



# Middlesex Water (MSEX)

Updated March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 by Samuel Smith

## Key Metrics

<b>Current Price:</b>	\$60	<b>5 Year CAGR Estimate:</b>	-3.0%	<b>Volatility Percentile:</b>	77.9%
<b>Fair Value Price:</b>	\$42	<b>5 Year Growth Estimate:</b>	2.2%	<b>Momentum Percentile:</b>	99.6%
<b>% Fair Value:</b>	142%	<b>5 Year Valuation Multiple Estimate:</b>	-6.8%	<b>Growth Percentile:</b>	8.8%
<b>Dividend Yield:</b>	1.6%	<b>5 Year Price Target</b>	\$47	<b>Valuation Percentile:</b>	7.6%
<b>Dividend Risk Score:</b>	A	<b>Retirement Suitability Score:</b>	C	<b>Total Return Percentile:</b>	1.5%

## Overview & Current Events

Middlesex Water Company was formed in 1897. The company is a water and wastewater utility in New Jersey and Delaware. Its market capitalization is \$700 million, and it produces about \$130 million in revenue annually. Middlesex has paid consecutive dividends since 1912 and has reached its 44<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of dividend increases.

Middlesex reported another strong quarter for Q4 on 3/8/19. Total revenue increased 5.8%. The majority of the gain came from higher rates in New Jersey, but customer growth and increased contract operations at the White Marsh, Inc. subsidiary contributed as well. Operating and maintenance expenses increased at a lower rate than that of revenue, leading to profitability gains, as expected. Overall, Middlesex continues to perform very well and exceeded our earnings-per-share estimate for 2018 by generating \$1.96 (exceeding our expectations of \$1.80 by 8.9% and 2017's EPS of \$1.38 by 42%).

## Growth on a Per-Share Basis

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2024
<b>EPS</b>	\$0.72	\$0.96	\$0.84	\$0.90	\$1.03	\$1.13	\$1.22	\$1.38	\$1.38	\$1.96	<b>\$2.00</b>	<b>\$2.23</b>
<b>DPS</b>	\$0.71	\$0.72	\$0.73	\$0.74	\$0.75	\$0.76	\$0.78	\$0.81	\$0.86	\$0.96	<b>\$1.06</b>	<b>\$1.20</b>
<b>Shares</b>	14	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	17	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>

Earnings-per-share have been rising steadily over the past decade, although gains have been far from linear. The Great Recession saw earnings fall markedly in 2009 but recovery was fairly quick and since 2009, earnings have more than doubled. We see total earnings-per-share growth for the next five years of just 2.2%, which is slightly below Middlesex's historical rate of growth. However, the only meaningful sources of growth will be the rate increase in New Jersey and lower taxes. The rate hike will boost revenue by ~3% this year and a lower tax rate will help as well, but starting in 2019, those things will be part of the comparable base. Indeed, FY18 results were driven almost exclusively by these two items. Therefore, growth will look much better in 2018 than in later years, a fact reflected by our estimates. Following this year, earnings growth will have to come primarily from cutting operating expenses and customer growth, both of which have historically contributed only minimally to growth.

We are forecasting the dividend to continue its streak of small increases, rising from this year's payout of \$0.96 to \$1.20 in five years' time. Middlesex has an impressive streak of dividend increases that will continue to grow but on a percentage basis, the payout will rise rather slowly. The company's payout ratio was far too high during the Great Recession and management pulled way back on dividend increases to avoid a similar fate down the road.

## Valuation Analysis

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Now	2024
<b>Avg. P/E</b>	21.0	17.8	21.7	20.8	19.7	18.5	19.1	25.6	28.4	26.9	<b>30.1</b>	<b>21.2</b>
<b>Avg. Yld.</b>	4.7%	4.2%	4.0%	4.0%	3.7%	3.7%	3.3%	2.3%	2.2%	1.8%	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>3.1%</b>

The company's price-to-earnings multiple has risen sharply in recent years and as a result, the stock looks substantially overvalued today. After spending much of the past decade under 20, the current multiple is 30.1. We are forecasting a

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decline back towards 21 in five years, indicating a meaningful 6.8% annual headwind to total returns. Given the stock's growth profile, it simply cannot sustain a price-to-earnings multiple near its current level.

As a result of the expected multiple contraction and weak dividend growth, we are forecasting the yield to return to normalized levels in excess of 3% from the current 1.6%. The yield is another way to demonstrate just how overvalued Middlesex is today, but we see that situation being rectified by a lower stock price and higher payout going forward.

## Safety, Quality, Competitive Advantage, & Recession Resiliency

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2024
Payout	98%	75%	87%	83%	73%	67%	63%	58%	62%	53%	53%	54%

