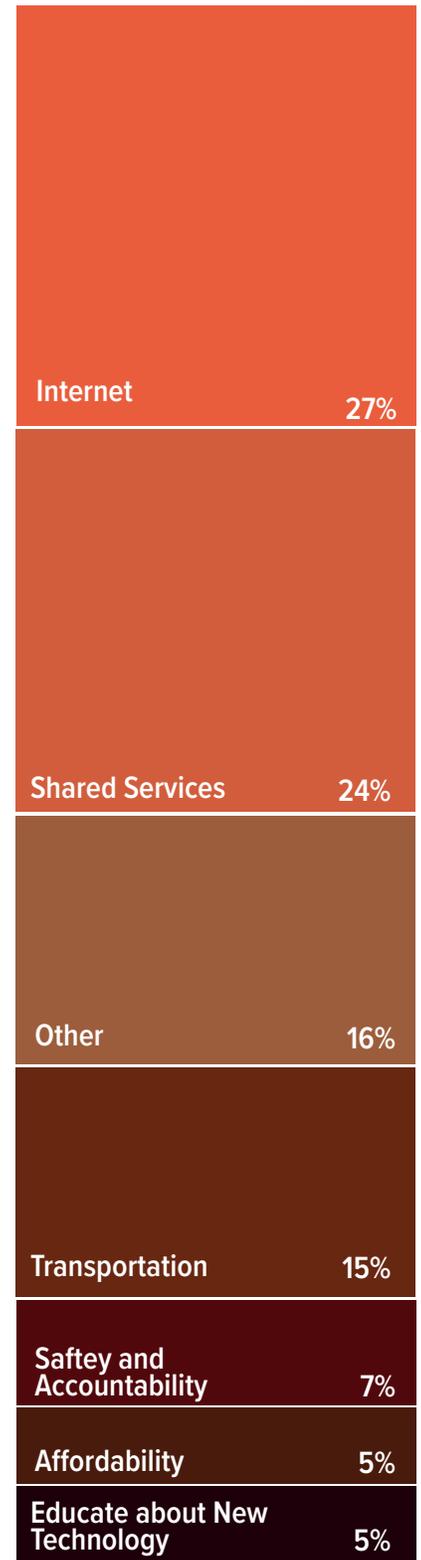
Get on board with 5G and wireless charging. It would be great to be at the forefront of this important new wave.

Although some communities do share services, maybe the County could organize what towns need to share and what towns are looking to share.

Develop incentives for businesses allowing employees to work from home at least once a week.



Comment Subcategories



Internet

Participant groups discuss the lack of competition among area internet service providers. Many feel that they do not have high quality access to the internet and that costs are often too high. Groups also suggest expanding internet access, particularly in rural and suburban areas.

- Increase choices of internet providers (competition)
- Cut down monopolies of internet providers - there's no reason there should only be one provider allowed for my complex.
- We should have free Wi-fi for all residents
- Good representation of companies for internet services but need to reduced costs. It's too expensive, often over \$200-\$250/mo
- There is a need for high-speed internet variety/availability
- I can say that I have decent access to reliable, quality internet connectivity at home.
- Internet is intermittent and not totally reliable. I don't like the Comcast monopoly (there is no Fios in our area)
- The internet providers are monopolized. This sector needs regulation and competition
- Middlesex County should develop their own internet service (e.g. Kansas City)
- There is no reliable internet (e.g. Xfinity)
- Provide free wifi-service
- We should be using one good company within the county which would give everyone the ability to get either free internet access or discounted rates
- We don't have reliable internet because the internet is fiberoptic and it only goes so high.
- We have options to internet service but no options in high quality providers
- We need more internet options - more choices among companies beyond Comcast
- We need more wireless access points as we are more mobile
- Wi-Fi right now is terrible; Wi-Fi- would be good with Altice
- Wi-Fi should be everywhere
- Yes, we do have reliable quality internet because it works fast and we can access things quickly.
- Get on board with 5G and wireless charging. It would be great to be at the forefront of this important new wave.



