



Middlesex Water (MSEX)

Updated November 8th, 2024 by Samuel Smith

Key Metrics

Current Price:	\$69.6	5 Year CAGR Estimate:	2.4%	Market Cap:	\$1.2 B
Fair Value Price:	\$56.5	5 Year Growth Estimate:	4.7%	Ex-Dividend Date:	11/15/24
% Fair Value:	123%	5 Year Valuation Multiple Estimate:	-4.1%	Dividend Payment Date:	12/2/24
Dividend Yield:	2.0%	5 Year Price Target	\$71	Years Of Dividend Growth:	52
Dividend Risk Score:	A	Retirement Suitability Score:	B	Rating:	Sell

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 \$1.2 billion. Middlesex has paid consecutive dividends since 1912 and has reached its 52nd consecutive year of dividend increases.

Middlesex Water Company (MSEX) posted strong financial results for Q3 2024, with diluted earnings per share increasing by 42.9% to \$0.80 and revenues up 17.95% year-over-year to \$55.1 million. The revenue growth was driven by an \$8.4 million increase primarily due to an NJBPU-approved base rate hike effective from March 2024 and increased customer demand, especially in the Middlesex System and Delaware operations. Operations and maintenance expenses rose by \$2.8 million, attributed to enhanced water treatment, higher labor costs, and rising energy expenses. Year-to-date, the company reported a net income increase of \$9.8 million to \$35.5 million and EPS of \$1.98, with substantial gains from the base rate increases and a \$6.8 million recovery related to water treatment investments. The company continues its 52-year streak of dividend increases, with a 4.62% rise announced. In regulatory developments, Middlesex filed for additional charges to enhance infrastructure in New Jersey and Delaware, anticipating over \$3 million in combined annual revenues. CEO Nadine Leslie attributed the results to operational efficiency and constructive regulatory interactions to support infrastructure investments, reflecting a commitment to reliable service and growth.

Growth on a Per-Share Basis

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2029
EPS	\$1.13	\$1.22	\$1.38	\$1.38	\$1.96	\$2.02	\$2.18	\$2.07	\$2.12	\$1.76	\$2.26	\$2.85
DPS	\$0.76	\$0.78	\$0.81	\$0.86	\$0.96	\$0.98	\$1.05	\$1.11	\$1.18	\$1.26	\$1.36	\$1.50
Shares¹	16.1	16.2	16.3	16.4	16.4	17.4	17.5	17.5	17.6	17.8	17.9	20.0

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 roughly tripled. We see annualized earnings-per-share growth for the next five years in the mid-single-digits as the meaningful sources of growth will be the rate increase in New Jersey and inflationary pressures. Adding customers will also help some as it will also improve operational efficiencies through economies of scale.

We are forecasting the dividend to continue its streak of small increases, rising to \$1.50 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	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Now	2029
Avg. P/E	19.7	18.5	19.1	25.6	28.4	26.9	30.5	34.2	56.4	36.5	30.8	25.0
Avg. Yld.	3.4%	3.5%	3.1%	2.4%	1.7%	1.8%	1.6%	1.6%	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.1%

¹ In millions

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The company's price-to-earnings multiple looks overvalued today. As a result, the stock should face a slight headwind to total returns in the coming half-decade from multiple contraction. The dividend yield will likely remain in its current range moving forward.

Safety, Quality, Competitive Advantage, & Recession Resiliency

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2029
Payout	67%	64%	59%	62%	49%	49%	48%	54%	56%	72%	60%	53%