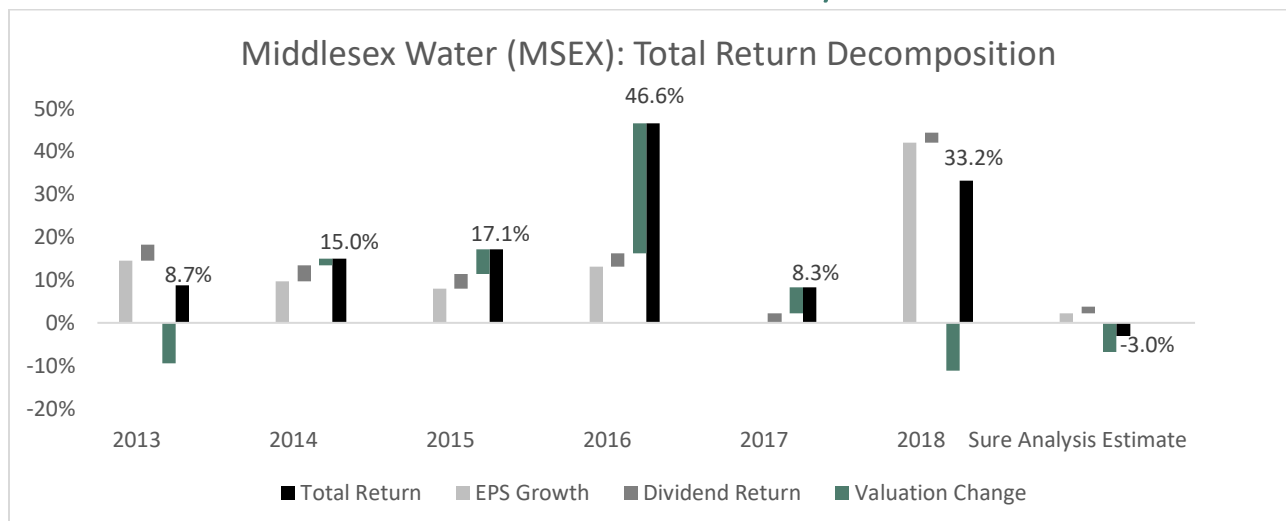
Like many other regulated utilities, Middlesex' quality metrics have remained steady in the past decade thanks to the monopoly-like nature of its assets. Its margins are right where they were 10 years ago and have remained very stable in the past few years in particular. However, since pricing is regulated, they cannot drive excessive profitability, thereby explaining the resistance to significant margin expansion. Its assets are 65% debt-financed, allowing for an excellent interest coverage ratio for a utility. Middlesex has the balance sheet to weather any economic storm so there is no question of safety, but obviously growth remains an issue. The payout ratio neared 100% in 2009 but slow growth in dividends and better rates of earnings-per-share growth have led it back down to 53% today. We see that rising slightly over time but overall, the dividend is very safe.

Middlesex' recession performance is decent given that it sells the most basic staple of all and indeed, its revenue was basically flat in 2009 at the height of the recession. Its earnings did not fare quite as well, but it certainly stood up to the downturn. Its obvious competitive advantage is in the monopoly it enjoys in its service area.

## Final Thoughts & Recommendation

Middlesex still looks to be overvalued here as the stock has had an impressive run in the past several years. We see total annual returns of -3.0% going forward, consisting of the current 1.6% yield, 2.2% earnings-per-share growth and a 6.8% headwind from multiple contraction. Its impressive dividend history is certainly worth noting but the current yield is likely too low to attract income investors. Middlesex would also be unattractive for those seeking growth or value, given the low potential for the former and high current valuation. We recommend selling Middlesex at current prices and investing the proceeds elsewhere due to its negative expected total returns over the next 5 years.

## Total Return Breakdown by Year



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## Income Statement Metrics

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Revenue</b>	91	103	102	110	115	117	126	133	131	138
<b>D&amp;A Exp.</b>	9	10	10	11	12	12	13	14	15	16
<b>Operating Profit</b>	20	27	24	28	31	34	36	40	38	37
<b>Operating Margin</b>	22.1%	25.9%	23.7%	25.0%	27.0%	29.4%	28.4%	30.3%	28.9%	26.9%
<b>Net Profit</b>	10	14	13	14	17	18	20	23	23	32
<b>Net Margin</b>	10.9%	13.9%	13.2%	13.0%	14.5%	15.7%	15.9%	17.1%	17.4%	23.5%
<b>Free Cash Flow</b>	-2	-4	-1	8	14	10	25	0	-7	-26
<b>Income Tax</b>	5	7	7	7	9	10	11	12	11	1

## Balance Sheet Metrics

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Total Assets</b>	458	489	538	562	530	576	581	620	661	768
<b>Cash &amp; Equivalents</b>	4	2	3	3	5	3	3	4	5	4
<b>Accounts Receivable</b>	11	12	11	12	12	10	10	10	11	12
<b>Inventories</b>	2	2	2	1	2	2	3	4	4	5
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	315	313	357	377	342	376	375	399	430	517
<b>Accounts Payable</b>	4	6	6	4	6	6	7	12	14	19
<b>Long-Term Debt</b>	171	155	161	171	164	161	142	153	174	209
<b>Shareholder's Equity</b>	140	173	177	182	186	197	204	218	229	249
<b>D/E Ratio</b>	1.20	0.88	0.89	0.92	0.87	0.81	0.69	0.69	0.75	0.83

## Profitability & Per Share Metrics

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Return on Assets</b>	2.2%	3.0%	2.6%	2.6%	3.0%	3.3%	3.5%	3.8%	3.6%	4.5%
<b>Return on Equity</b>	7.2%	9.2%	7.7%	8.0%	9.1%	9.6%	10.0%	10.8%	10.2%	13.6%
<b>ROIC</b>	3.2%	4.4%	4.0%	4.1%	4.7%	5.2%	5.6%	6.3%	5.9%	7.5%
<b>Shares Out.</b>	14	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	17
<b>Revenue/Share</b>	6.65	6.89	6.43	6.90	7.13	7.22	7.72	8.09	7.93	8.35
<b>FCF/Share</b>	-0.12	-0.27	-0.05	0.50	0.85	0.61	1.56	-0.02	-0.45	-1.59

Note: All figures in millions of U.S. Dollars unless per share or indicated otherwise.

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