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RPC Board Review Copy
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2023 Comprehensive Plan Fairfield County

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WORKING DRAFT

Steering Committee Review Copy

Fairfield County 2023 Comprehensive Plan

08/01/23

Executive Summary

1.1 Managing Growth and Development

Fairfield County and its local jurisdictions are facing a key moment in history relative to growth and development. The metropolitan region continues to expand, major economic opportunities are occurring outside of Franklin County, the housing market is under duress, and land is a finite resource. Managing these forces while balancing what is best about Fairfield County is the major focus of the 2023 Comprehensive Plan.

These forces include a geographically expanding, yet sometimes contracting metropolitan region, economic expansion of data centers, advanced manufacturing, logistics, and warehousing, the increasing role of US-33 connecting the Columbus metropolitan region to Southeast Ohio, growing a highly skilled local workforce, and unprecedented pressure on the regional and local housing market (rising development costs, lack of available housing stock, and affordability challenges).

The County enjoys outstanding aesthetic and natural assets, including abundant highly productive farmland, as well as an extensive stream system and natural areas, and the foothills of the Hocking Hills region, one of the increasingly recognized tourist destinations in the U.S.

Within this context, it's critical to note that land is a finite resource in Fairfield County. An estimate prepared for the planning process determined that only 35% of the County is available to support future growth, not just growth for the next five to ten years, but for the entire future of Fairfield County. This is a pivotal point. Decisions regarding growth and development must strike the appropriate balance among a healthy economy, providing homes for current and future generations, and protecting the County's agricultural roots and natural landscape.

As a result, the plan seeks to target future development in the locations that can best support that growth through the extension of public utilities and transportation enhancements, which is different from the low density, random residential development pattern that typifies most townships and consumes significant amounts of productive farmland. Concentrating higher density development and employment uses will protect larger amounts of farmland than "business as usual."

Growth is coming and the County wishes to be well prepared both to manage and direct that growth and ensure that opportunities are fulfilled to benefit all.

1.2 What is the Comprehensive Plan?

The Comprehensive Plan is Fairfield County’s official set of policies relative to growth, land use, and development. It serves as a basis for considering a variety of growth- and service-related policies, programs, regulations, and capital expenditures. The plan will serve as a policy basis to consider amendments to the County Subdivision Regulations, updates to local zoning codes, additional joint projects to manage growth, and investments to direct development in appropriate locations.

The Comprehensive Plan was funded by the Board of County Commissioners as another tool to assist local jurisdictions in addressing the various growth pressures and opportunities facing each community. The plan does not replace local zoning but can serve as a resource to consider code and zoning map amendments to further guide development in each community.

The 2023 Comprehensive Plan replaces all previously adopted comprehensive plans. And can be adopted by local jurisdictions to serve as their policy document for making future zoning and service decisions.

1.3 Key Themes

Key themes summarize the results of the analysis that is the basis of the Comprehensive Plan, as well as the public input gathered to date. Themes and key findings are detailed within individual chapters.

- A. Regional growth is extensive and will continue.** Once a truly rural place, Fairfield County has been transitioning to one that is more suburban in character and its own economic unit with state, national and international businesses. But Central Ohio will continue to grow and is evolving into a high-tech economy. Fairfield County will continue to experience and benefit from this growth if individual communities make the right decisions.
- B. Growth management is jointly handled by various levels of local government.** The County has responsibility for residential subdivisions, economic development, utility provisions, and managing the transportation network. Townships manage zoning and local services within their jurisdictions. Cities and villages are responsible for almost all aspects of growth management within their political boundaries. As a result, it takes a partnership among the various levels of local government to work towards the same vision for the future of Fairfield County.
- C. Local officials have various perspectives on growth.** The County seeks to encourage the right kind of growth in the right locations to secure a prosperous future for Fairfield County. Some local jurisdictions share this set of pragmatic values, while other jurisdictions value maintaining the status quo. Within our free market system, change is constant and there are

many players in the development process. Communities are most successful when they proactively seek to manage and direct this energy to ensure a prosperous future for all.

