



Tourism Action Plan

Developed with assistance by:



Officially Adopted on:

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Acknowledgements

This action plan is a direct result of a series of two planning sessions hosted by Middlesex County (Middlesex or MSX), where key community stakeholders came together, all working towards the goal of growing tourism in Middlesex and encouraging visitation. Due to the nature of the tourism industry, it takes a great deal of focus and determination from a community to dedicate time to creating a tourism action plan and with that in mind, a great deal of appreciation is given to those who attended the two sessions.

Name	Organization
John Anzivino	Chairman, Middlesex County Economic Development Authority
Jamie Barnhardt	Chairman, Middlesex Airport Committee Event founder, Wings, Wheels & Keels Owner, Innovative Restorations
Catherine Bellows	Co-owner, Cross Rip Campground
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Meghan Hall	Start Small Think Big Marketing
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Rebecca Wondergem	Co-owner, Cross Rip Campground
Jeff Wright	President, Friends of Dragon Run

Laura Messer, Destination Development Manager with the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) Partnership Marketing division, facilitated the planning process and drafted this document with assistance and input from staff of Middlesex.

Executive Summary

Middlesex County is a coastal county on the Middle Peninsula. Within Middlesex's boundaries are the Town of Urbanna, a historic port town, and the unincorporated towns of Deltaville, Saluda, and Topping. Saluda is the county seat. Middlesex is bounded by several bodies of water including the Rappahannock River, Chesapeake Bay, Piankatank River, and Dragon Run Swamp. Middlesex has a variety of tourism assets and is well known for the Urbanna Oyster Festival, which is held annually and welcomes more than 50,000 visitors during a two-day event. The Urbanna Oyster Festival has been held for 67 years and includes the official Virginia Oyster Shucking Contest. Middlesex understands that if it better positions its tourism efforts it can increase visitation and the economic impact of tourism.

Better marketing and increased collaborative efforts throughout MSX including relationships with Urbanna and Deltaville are key to expanding tourism in Middlesex. An event calendar would be an exceptional visitor asset allowing visitors to understand the depth and breadth of events. Improved public water access could also encourage tourism development. Middlesex knows it is a key destination for maritime heritage with the Museums of Middlesex and it should work to better tell untold stories. Outdoor recreation is also important to tourism growth and Middlesex has a number of sports-related assets, which can also be marketed to visitors including the world's largest croquet venue at the Chesapeake Bay Croquet Club. Wholly, the combination of Middlesex's heritage, culture and natural beauty make it a wonderful tourist destination for those seeking a relaxed trip.

This tourism action plan provides numerous goals that will foster tourism growth and improve local quality of life. While the plan does not assign goals to any one person, it is vital that a collaborative approach take precedence due to limited staff and limited resources. Middlesex must work with its regional partners including the Town of Urbanna and the Deltaville Community Association to encourage cohesive marketing. There are a number of tourism-related businesses including campgrounds throughout Middlesex that should also be partners of the County to grow tourism. If Middlesex works in conjunction with local, regional, and statewide partners, tourism will be successful. Furthermore, this plan provides a list of entrepreneurial opportunities in Middlesex. New businesses related to existing gaps will create new jobs and grow revenue within the local community contributing to increased community vitality.

It is suggested that Middlesex expand its communication efforts with the stakeholders that participated in the development of this plan to support tourism in the County. Vital to this plan is increased and diversified commerce to provide additional visitor and resident amenities. Middlesex should focus on continuing to build promotional efforts while working collaboratively with regional destination marketing organizations (DMOs).

In 2023 (latest data from VTC), visitors spent \$30.0 million in Middlesex, supporting dozens of businesses, creating more than 125 jobs, and generating approximately \$1.4 million in state and local taxes. Tourism spending supports goods, services, facilities, and transportation that benefit residents of Middlesex.

Multi-faceted Purpose:

Middlesex Tourism Action Plan Vision Statement

Defining the unique experiences and assets that set Middlesex County apart, while fostering collaboration between businesses and organizations to create year-round synergy, all while preserving our heritage and protecting the county's natural beauty.

Middlesex Tourism Action Plan Mission Statement

To invite residents and visitors to experience a welcoming destination, where history, nature, and culture come together to create shared experiences to positively enhance the community.



Background

Middlesex County is a coastal county on the Middle Peninsula. Within Middlesex's boundaries are the Town of Urbanna, a historic port town, and the unincorporated towns of Deltaville, Saluda, and Topping. Saluda is the county seat. Middlesex is bounded by several bodies of water including the Rappahannock River, Chesapeake Bay, Piankatank River, and Dragon Run Swamp. Neighboring localities include the Counties of Essex, Gloucester, King & Queen, Lancaster, and Mathews. This area is part of the Chesapeake Bay region. Middlesex has a population of nearly 11,000.¹ Middlesex has many rural characteristics.

Middlesex's focused tourism efforts began in earnest in 2014 following its original tourism action plan facilitated by the Virginia Tourism Corporation. Tourism in Middlesex is supported by the Economic Development Authority, which has one full-time staff member as well as one part-time staff member and contracted marketing and development support. Middlesex participates in a regional destination marketing organization, Virginia's River Realm (VRR), which is led by the Town of Kilmarnock in neighboring Lancaster County. VRR promotes regional tourism in the eight towns located within Lancaster and Middlesex Counties. Following staffing changes within Middlesex and changes within the tourism industry post-pandemic, it was determined that the 2014 tourism action plan should be updated. Some goals of the 2014 tourism action plan were accomplished and a solid foundation for tourism exists. Middlesex recognizes its potential to expand tourism expenditures and its recognition as a tourism destination through further

highlighting its heritage and ecotourism assets. Due to limited staffing capacity, Middlesex must work collaboratively with tourism industry partners and VRR to support its tourism efforts.

Visitation to Middlesex first occurred in 1608 when Captain John Smith documented that he was bitten by a sting ray off what is now Deltaville. Middlesex was officially established in 1669 from land that was previously a part of Lancaster County. The Town of Urbanna was established in 1680 and became incorporated in 1902. Prior to its establishment, Middlesex's first plantation, Rosegill Estate, was constructed in 1649 by Ralph Wormeley. Before this, the area had been settled by Indigenous peoples (Piankatank, Opiscopank, and Nimcock) part of the Powhatan. The Indigenous peoples moved north following the settlement of Middlesex and no Indigenous peoples remained by 1650.