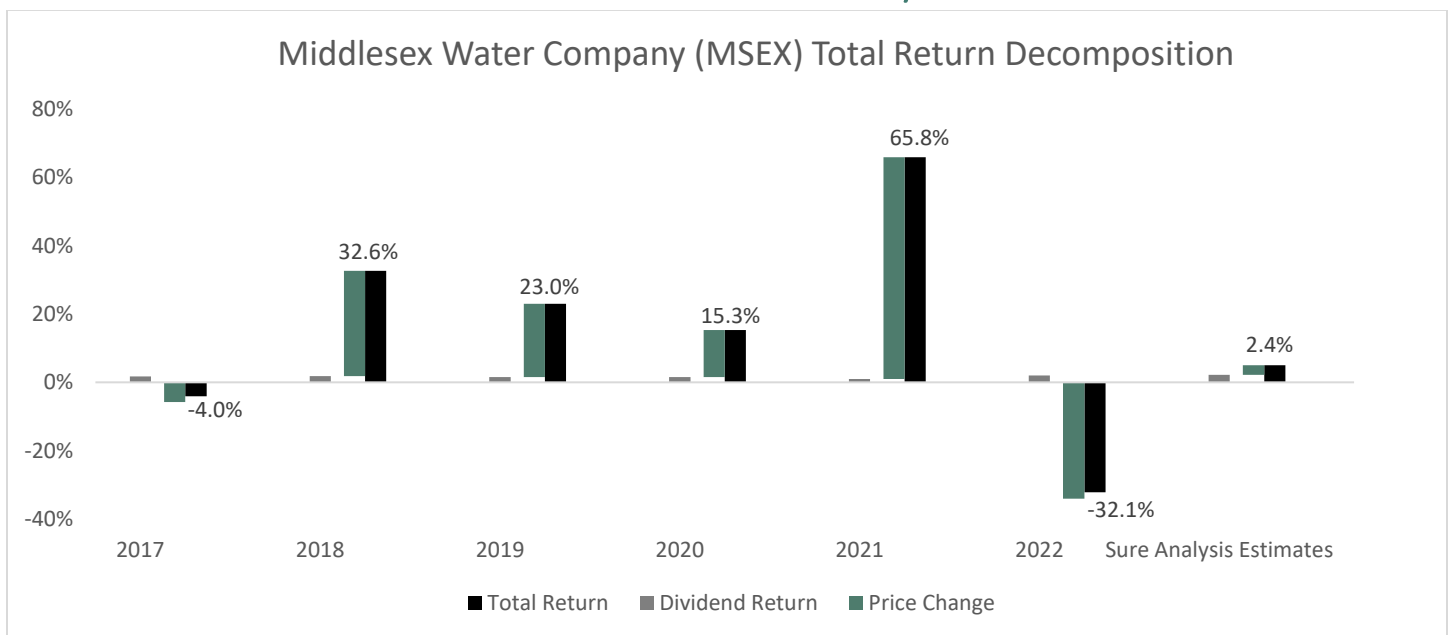
Like many other regulated utilities, Middlesex' quality metrics have remained steady in the past decade thanks to the monopoly-like nature of its assets. However, since pricing is regulated, they cannot drive excessive profitability, thereby explaining the resistance to significant margin expansion. Its assets are mostly debt-financed, allowing for an excellent interest coverage ratio for a utility. Middlesex has the balance sheet to weather virtually 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 60% today, making the dividend 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 offers annualized total return potential of 2.4% going forward based on our projections, as the current yield and mid-single digit expected annual earnings-per-share growth will face with slight expected valuation multiple contraction. The company's impressive dividend growth 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. As a result, we rate the stock a Sell.

Total Return Breakdown by Year



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Income Statement Metrics

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Revenue	117	126	133	131	138	135	142	143	162	166
D&A Exp.	12	13	14	15	16	17	21	27	27	29
Operating Profit	34	36	40	38	37	36	37	33	42	39
Operating Margin	29.4%	28.4%	30.3%	28.9%	26.9%	26.4%	26.4%	23.2%	25.9%	23.6%
Net Profit	18	20	23	23	32	34	38	37	42	32
Net Margin	15.7%	15.9%	17.1%	17.4%	23.5%	25.2%	27.1%	25.5%	26.1%	19.0%
Free Cash Flow	10	25	(0)	(7)	(26)	(53)	(52)	(46)	(30)	(37)
Income Tax	10	11	12	11	1	(3)	(4)	(5)	3	1

Balance Sheet Metrics

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Assets	576	581	620	661	768	910	976	1,020	1,074	1,236
Cash & Equivalents	3	3	4	5	4	2	4	4	4	2
Accounts Receivable	10	10	10	11	12	12	15	15	16	18
Inventories	2	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	6	7
Total Liabilities	376	372	399	430	517	584	628	650	672	811
Accounts Payable	6	7	12	14	19	23	30	21	25	28
Long-Term Debt	161	142	153	174	209	258	282	326	363	409
Shareholder's Equity	197	207	218	229	249	324	346	368	400	423
LTD/E Ratio	0.81	0.68	0.69	0.75	0.83	0.79	0.81	0.88	0.90	0.96

Profitability & Per Share Metrics

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Return on Assets	3.3%	3.5%	3.8%	3.6%	4.5%	4.0%	4.1%	3.7%	4.1%	2.7%
Return on Equity	9.4%	9.8%	10.6%	10.1%	13.4%	11.7%	11.4%	10.2%	11.0%	7.6%
ROIC	5.2%	5.6%	6.3%	5.9%	7.5%	6.5%	6.3%	5.5%	5.8%	3.9%
Shares Out.	16.1	16.2	16.3	16.4	16.4	17.4	17.5	17.5	17.6	17.8
Revenue/Share	7.22	7.72	8.09	7.93	8.35	8.00	8.06	8.13	9.17	9.32
FCF/Share	0.61	1.56	(0.02)	(0.45)	(1.59)	(3.15)	(2.97)	(2.63)	(1.69)	(2.10)

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

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