- D. Expanding the tax base and attracting a skilled workforce is critical to a sustainable future.** The key to providing local services to residents is ensuring a strong tax base, built upon non-residential development that fuels real estate and income tax revenue. Attracting businesses requires a skilled workforce. And growing that workforce requires sufficient housing options within the County.
- E. Land remains a finite resource.** More than at any time in the County’s history, available land to support development has reached a critical point in that individual development decisions can have wide ranging impacts on the landscape. Should street frontage continue to be subdivided into two- or five-acre lots, consuming farmland and impacting service delivery? Or should growth be focused in the best locations in which public utilities and access to the regional transportation network can minimize impacts on the rural countryside?
- F. Agriculture must remain resilient.** Working farms and the County’s agricultural sector are important to Fairfield County’s heritage and culture, as well as local food production and successful family farms. Directing and concentrating future development to conserve prime farmland is more important than low density, rural residential sprawl.
- G. Respecting the natural environment.** The plan acknowledges the importance of the County’s natural features and assets, from stream corridors to the privately nature preserves and parks. Development’s footprint should be light and less harmful to the natural landscape than in the past. Floodplains should be retained considering the effects of climate change and the rolling hills of southeast Fairfield County provide a unique entry to the Hocking Hills.

1.5 Future Land Use

1.5.1 Future Land Use

The Future Land Use Map seeks to balance development and conservation into a seamless and integrated growth pattern that responds to the growth potential of Fairfield County. In terms of accommodating future development, the Future Land Use Plan can support about 57,730 new housing units and 40,000,000 square feet of new employment uses over time. Specifically:

MAP: INSERT THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP, BAR CHART

- A. Respecting existing population centers.** More intense development is focused on the existing population centers, both large (Lancaster and Pickerington) and small (Baltimore, Carroll, Pleasantville, Thurston, etc.).

- B. Suburban development where most appropriate.** Suburban-scale development is recognized and expected to continue a development path in the northwest, as well as the northern portions of Liberty and Walnut townships given available access to I-70 and the related short commutes into Franklin County.
- C. Rural development pattern and agriculture in balance of the County.** Less dense, residential development continues in the balance of the County, in many cases integrated with larger, conserved agricultural areas.
- D. Conserving critical natural resources.** Conservation should continue along all stream and river corridors, in recognition of the regulatory floodplains, extensive woodlands, and species habitat, and in recognition that a variety of recreational activities can be accommodated.

1.5.2 Character Types

To effectively communicate the vision represented by the Future Land Use Map a series of Character Types are deployed to provide a richer explanation of and policy direction for the various land use categories. The Character Types are described relative to a description, primary and secondary uses, density/intensity where applicable, and photos and patterns as further illustration. These can serve as the basis for new zoning districts.

CHART: CHARACTER TYPES OVERVIEW

1.5.3 Priority Growth Areas

While the Comprehensive Plan provides a long-term vision for growth and development in unincorporated Fairfield County, there are growth areas that serve as priorities in which new development pressure is supported, public and private utility services are or can be available, and the supporting road network is in place (or improvements can be made). The nine Priority Growth Areas represent a combined 9,341 acres of developable land. Based on the Future Land Use Map, the growth areas can accommodate a significant amount of short- and mid-term growth for the County, specifically 16,004 housing units and 26,700,000 square feet of employment uses. All growth areas are dependent upon the extension of public utilities to facilitate any significant development.

MAP: PRIORITY GROWTH AREAS

1.6 Economic Development and Housing Priorities

The 2023 Comprehensive Plan delved into economic development and housing to highlight those important policy and programmatic priorities for Fairfield County. The importance of these policy areas is folded into the plan's land use and development vision.

1.6.1 Economic Development

Fairfield County continues to have a strong economy but there is a disconnect between available jobs in the County and the skill set of residents, most of whom commute to Franklin County and around the region for employment. The plan seeks to attract a range of employers to the County to provide local job opportunities, reduce commuting, and build the local tax base. The plan seeks to enhance the skillset of the local workforce to attract those businesses, as well as grow the housing stock to ensure everyone has a place to live and prosper.

1.6.2 Housing

Housing remains a critical priority for Fairfield County, just as it is for the Central Ohio region. While single-family homes dominate the local housing market, the costs of new construction are extraordinarily high, and rents continue to burden individuals and families (48% of households). Housing forecasts suggest the need for nearly 10,000 new homes over the next 10 years. Building step down and empty nester housing would free up existing homes affordable to young households, as well as financial challenges faced by existing households aged 55 and older.

1.7 Emphasizing Implementation

The key to long-term success is consistent implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, which contains a robust set of objectives, policies, and strategies to inform public and private decision making. The plan identifies several actions that can further implementation, such as model zoning districts that could be considered by individual townships, additional planning relative to the housing market, provision of targeted utilities and an updated Thoroughfare Plan.

Key to success will be a stronger working relationship between the County and individual townships. The plan identifies growth agreements that may be executed between the Board of Commissioners and a Board of Trustees to define a partnership consistent with the plan and committing County resources (e.g., utility services, road improvements) in exchange for zoning commitments. Together the future of growth and development can be equitably managed to ensure all benefit.