In its early years, Middlesex was home to many tobacco plantations and the average plantation size was 406 acres. During this time, the Town of Urbanna was a thriving center of commerce due to its location as a port town. Middlesex continues to be agricultural in nature with dozens of active farms and boasts the fact that nearly 60 percent of the soils in Middlesex are considered prime agricultural soils. The 2020 Middlesex Comprehensive Plan states, "Middlesex has been and remains a rural community dependent on the gifts of the earth: productive farmland and timberland, and tremendous access to the waters of the Chesapeake Bay."

As part of its establishment, Middlesex residents resolved to no longer be inconvenienced by traveling across the river to conduct business in Lancaster County and built their first courthouse in 1705 along with a jail. In 1750, a new courthouse was built in Urbanna. That building now serves as the home of the Middlesex County Woman's Club. Middlesex built what is now referred to as the Historic Middlesex County Courthouse from 1850-1874. This building along with 12 others and the Urbanna Historic District are all on the Virginia Register of Historic Places. The Historic Courthouse is also on the National Register of Historic Places. Middlesex has one of the most complete sets of court records by any County due to storage of older records at an undisclosed location instead of in Richmond where records were burned in 1865. Middlesex has records dating back to the 1600s. These court records now serve as a genealogical draw for visitors.

With its rich history, Middlesex is home to four museums: Deltaville Maritime Museum, Middlesex Museum, Colonial Seaport's Luna and the Urbanna Museum. These museums highlight the heritage and history of Middlesex and maritime culture. Deltaville was once a major center for wooden boat building and still serves as a major commercial and recreational center for the maritime industry on the Middle Peninsula. Additionally, Urbanna has a self-guided walking tour of 14 historical sites in Urbanna and there is a historic marker trail driving tour. An exact replica of Stingray Lighthouse, a lighthouse built in 1853, exists in Deltaville. A complete index of recognized historical sites is included in the appendix of this document.

Much of the outdoor recreation in Middlesex can be tied to its waterfront location. Deltaville sits between the mouths of the Rappahannock and Piankatank Rivers. Middlesex has more than 20 marinas that offer a variety of services including slips, amenities, boat repair and boat brokers.

While many marinas are privately owned and operated, the Town of Urbanna owns the Urbanna Town Marina and has a trolley service from July 1 through Labor Day as well as kayak rentals. There are more than 15 transient slips at the Urbanna Town Marina, which are ideal for visitors. There are several charters, outfitters, and sailing classes available throughout Middlesex. Strategies to maximize the waterfront are included in this tourism action plan.

In addition to waterfront, Middlesex has four campgrounds and a variety of other lodging options from short term rentals to bed and breakfasts as well as a boutique hotel in Urbanna. The campgrounds in Middlesex total nearly 2,500 sites (Bethpage – 1,034 sites; Bush Park – 598 sites; Cross Rip Campground – 46 sites and 7 cabins; Grey’s Point – 774 sites and 13 cabins). This makes Middlesex an ideal location for outdoor enthusiasts.

Urbanna is well-known for its annual Urbanna Oyster Festival, a free event that has taken place since 1958 and hosts a variety of events including the renowned Virginia State Oyster Shucking Competition, live music, parades, educational and children’s events and of course, plenty of oysters. The festival is a “pay-as-you-go” festival and only certain aspects of the festival have fees. Annual attendance over the two festival days is in between 50,000 and 75,000. The Urbanna Oyster Festival is the official statewide oyster festival for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Middlesex is a VTC designated destination marketing organization (DMO) through its EDA and works collaboratively with VRR to promote tourism. At the time of this tourism action plan, the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission is also undergoing designation as a DMO. This will help strengthen tourism as a whole on the Middle Peninsula. In addition to the aforementioned tourism assets, Middlesex is also home to the Chesapeake Bay Croquet Club, Virginia Motor Speedway, the Deltaville Ballpark, and a number of special events.

Following conversations with VTC, Middlesex staff invited a diverse group of stakeholders to participate in a pair of strategic led by VTC staff. The sessions were held on Sept. 17, 2024 and Oct. 22, 2024. Throughout the sessions, the planning group provided feedback on how to best maximize tourism efforts throughout Middlesex.

The planning group focused on Middlesex and excluded Urbanna, as the Town completed its own tourism action plan in 2023. The Urbanna Tourism Action Plan is included as a supplementary document to the Middlesex Tourism Action Plan.

The planning group recognizes that Middlesex needs to lean into marketing itself as a waterfront location while increasing tourism product and expanding tourism-related entrepreneurship. To improve the tourism economy and expand tourism expenditures, it is critical to better support visitors through planned itineraries and better communication strategies. Middlesex has a good foundation of tourism, but further collaboration with tourism industry partners and regional efforts will improve the tourism industry. Providing additional tourism product can attract new visitors and lead to increased expenditures. Finally, the planning group recognizes the need for additional public water access to maximize the waterfront location.

¹University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center, Demographics Research Group. (2020). Virginia Population Estimates. Retrieved from <https://demographics.coopercenter.org/virginia-population-estimates>



Situational Analysis

As a key component of the planning process, the planning team conducted a situational analysis to help determine the goals and strategies of this plan.

Situational Analysis - SWOT

The discussion and identification of SWOT - S (Strengths) W (Weaknesses) O (Opportunities) and T (Threats) was used as a key method in developing goals for Middlesex against the backdrop of growing tourism in Middlesex. Most goals and strategies spawned from SWOT discussion and consideration.