Shared Services

Participant groups identify services that could be shared amongst communities, such as emergency services, park management, and school facilities. However, some express concern that sharing services would not be ideal for their community.

- My town of Spotswood does an excellent job of sharing services with our surrounding towns. Our police departments provide protection to our next town over Helmetta. Our schools bus in the students in from Milltown. We are connected with East Brunswick through the Nixel alerts, etc.
- Rather than sharing services, more civilians must have individual preparedness and skills
- Regarding shared services, we need to evaluate the impact on affected towns and qualitatively improve the services
- Rethink duplicated services across municipalities into districting and shared services
- Shared services is something we do not want
- There should be a unified pension and other benefits systems over multiple counties
- We don't want to have our services shared with nearby towns. We have enough to keep up

with the population increase

- Look into some shared services
- Streamline municipal and school facilities to save taxes
- Although some communities do share services, maybe the county could gather what towns need to share and what towns are looking to share
- More collaboration and incentives for cooperation
- There should be reciprocity between towns, across the county, especially for inspections
- Collaborate on purchasing to have towns be more cost effective in replacing park equipment. Have a program to reduce costs.
- Emergency services could be shared with nearby towns.
- Municipal first aid and fire departments should be shared and professionalized
- Police departments should be regionalized
- One shared service could be a county police force with each town being beneath the county umbrella
- We have volunteer EMS and fire; response time is getting longer and it's volunteer only; merging of surrounding districts? Not necessarily a bad thing-Milltown is small, costs are high



Other

- The practical application of many technologies is lagging in the county
- Draw more on the work that researchers at Rutgers (geologist/hydrologists) are doing; what are other states doing? Integrate literature reviews about various issues
- Implement smart infrastructure
- Ensure that insurance that technologies are compatible across jurisdictions.
- Rather than only having things in walking distance, packages should also be delivered in locker areas and shared secure locations
- Technology and innovation is fast and growing, services need to be preserved in public and community places (e.g. libraries, church and workplace break rooms, etc.)
- We are unsure how county technology is going to impact us
- Improve maintenance for any utilities which have been under the ground such as gas lines and electricity
- The county should lobby the state to have tax exempt facilities pay increased host community benefits to the town they are located in

Safety and Accountability

- Begin a cyber-security/spam awareness program for all residents
- We are excited about safety cameras
- If someone can block robo-calls, do it for free

Electric Vehicles

- Integrate charging ports in new developments (electric cars/USBs in home)
- Do we need more charging stations for electric cars (at malls, office, buildings)? There are ways to incentivize this.
- Expand environmentally friendly public vehicles
- Create incentives to encourage gas stations to install charging stations for cars

Transportation Infrastructure

- Smart scanners in public parking could save commuter time
- Develop an electric tram system for Rutgers (like what they have in New Brunswick)
- There should be greater investment in smart mass transit
- It amazes me to see technology advancing. I see MCAT buses all around the county, which is great.

Affordability

- There should be cost-control, including regulation of cost for technology and innovation; technology should be affordable to all; subsidize and make available at least for one major device per family (e.g. smart phone, surveillance, etc.)
- I do have access to reliable, quality internet connectivity at home (but I wish it was less expensive, services are too pricey)
- Make technology it more accessible to the public
- Technology is adequate in quality, but very expensive.

Educate about New Technology

- Develop free educational training for seniors and provide discounted rates for people
- If individuals need to attend school for new technology, even with a job, they should be provided an opportunity to improve and they should be allowed to receive unemployment funds
- Integrate new technology: 5G, cars-self-drive, electric, lane warnings, county should foster technology education, more communities on county tech offerings
- We'll need to facilitate lots of training on the different aspects of technology

Telecommuting

- The county can help with women who want to keep working when they start a family (e.g. work from home, school at home both having virtual options), No smart home stuff, AI coming (scary!), support people working from home with library system tech support office space
- Develop incentives to businesses for allowing employees to work from home at least once a week
- Telecommuting would be put to good use during severe storms

Devices

- iPads for schools are not working
- Phones, tablets, iPads are all useful, especially in comparison to carrying laptops on my commute to work.
- Smart phones good for Google searches