Introduction

2.1 Defining the 2023 Comprehensive Plan

The 2023 Comprehensive Plan is an update to the 2018 Comprehensive Land Use Plan. It is responsive to updating development trends, evolving County growth priorities, and a public engagement process that included a local representative Steering Committee. Its purpose is to inform public and private development decisions and is implemented through zoning and subdivision approvals, capital improvement planning, and other public programs and decisions.

Of particular importance, the Comprehensive Plan incorporates an economic development strategy, linking land use and job creation, and recommended priority development sites to guide future public and private decision making. It also addresses housing needs following an assessment of the current stresses on the regional and local housing market.

Fairfield County has felt growing development pressure from a variety of sources: an expanding metropolitan region; economic expansion into advanced manufacturing (Intel, Honda/LG battery factory, Google, Microsoft, and Amazon); additional warehouse space; and unprecedented pressure on the regional and local housing market, reducing affordability and available stock.

Residential builders continue to struggle to respond to this historic demand. Like its peers, Fairfield County struggles with attracting sufficient housing stock to meet local needs and to support new workers, which results in continued congestion on US33 from the west and the east.

The County enjoys outstanding aesthetic and natural assets, including abundant highly productive farmland in several townships, as well as the wooded foothills of the Hocking Hills region, one of the increasingly recognized strongest tourist destinations in the U.S.

Within this context, it's critical to note that land is a finite resource in Fairfield County, regardless of the use of individual parcels. Given recent development pressure the time is right for the County and local jurisdictions to rethink their collective role in guiding development and ensuring a prosperous future for all that doesn't adversely impact perhaps its most important resource – land.

Growth is coming and the County wishes to be well prepared both to manage that growth and ensure the associated opportunities are fulfilled for all to benefit.

2.2 Key Themes

The following summarizes the key recommendations contained in the 2023 Comprehensive Plan Update. These are further refined in the goals and objectives that drive and support the plan, as well as the detailed policies and recommendations found throughout the document.

- A. Balanced growth.** Future growth must be balanced among jurisdictions and across the suburban, urban, and rural parts of the County. While the northwest quadrant and parts of the US-33 corridor have benefited, other growth areas exist and will equally benefit in the future. Growth should be targeted, such as locations that can be efficiently served with infrastructure and minimal impact to the natural environment and agriculture. Aesthetic considerations, such as development character, are equally important.
- B. Diversifying the economic base.** Clearly, Fairfield County is a competitive location for new businesses, such as Google and Magna, potential Intel suppliers and advanced manufacturing, and a growing market for logistics. Additional skilled job opportunities within proximity to housing will provide for growing families and future generations. Incentives and infrastructure investments will be invaluable in this highly competitive global economy.
- C. Expanding housing opportunities.** Expanding the County's housing stock to meet the needs of residents and a growing workforce, a growing senior population, and options for young families and single professionals is critical to a strong local economy and the viability of each jurisdiction. Not all solutions are applicable in each community, but the local linkage between housing and employment is fundamental, whether through proximity or transportation options that connect people to jobs.
- D. Smart infrastructure investments.** Public funding decisions relative to infrastructure should continue to link growth policies reflected in the Comprehensive Plan to ensure both are mutually supportable. Whether through major road investments or utility expansions, those public dollars are critical to ensuring that the targeted growth vision of the plan is fulfilled.
- E. Agricultural resiliency.** Working farms and the County's agricultural sector are important to Fairfield County's heritage and culture, as well as local food production and successful family farms. Establishing priority growth areas can reduce the footprint of future development, which will occur regardless. Without changing residential density patterns, a continuation of large lot, single-family homes will permanently alter the farming landscape .
- F. Respecting the natural environment.** The plan acknowledges the importance of the County's natural features and assets, from stream corridors to privately owned nature preserves. Development's footprint should be light and less harmful to the natural landscape. Floodplains should be retained considering the effects of weather changes and the rolling hills of southeast Fairfield County provide a unique entry to the Hocking Hills.

- G. Local cooperation and coordination.** Continued cooperation among jurisdictions in Fairfield County is critical to ensuring both implementation of the plan, as well as the efficiency use of limited public dollars to deliver services and facilities to residents. Growth management tools, such as new economic development approaches and agreements among jurisdictions will continue to provide support for local cooperation.