Strengths

Location

- On the water/waterfront
- Proximity to other more-populated areas/metro areas
- Rural

Water

- Access to water
- Education about the water
- Rappahannock River & tributaries
- Marinas
- Wake Beach
- Water Recreation
 - Boating/charters
 - Fishing
 - Kayaking
 - Sailing

Airport and Hummel Field

Draft

Events and festivals

- Arts in the Middle
- Farmer's Market
- Music
- Urbanna Oyster Festival
- Wings, Wheels, and Keels

History

- Marine trade heritage
- Historic structures and buildings
- Historic town (Urbanna)
- Walking tours

Marketing

- General tourism efforts including digital advertising
- Virginia's River Realm efforts
- Visit Widget

Nature

- Dragon Run
- Trails
- Waterfront
- Wildlife

Recreation

- Golf courses
- Middlesex County Recreation Complex
- Middlesex Croquet Club
- Sports activities
- Trail (Cook's Corner)

Tourism Assets

- Campgrounds
- Deltaville Ball Park
- Museums
 - Deltaville Maritime Museum
 - Middlesex County Museum
 - Urbanna Museum
 - Colonial Seaport Foundation
- Restaurants including waterfront dining
- Shopping
- Virginia Motor Speedway

Seafood and oysters

Other

- Affordable compared to other riverfront communities
- Less developed than other riverfront communities

Rural characteristics

Draft

- Friendly
- Golf cart community (Urbanna)
- Rural charm

Weaknesses

Limited public access to the water

Commercial and retail issues

- Limited grocery retail
- Limited number of restaurants
 - Dock and dine options needed
- Limited public transportation
- Limited shopping options
- Limited event venues
- Limited outdoor recreation outfitters
- No craft beverage producer (brewery, winery, distilled spirits)
- No food truck court
- No laundromat
- No theater
- Small economic base, need more entrepreneurs

No primary event calendar

Seasonality as a tourism destination

Missing amenities for visitors

- Public beaches
- Visitor center

Recreation Issues

- Limited on/off road bike paths
- No large community park

Tourism issues

- Limited accommodations other than camping
- Limited full-service boat ramps (with concessions and restroom facilities)
- Limited family-friendly attractions and youth-based activities
- Not pedestrian friendly from campgrounds

County issues

- Advocacy on value of tourism needed
- Limited investment in infrastructure
- Maintenance of existing boat/kayak launches
- No hospital/emergency room
- Not walkable or bike-friendly
- Dredging of waterways and marinas

Opportunities

Advocate the importance of tourism

Building better coordinated relationships

Draft

- Collaboration
- Business partnerships
- Communication with stakeholders and County
 - Regular meetings
 - Roundtables

Expanded marketing efforts

- Event communications
- Market to new areas of Virginia
- Better access to printed marketing materials
- Create more itineraries
- Utilize influencers

Diversified commerce

- Food truck court
- Outfitters
- More dining (including waterfront)
- More family-friendly attractions
- More retail
- Traditional lodging

Tourism development

- Enhance museum activities
- Family-friendly activities
- Offseason activities and events
- More public water access and activities

Infrastructure needs

- Expand public water access and waterfront recreation
 - Dredging
- Walking and biking trails

Other

- Virginia Main Street program for Deltaville
- Workforce housing

Threats

Community

- Aging population
- Apathy from stakeholders (business owners and County leadership)
- Drugs
- Generational differences
- Limited interest in development (thinking too small)
- Low income housing
- Overreliance on current tourism champions/stakeholders
- Value of tourism is ignored

Economic and financial

Draft

- Limited entrepreneurial community
- Limited economy
- Limited government collaboration
- Limited financial resources to market MSX
- Limited funding
- Limited tourism product development funding
- Residents do not support local businesses

Tourism-related

- Seasonal
- Limited accommodations reduce visitor spending
- People choose other nearby destinations

County

- Limited government collaboration (Deltaville, Urbanna, MSX)
- Limited investment in parks, trails and infrastructure
- Limited implementation of tourism action plan
- Need a marketing and development plan for tourism to generate growth
- No infrastructure plan for growth (sewer project)
- Political will/divided Board of Supervisors
- Strained communications between Deltaville, Urbanna, MSX

Other

- Competition from surrounding areas

Visitor Profile

Recently, Middlesex has gained access to its visitor data from Arrivalist courtesy of a VTC grant. Arrivalist is the leading location intelligence platform in the travel industry and utilize mobile location datasets to provide actionable insights on consumer behavior, competitive share, media effectiveness, and market trends.

For 2023, 68.2% of visitors to Middlesex spent at least one night with the average nights spent in destination being 1.5. This was slightly down from prior year data (-3%). Most visitors traveled from the Richmond/Petersburg destination marketing area (DMA) followed by the Washington DC DMA. The Hampton Roads DMA rounded out the top three origin locations. For months of travel, the summer season led for number of visits.

Data for 2022 had a slightly higher number of total visitors but was similar to 2023 data. About 67% of visitors spent at least one night in Middlesex and the average stay was 1.5 nights. The places travelers visited from remained the same as well. Visitation was stronger in the fall for 2022 than it was in 2023, but the summer was also strong.



Action Plan

The goals of this plan are framed to coincide with the objectives of Virginia’s State Tourism Development Plan, available for viewing at <https://www.vatc.org/drive2/>. In 2019, VTC completed a long-term strategic plan to help increase tourism visitation and spending across the Commonwealth. This plan is titled “Drive 2.0,” and builds on the existing findings and conclusions from the 2013 Statewide Tourism Plan.

DRIVE 2.0

This strategic plan is a result of conversations with Virginia’s tourism industry and tourism partners as we look to the future and plan for success. It focuses on answering two key questions:

What should we be promoting?
What should we be building?

The tourism industry is an overly saturated and extremely competitive market. To succeed and thrive, Virginia communities must continue to develop new tourism product and focus on winning strategies to evolve and grow. When tourism development is increased, communities increase the visitor experience, economic impact to communities.

Middlesex is part of the Chesapeake Bay region. The Chesapeake Bay region’s outdoor and water-related offerings continue to be its primary strengths, as the region boasts more than 1,800 miles of bay shoreline, perfect for boaters, paddlers, and water lovers of all kinds. In addition, its culinary and history and heritage experiences remain attractive draws. For the entire regional guide, please visit <https://www.vatc.org/download/regional-guide-chesapeake-bay/>.

Goals

Middlesex is a locality with limited staff capacity as the DMO is run through the EDA, which only has one position that is not wholly dedicated to tourism. However, working with contracted vendors and partnerships with tourism industry stakeholders, there is capacity to grow tourism. Without collaboration and partnerships, Middlesex may not be able to complete many of the

identified goals. Middlesex must work in collaboration with its local, state, and federal partners to achieve all goals.

Some goals of this plan require partnerships of different agencies, financial resources, and additional staff time. Without support and the allocation of additional assets, the entirety of this plan cannot be successful.

Goals were categorized into four categories:

- Improve Tourism Marketing
- Expand Tourism Products and Events
- Develop Tourism Relationships and Partnerships
- Expand Tourism Infrastructure

These categories align with Drive 2.0.

Some goals included in this plan were identified in the Middlesex Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted by the Middlesex Board of Supervisors in 2009 and last amended in 2020. Additional goals were identified in the Middlesex Economic Development Authority (EDA) strategic plan from 2022 (EDA), the 2014 MSX tourism plan, and the 2022 Middle Peninsula Comprehensive Economic Development plan.

If a goal came from another document, it is annotated as such: MSX Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan), MSX EDA strategic plan (EDA), 2014 MSX tourism plan (2014 TAP), and the 2022 Middle Peninsula Comprehensive Economic Development plan (MPCEDs).

The complete Comprehensive Plan can be viewed online:

<https://www.co.middlesex.va.us/DocumentCenter/View/1275/Middlesex-County-Comprehensive-Plan-Revised-3-3-20-PDF?bidId=>

2022 Middlesex EDA Strategic Plan:

<https://www.co.middlesex.va.us/DocumentCenter/View/1869/Strategic-Plan-EDA-Final-Adopted-221215>

The 2014 MSX tourism plan is in the appendix of this document.

2022 Middle Peninsula Comprehensive Economic Development plan can be viewed online:

<https://www.mppdc.com/index.php/service-centers/economic-development/ceds>

Key Goals

The planning group identified seven goals that are critical to growing tourism in Middlesex through a voting process. The comprehensive votes are included in the appendix of this plan.

Draft

Improve Tourism Marketing

- Work to develop an MSX event calendar

Expand Tourism Products and Events

- Expand history assets to include untold and forgotten history including Indigenous Peoples and maritime history
- Work to diversify and increase tourism-specific small businesses

Develop Tourism Relationships and Partnerships

- Increase collaborative efforts throughout MSX including relationships with Urbanna and Deltaville
- Increase funding initiatives (EDA)

Expand Tourism Infrastructure

- Develop a shoreline access and management plan and explore and pursue all opportunities to provide additional public water access (Comp Plan)
- Support acquisition of additional properties for recreation including parkland and natural areas (Comp Plan)

The themes of these critical goals are increased collaboration including an event calendar, expanded history asset development, increased commerce, expanded entrepreneurship, increased funding, and increased water access, which align with the Chesapeake Bay Regional Guide from Drive 2.0. Investment is key to continuing to grow tourism in Middlesex.

The planning group created a larger list of goals, which was broken down into short-term, long-term and ongoing goals within each category. The previously noted key goals are included and each category has overall strategies in bold with tactics listed under • bullets.

Short-term goals should be completed within two years and long-term goals may take more than five years. Some goals are ongoing because they are multi-step processes or will require annual updates. Each goal should be assigned to stakeholder organizations as appropriate with timelines in place.



Improve Tourism Marketing

Strengthen existing marketing strategies and expand promotional efforts

Short-Term Goals

- Develop an expanded marketing plan to include new opportunities such as influencers

Short-Term and Ongoing Goals

- Develop new marketing materials
 - Guide for boaters (EDA)
 - Guide to access the water/water trails (MPCEDs)
 - Guide to trails
- Expand the use of VisitWidget to promote MSX
- Expansion of geographic marketing footprint of MSX

Ongoing Goals

- Highlight MSX visitor strengths
 - Central location close to other metropolitan areas
 - Affordable
 - Small town charm
 - History/heritage
- Work to develop an MSX event calendar
- Increase marketing materials to include some printed materials
- Encourage MSX residents to “Be a tourist” in MSX
- Leverage existing tourism assets (ie, campgrounds, ecotourism)
- Promote under-visited attractions (ie, Deltaville Ball Park, Virginia Motor Speedway)
- Support the efforts to brand Deltaville as “the boating capital of the Chesapeake” (MPCEDs)

Expand marketing strategies

Long-Term Goals

- Market MSX as the premier sports destination on the Middle Peninsula

Expand Tourism Products and Events

Strengthen reasons to visit Middlesex

Short-Term, Ongoing and Long-Term Goals

- Expand history assets to include untold and forgotten history including Indigenous Peoples and maritime history
- Expand reasons to visit during shoulder seasons
- Work with museum assets to diversify programming and activities (2014 TAP)

Short-Term Goals

- Develop new driving and walking trails that support historical and cultural assets
- Inventory all sports-focused activities and assets in MSX

- Develop new 3-day itineraries that highlight strengths
 - Ecotourism (birding, water, wildlife viewing)
 - Sports activities
 - History and heritage

Expand commerce and diversify businesses

Short-Term, Ongoing and Long-Term Goals

- Work to diversify and increase tourism-specific small businesses
 - Encourage entrepreneurship (2014 TAP)(EDA)
 - Recruit outdoor recreation entrepreneurs
 - Restaurants
 - ATV trails (MPCEDs)
 - Recruit additional family-friendly entertainment
 - Recruit chain hotel
 - Recruit craft beverage producer/venue
 - Encourage agritourism ventures (2014 TAP)(Comp Plan)
 - Encourage aquaculture ventures (Comp Plan)

Ongoing Goals

- Provide assistance to existing tourism-related businesses and industries that wish to expand in the County (Comp Plan)
- Encourage commercial recreation, tourism, fisheries, and water- and boating-related industries
- Encourage the preservation of areas and properties of historic and cultural significance in Middlesex County (Comp Plan)

Create new tourism product

Long-Term Goals

- Establish digital visitor kiosks
- Support new rural economic development and businesses that are compatible with the traditional pattern of rural land uses in the Dragon Run area (Comp Plan)
 - The County should discourage the extensive use of the Watershed for public recreation and large-scale tourism and encourage small scale and controlled tourism and recreation uses that conserve natural areas, respect property rights, and limit opportunities for trespassing on private properties in the Watershed such as bed and breakfasts, private hunt clubs and preserves, and private tours (Comp Plan)
 - The County should implement programs and exhibits that interpret the natural and cultural heritage of the Dragon Run for both residents and visitors, without encouraging intense or incompatible recreational use of the Watershed's sensitive resources (Comp Plan)

Develop Tourism Relationships and Partnerships

Increase funding for tourism and tourism businesses

Short-Term Goals

- Work to establish Tourism Zone in MSX to support entrepreneurship and business development

Short-Term, Ongoing and Long-Term Goals

- Increase funding initiatives (EDA)
 - Apply for Virginia Tourism Corporation grants annually to leverage tourism funding
 - Apply for product development through VTC programs such as DRIVE Outdoor
 - Identify additional County allocations for tourism investment
 - Support other organizations grant applications as needed

Increase communication and collaboration

Short-Term and Ongoing Goals

- Better communicate with tourism partners
 - Develop regular communications strategy with stakeholders including emails and meetings
 - Annual report
 - Advocate the importance of tourism
- Increase collaborative efforts throughout MSX including relationships with Urbanna and Deltaville
- Increase partnerships between businesses
- Work more collaboratively with the Middle Peninsula Public Access Authority

Ongoing Goals

- Encourage that tourism is recognized and promoted as an industry and encourage its continuing growth and development (Comp Plan)
- Work regionally to connect with existing resources for entrepreneurs

Support regional partnerships

Ongoing Goals

- Support the execution of the Town of Urbanna's Tourism Action Plan (included in appendix)
- Continue to support participation of MSX in Virginia's River Realm
- Support the regional DMO including the development of a Middle Peninsula specific tourism marketing plan (MPCEDs)

Ongoing and Long-Term Goals

- Increase public-private partnerships
 - Investigate public-private partnerships to enhance the recreational opportunities within the county (Comp Plan)

- Recruit volunteers and tourism ambassadors

Long-Term Goals

- Work regionally to connect with other historic destinations for increased day trips
- Build relationships with surrounding localities to enhance regional efforts
- Support opportunities for technical training and skill development related tourism and natural resource-based businesses (MPCEDs)

Expand Tourism Infrastructure

Improve and expand public water access

Short-Term, Ongoing and Long-Term Goals

- Support expansion of public water access (2014 TAP)
- Develop a shoreline access and management plan and explore and pursue all opportunities to provide additional public water access (Comp Plan)

Ongoing and Long-Term Goals

- Establish a program for the evaluation of properties owned by the County which have potential as suitable sites for public use as access points to the waterways, natural areas and scenic and historic assets. Consideration should be given to the liquidation of such properties having no foreseeable potential use to the County (Comp Plan)(EDA)
- Develop a schedule for monitoring and dredging high-use waterways including creeks and tributaries to maintain boat access for outdoor recreation

Long-Term Goals

- Encourage new development along the county's shorelines to provide public access to the waterways (Comp Plan)
- Develop a public boat ramp owned by MSX

Improve outdoor recreation assets and infrastructure

Short-Term, Ongoing and Long-Term Goals

- Support acquisition of additional properties for recreation including parkland and natural areas (Comp Plan)

Long-Term Goals

- Establish a program to persistently solicit support from the State authorities in the siting of a State Park within the County (Comp Plan)

Improve infrastructure

Short-Term, Ongoing and Long-Term Goals

- Support expanded public transportation
 - Development of MSX multiuse pedestrian trails (2014 TAP)(Comp Plan)(MPCEDs)
 - Development of off-road bike paths within the County (Comp Plan)

- Request that bike lanes, consistent with the adopted bikeway plan, be incorporated into VDOT road projects. The County's subdivision and zoning ordinances will be amended to require bike and pedestrian facilities. (Comp Plan)
- Encourage bike lanes and bike paths within new developments (Comp Plan)
- Request VDOT design and incorporate bikeways into new road projects as designated in any adopted regional and County bikeway plans (Comp Plan)
- Consider bike lanes and bike paths "public facilities" to be considered as part of any future proffer policy adopted by the County (Comp Plan)
- Connecting campgrounds to retail centers

Other

Throughout the process of developing this Tourism Action Plan, the planning group had a variety of engaging conversations, and several items of interest were noted. The group believes that Middlesex needs to work on expansion of its public water access, which would set it apart from other parts of the region.

Expanded tourism staff and additional funding will also help encourage tourism growth in Middlesex. While the extensive list of goals in this report is useful, it cannot all be accomplished without more resources. Some of the goals require upfront funding, but the return on initial investments would occur. Working collaboratively with other organizations – locally, regionally and statewide – can assist in accomplishing these goals, but Middlesex may need to allocate additional resources – both staff and funding.

New tourism product and strengthening existing marketing efforts will help further develop tourism in Middlesex. Middlesex must work within the community to bolster entrepreneurial efforts to further expand the tourism industry.

The group identified several entrepreneurial opportunities that would benefit the tourism industry.

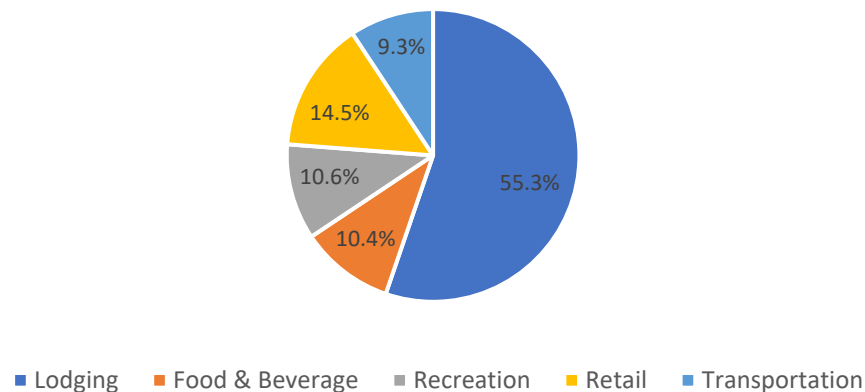
Identified Entrepreneurial Opportunities

- Attractions
 - Craft beverage producer (brewery, winery, distilled spirits)
 - Event venue
 - Family-friendly entertainment
 - More agritourism attractions
 - Theater
- Lodging
 - Boutique hotel
 - More traditional transient lodging
- Retail
 - Grocery
 - More retail in general

- Outfitters for equipment rental
- Restaurants
 - Food truck court
 - More waterfront dining options
- Other
 - Agritourism ventures
 - Full-service boat ramp with concessions and restrooms
 - Laundromat
 - Public transportation

Creation of new businesses through the above identified opportunities would grow tourism expenditures in Middlesex. In the most recent 2023 economic impact data from VTC, lodging was the largest category for tourism expenditures accounting for more than half of all expenditures. The lodging expenditures are a result of the multiple campgrounds in Middlesex. Diversification of lodging options could expand revenues for visitors seeking traditional accommodations. Growth in food and beverage, recreation, and retail would be beneficial to the local economy and support a better quality of life for residents. In 2023 data, transportation had the lowest share of tourism expenditures at only 9.3% of spending.

2023 Sector Share Percentages of Tourism Expenditures
in Middlesex



Source: Virginia Tourism Corporation Economic Impact Data 2023

Monitoring Progress

Middlesex staff will monitor progress of all goals and initiatives on an annual basis. Tourism in Middlesex must be a collaborative effort due to limited resources. It is important that Middlesex work collaboratively with its partners including the Town of Urbanna as well as the Deltaville Community Association and Museums of Middlesex.

It is important that Middlesex reiterate their shared goals, mission, and vision with the community so that stakeholders continue to recognize tourism as an important sector in

Middlesex. This plan contains important community and entrepreneurial development ideas that support tourism development in Middlesex.

To encourage progress toward the established strategies, this plan should be reviewed on a consistent basis. Upon each review, any adjustments that need to be made to this plan should be considered. Once many of the targets have been met or three to five years have passed, a new/updated plan should be developed through another collaborative process. Measures can vary based on the goal and can be established by county staff. Suggested measures should be tangible and supported by visitors traveling to Middlesex.

It is vital that the plan be referenced consistently as any new tourism related project or initiative discussions occur and as all applicable decisions are made. Using this plan to help make decisions will be beneficial to Middlesex defining itself as a place where history, nature, and culture come together to create shared experiences.

To assist with completion of the plan's goals it is suggested that stakeholders monitor grants offered by VTC. Grants will continue to help extend investments made to create larger impacts. Grants include the Marketing Leverage Program, VA250 Marketing Leverage Program, VTC's DRIVE program and any other applicable new grants. A number of other state and federal agencies offer grants that may also support this plan.

Conclusion

All ships rise with the tide and increased tourism visitation and expenditures can expand tourism in Middlesex. The addition of new and expanded tourism-related businesses will augment the length of visitor stays and improve quality of life for residents. Communication and collaboration are vital to Middlesex thriving as a tourist destination.

Middlesex's rich history and outdoor recreation paired with its natural beauty and watermen's culture provide great opportunity for visitors to experience a charming, waterfront destination. These existing assets can encourage a stronger tourism sector specifically through further developing outdoor recreation and heritage tourism. Middlesex should focus on its seven key goals and work collaboratively with its partners.

Implementation of this plan is expected to result in various benefits to Middlesex citizens, including increased job and business opportunities and increased tax revenue, while maintaining quality of life for those citizens.

This tourism action plan was developed utilizing community input from a variety of stakeholders in conjunction with existing research on the Chesapeake Bay region and previously approved documents including the 2014 Middlesex County Tourism Action Plan and Comprehensive Plan. As always, this 2025 tourism action plan can be changed and amended at any time as travel trends change.



Appendix

Abbreviations

DCR: Department of Conservation and Recreation

DHCD: Department of Housing and Community Development

DWR: Department of Wildlife Resources

NPS: National Park Service

SEO: Search engine optimization

Terms & Definitions

Goals: Broad statements of measurable outcomes to be achieved on behalf of customers

Measures: Meaningful indicators that assess progress towards accomplishment of goals and objectives

Mission Statement: Statement of purpose; fundamental reason for an organization's/tourism effort existence

Opportunities: Factors or situations that exist beyond your organization that may have a favorable effect on it

Strengths: Resources or capabilities that can be used to accomplish your mission.

Target: The numerical value of the performance measure you hope to achieve

Threats: Factors or situations that exist beyond your organization that can negatively affect it

Tourism Assets/Products: Any tourism related product, attraction, site, or promotional effort that is of interest to target customers/tourists

Vision Statement: A word picture of the future that the organization/tourism effort intends ultimately to become or to influence

Way finding: Signs, maps, and other graphic or audible methods used to convey location and directions to travelers

Weaknesses: Deficiencies in resources or capabilities that hinder your ability to be successful

Hub & Spoke Exercise

Lures were identified – a lure is the primary reason travelers are coming to your area. Lures were based on tourism products that have been brought up continually throughout the planning process. Following identification of lures, key existing tourism assets were identified. These are referred to as existing product.

Following review of existing product, the group reviewed what Middlesex should be building and focusing on to expand tourism products. At the core of vibrant communities are its assets. To stay competitive in the tourism landscape, it is critical that communities are well-rounded. Part of this includes constantly assessing what exists, what needs to be enhanced and what needs to be added.

The group reviewed what could enhance existing products. These are areas that just need a little tweaking or improvement.

The 2- year product ideas are projects or ideas that a community can implement in the short-term. The five-year product idea is something that is truly game changing and have a significant impact on a community.

Lure: Nature

Existing Product: Water recreation

Existing Product: Camping

Enhanced Product: Guide for boaters/how to access the water

Enhanced Product: Kayak trails and marketing materials

Two-Year Idea: Boat ramp

Five-Year Game Changer: Trails

Lure: History

Existing Product: Museums

Existing Product: Maritime/watermen

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Enhanced Product: Amplifying existing trails

Enhanced Product: Connecting to existing history

Two-Year Idea: Development of more historic themes/trails

Five-Year Game Changer: Digital kiosk(s)

Lure: Sports

Existing Product: Water-related recreation (including fishing)

Existing Product: Croquet Club, golf, disc golf, horseback riding

Enhanced Product: Inventory of all sports activities and assets

Enhanced Product: Sports-focused itineraries

Two-Year Idea: Sports events/inventory/history/feasibility

Five-Year Game Changer: Future of sports/masterplan/economic analysis

[Goal Prioritization Exercise](#)

Improve Tourism Marketing

	Important Votes	Votes	Total
Encourage MSX residents to “Be a tourist” in MSX	0	1	1
Increase marketing materials to include some printed materials	0	3	3
Develop new marketing materials	0	2	2
Work to develop an MSX event calendar	0	6	6
Market MSX as the premier sports destination on the Middle Peninsula			
Leverage existing tourism assets (ie, campgrounds, ecotourism)	0	1	1
Expand the use of VisitWidget to promote MSX	0	4	4
Develop an expanded marketing plan to include new opportunities such as influencers	0	2	2
Promote under-visited attractions (ie, Deltaville Ball Park, Virginia Motor Speedway)	0	1	1
Highlight MSX visitor strengths	0	1	1
Expansion of geographic marketing footprint of MSX			
Support the efforts to brand Deltaville as “the boating capital of the Chesapeake” (MPCEDs)	2	2	4

Expand Tourism Products and Events

	Important Votes	Votes	Total
Develop new driving and walking trails that support historical and cultural assets	0	3	3
Establish digital visitor kiosks	0	2	2
Inventory all sports-focused activities and assets in MSX			
Develop new 3-day itineraries that highlight strengths	0	5	5
Expand history assets to include untold and forgotten history including Indigenous Peoples and maritime history	1	6	7
Encourage commercial recreation, tourism, fisheries, and water- and boating-related industries			
Work to diversify and increase tourism-specific small businesses	3	9	12
Provide assistance to existing tourism-related businesses and industries that wish to expand in the County (Comp Plan)			
Support new rural economic development and businesses that are compatible with the traditional pattern of rural land uses in the Dragon Run area (Comp Plan)	0	1	1
Expand reasons to visit during shoulder seasons	0	2	2
Work with museum assets to diversify programming and activities (2014 TAP)	0	4	4
Encourage the preservation of areas and properties of historic and cultural significance in Middlesex County (Comp Plan)	0	4	4

Develop Tourism Relationships and Partnerships

	Important Votes	Votes	Total
Encourage that tourism is recognized and promoted as an industry and encourage its continuing growth and development (Comp Plan)			
Better communicate with tourism partners	0	2	2
Continue to support participation of MSX in Virginia's River Realm	0	4	4
Support the regional DMO including the development of a Middle Peninsula specific tourism marketing plan (MPCEDs)	0	1	1
Support the execution of the Town of Urbanna's Tourism Action Plan (included in appendix)	0	3	3
Increase collaborative efforts throughout MSX including relationships with Urbanna and Deltaville	0	5	5
Increase partnerships between businesses	0	3	3
Increase public-private partnerships			

Work regionally to connect with other historic destinations for increased day trips	0	1	1
Work regionally to connect with existing resources for entrepreneurs			
Build relationships with surrounding localities to enhance regional efforts	0	2	2
Work more collaboratively with the Middle Peninsula Public Access Authority			
Recruit volunteers and tourism ambassadors	0	1	1
Support opportunities for technical training and skill development related tourism and natural resource-based businesses (MPCEDs)			
Work to establish Tourism Zone in MSX to support entrepreneurship and business development	0	1	1
Increase funding initiatives (EDA)	0	6	6

Expand Tourism Infrastructure

	Important Votes	Votes	Total
Support expanded public transportation	1	4	5
Support expansion of public water access (2014 TAP)	0	3	3
Encourage new development along the county's shorelines to provide public access to the waterways (Comp Plan)			
Develop a shoreline access and management plan and explore and pursue all opportunities to provide additional public water access (Comp Plan)	8	5	13
Support acquisition of additional properties for recreation including parkland and natural areas (Comp Plan)	0	6	6
Establish a program to persistently solicit support from the State authorities in the siting of a State Park within the Count (Comp Plan)			
Establish a program for the evaluation of properties owned by the County which have potential as suitable sites for public use as access points to the waterways, natural areas and scenic and historic assets.	0	4	4
Consideration should be given to the liquidation of such properties having no foreseeable potential use to the County (Comp Plan)(EDA)	0	1	1
Develop a public boat ramp owned by MSX	0	3	3

Notes: Goals are not listed in their entirety in the above chart. Please view pages 12-19 for the complete goal descriptions.

VTC Economic Impact Data for Middlesex 2019-2023

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Percent Change
Travel Economic Impacts						
Employment	143	131	133	135	128	-4.6%
Expenditures	\$ 26,483,314	\$ 24,772,846	\$ 29,235,441	\$ 29,963,196	\$ 30,029,833	0.2%
Labor Income	\$ 4,259,273	\$ 3,889,104	\$ 4,242,096	\$ 4,236,647	\$ 4,218,096	-0.4%
Local Tax Receipts	\$ 791,831	\$ 721,790	\$ 846,356	\$ 935,871	\$ 939,021	0.3%
State Tax Receipts	\$ 410,153	\$ 345,047	\$ 411,639	\$ 423,537	\$ 413,638	-2.3%

Source: <http://www.vatc.org/research/economicimpact>

Sector Specific Data 2019-2023

2019			
	Total Sector Spend	Share of Total	YOY %
Lodging	\$ 14.7 M	55.6%	4.3%
Food & Beverage	\$ 2.6 M	9.9%	1.7%
Recreation	\$ 2.5 M	9.5%	2.9%
Retail	\$ 4.3 M	16.1%	-2.2%
Transportation	\$ 2.4 M	8.9%	-2.6%

2020			
	Total Sector Spend	Share of Total	YOY %
Lodging	\$ 14.8 M	59.9%	0.7%
Food & Beverage	\$ 2.2 M	9.0%	-15.3%
Recreation	\$ 2.3 M	9.3%	-8.0%
Retail	\$ 3.4 M	13.8%	-20.0%
Transportation	\$ 2 M	8.1%	-15.4%

2021			
	Total Sector Spend	Share of Total	YOY %
Lodging	\$ 16.2 M	55.4%	9.2%
Food & Beverage	\$ 2.9 M	10.0%	31.4%
Recreation	\$ 2.9 M	9.8%	24.6%
Retail	\$ 4.4 M	15.0%	28.4%
Transportation	\$ 2.9 M	9.8%	43.1%

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2022			
	Total Sector Spend	Share of Total	YOY %
Lodging	\$ 16.1 M	53.7%	-0.7%
Food & Beverage	\$ 3.1 M	10.4%	6.4%
Recreation	\$ 3.3 M	10.9%	13.8%
Retail	\$ 4.5 M	15.0%	2.6%
Transportation	\$ 3.0 M	10.1%	5.2%

2023			
	Total Sector Spend	Share of Total	YOY %
Lodging	\$ 16.6 M	55.3%	3.2%
Food & Beverage	\$ 3.1 M	10.4%	1.0%
Recreation	\$ 3.2 M	10.6%	-2.9%
Retail	\$ 4.3 M	14.5%	-3.3%
Transportation	\$ 2.8 M	9.3%	-7.7%

Source: This data is provided by Tourism Economics and prepared for VTC.

Existing Historical Landmarks

*denotes that an associated physical highway marker exists

Place	VLR Listing Date	NHL Listing Date	NRHP Listing Date	Link
Christ Church*	3/21/1972	N/A	11/3/1972	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/059-0002/
Deer Chase	6/19/1973	N/A	8/14/1973	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/059-0017/
F. D. Crockett (log deck boat)	6/21/2021	N/A	8/22/2012	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/059-5013/
Hewick*	7/18/1978	N/A	11/17/1978	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/059-0006/
James Mills Storehouse*	4/18/1972	N/A	11/7/1972	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/316-0004/
Lansdowne	9/17/1974	N/A	11/8/1974	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/316-0003/
Lower Chapel	10/17/1972	N/A	4/24/1973	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/059-0007/
Middlesex County Courthouse*	4/18/1978	N/A	11/21/1978	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/059-0008/
Old Middlesex Courthouse*	6/15/1976	N/A	11/21/1976	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/316-0002/

Prospect	3/17/2004	N/A	5/19/2004	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/059-0025/
Rosegill*	2/10/1973	N/A	11/27/1973	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/059-0009/
Saluda Historic District	9/17/2020	N/A	12/8/2020	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/059-5124/
Sandwich	3/20/2008	N/A	5/8/2008	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/316-0001/
St. Clare Walker School Complex*	3/21/2024	N/A	N/A Currently	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/059-0078/
Urbanna Historic District	8/21/1990	N/A	2/7/1991	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/316-0009/
Wilton	10/17/1978	N/A	2/28/1979	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/059-0010/
Wormeley Cottage	12/20/1977	N/A	5/23/1980	https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/316-0006/

Source: <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/>

Abbreviations:

VLR: Virginia Landmarks Register

NHL: National Historic Landmark

NRHP: National Register of Historic Places

Additional Highway Markers

Marker Name	Location	Details
Antioch Baptist Church	General Puller Hwy	U.S. 17 Business at intersection with Rt. 618
Christopher Robinson	Old Virginia St.	Rte. 602, just north of Rte. 615, 0.5 miles west of Urbanna
John Mitchell's Map	Old Virginia St.	Old Virginia Street at intersection with Cross Street, Urbanna
Morgan v. Virginia	General Puller Hwy	Corner of General Puller Hwy and New St., Saluda
Naval Actions on Wilton Creek and the Rappahannock River	General Puller Hwy	Rte 33 at intersection with Woodport Lane
Opiscopank--Smith's Mystery Town	Urbanna Rd.	Route 227 near intersection with Mollys Way, Urbanna
Stingray Point (1)	General Puller Hwy	17147 General Puller Highway/ East Saluda
Stingray Point (2)	General Puller Hwy	General Puller Highway at intersection with Twiggs Ferry Road, in Hartfield

Stingray Point Contraband	General Puller Hwy	17147 General Puller Highway
Tomb of Puller	General Puller Hwy	Rte. 33, at intersection with Christchurch Drive
Urbanna Creek	Urbanna Rd.	Rte. 227, near intersection with Route 1070, at Urbanna

Source: <https://vcris.dhr.virginia.gov/HistoricMarkers/>

Icebreaker Exercises

Each session began with a question for stakeholders. The questions and their answers are listed below.

What is a hidden gem in Middlesex County?

Big Oak Café
 Captain John Smith Heritage Trail
 Crossrip Camp
 Deltaville Ball Park
 Dragon Run
 Hughlett Plantation
 John Mitchell Map at the Scottish Factory Store
 Public dock in Deltaville
 Stamper's Bay Landing
 Tetaking Nature Preserve
 Urbanna Town Marina
 Wake Beach
 Watermen's Park

What is your favorite restaurant in Middlesex County? **Bold indicates multiple people agreed**

Deltaville Tap & Raw Bar	Something Different
Little Jimmy's	The Galley
Los Compadres Mexican Grill	The Table

What location shows Middlesex in a photo? **Bold indicates multiple people agreed**

Aerial of Hummel Field Airport including WWII aircraft and the river
 Aerial of Stove Point/Jackson Creek
 Aerial of Town of Urbanna
 Clubhouse at Deltaville Yachting Center
 Interior shot of Chad's Dad
 Kayaking
 Rural landscapes
 Sailboats/regatta
 Urbanna bridge view
 Urbanna Marina (looking at it from the water and looking out to the water)
 Urbanna Oyster Festival
 Watermen's Park

Wildlife/birding

Describe Middlesex in one word. Bold indicates multiple people agreed

Charming

Relaxed

Dead end

Rural Virginia

Festivals

Serene

Laid back

Tight-knit

Majestic

Variety

Quaint

Fill in the blank.

Middlesex County is a _____ destination for _____ seeking _____.

Middlesex County is a prime destination for outdoor lovers seeking adventure.

Middlesex County is a waterfront destination for smalltown lovers, boaters, and outdoor adventurers seeking tranquility, fun and unique experiences.

Middlesex County is a hidden gem destination for travelers seeking history and water recreation.

Middlesex County is a smalltown destination for anyone seeking boating, camping, and relaxation.

Middlesex County is a perfect destination for those seeking a friendly community.

Middlesex County is a great destination for people seeking peace and quiet.

Middlesex County is a well-known destination for boaters seeking services and repairs.

Middlesex County is a boating destination for people seeking boat repair and services.

Middlesex County is an easy to get to destination for families seeking smalltown activities and events.

Middlesex County is a great destination for anybody seeking unique experiences.

Middlesex County is a historic destination for rural waterfront living seeking a reasonably priced place to live close to amenities.

Middlesex County is a rural destination for people and tourists seeking traditional values and relaxation.

[Appendix Documents](#)

- 2014 MSX Tourism Plan
- 2023 Urbanna Tourism Action Plan, adopted in 2024