2.3 Planning Process

The planning process that delivered the 2023 Comprehensive Plan Update was built upon the following key steps:

- A. Analysis and Forecasting.** Data gathering and analysis, including assessing the developability of vacant land and comparing it to growth projections, creating a Growth Concept built upon both analysis and layers of input that served as the basis of the Future Land Use Map, and a focus on development character to ensure the County benefits in the future from the quality of development that it seeks. Detailed analyses focused on the economy and housing characteristics, the transportation network, and utility system.
- B. Public Participation.** The participation process included a variety of stakeholders representing broad perspectives regarding growth and development. A steering committee was appointed that included representatives of a majority of local jurisdictions and County staff. Early in the process, representatives of almost all jurisdictions participated in one-on-one interviews with the planning team. A public meeting was held early in the process to identify growth and development concerns and priorities and assess the themes of the 2018 plan. The County web site was used to post material throughout the process. A weeklong final public open house was held in the County Courthouse. And an orientation was held with local officials to present the final plan and recommendations.
- C. County Leadership.** County staff and the County Commissioners were engaged throughout the planning process to ensure ongoing review and feedback as the project unfolded and to provide the team with direction as options were proposed and strategies identified. The final plan was reviewed and recommended for adoption by the Regional Planning Commission and final adoption occurred by the Board of Commissioners.

2.4 Document Outline

The Comprehensive Plan Update is comprised of the following chapters:

- A. Executive Summary.** The Executive Summary provides an overview of the 2023 Comprehensive Plan, the future land use map, supporting components, and the key policies, recommendations, and strategies.

- B. Introduction.** The Introduction summarizes the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan, the key themes represented in the plan, the planning process, and an outline of the document.
- C. Goals and Objectives.** The goals and objectives serve as the policy foundation of the plan, build upon public input, and update the themes that defined the 2018 plan.
- D. Planning Content.** The Planning Context addresses the planning issues facing the County and its jurisdictions regarding growth, regional growth, and population change forecasts.
- E. Future Land Use and Growth Areas.** This chapter presents the growth concept, future land use map, character types, and priority growth areas that together represent the land use and growth vision for Fairfield County.
- F. Economic Development.** The Economic Development chapter addresses the current economic challenges and opportunities facing the County, building upon the land use vision and outlining strategies to continue the County's economic successes.
- G. Housing.** The Housing chapter assesses the stresses affecting the housing market in the region and in Fairfield County, and outlines strategies to proactively address the housing needs of current and future residents to meet a range of housing needs.
- H. Transportation.** The Transportation chapter assesses the current state of the transportation network in Fairfield County, correlates improvements consistent with the future land use vision, and recommends strategies to address the Thoroughfare Plan, access management, and major transportation investments.
- I. Utilities.** The Utilities chapter provides a status report of the state of the various utility providers in Fairfield County (water, wastewater, electricity, and natural gas) and identifies strategies for expanding capacity and supporting growth priorities.
- J. Implementation.** The Implementation chapter summarizes the various recommendations of the plan, organized by goals, objectives, and strategies, and identifies the level of local government where responsibility lies, as well as notes partners that can assist with implementation.
- K. Appendix.** The Appendix includes a summary of land use and growth recommendations for each township and a summary of public input.

Goals and Objectives

3.1 Introduction

The goals and objectives serve as the policy foundation for the Comprehensive Plan. They emphasize the direction reflected in the Future Land Use Map and the supporting chapters of the plan. The goals and objectives also serve as a framework for organizing strategies that seek action over time to implement the intentions and direction reflected in the Comprehensive Plan.

3.2 Goals and Objectives

3.2.1 Managing growth in a sustainable way, revitalizing existing communities, and supporting new development in appropriate locations. Growth offers opportunities as communities change over time, but those opportunities can bring certain unintended consequences. Priorities should include ensuring sustainability (environmental and economic), revitalizing existing communities as a priority, and supporting new development at appropriate locations where infrastructure can be economically provided.

- A. Ensure future development is sustainable using updated development regulations, targeted incentives, and higher residential densities where appropriate.**
- B. Revitalize existing communities by encouraging private investment, updating zoning codes, adopting zoning incentives, and promoting walkability.**
- C. Support new development in appropriate locations consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, as well as local plans and supported by updated zoning codes.**

3.2.2 Ensuring that growth benefits all communities. As noted earlier, growth should benefit all communities – existing villages, cities, and the townships. This doesn't mean growth should sprawl across the County's landscape, but it does suggest that existing population centers should expand, while new areas attract growth that can be appropriately located and served by public utilities.

- A. Support development in cities, villages, and other growth centers through the extension of public utilities consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.**

- B. Support development in townships with County economic development incentives and the targeted extension of public utilities.**

3.2.3 Supporting appropriate economic expansion and workforce development, a full range of housing options to support current residents and a growing workforce, retail services that meet the needs of local communities, downtown revitalization, and a strong agricultural economy. The economic health of Fairfield County and individual communities is critical to the County’s long-term success as a place to live and raise a family, invest, operate a business, and continue its high quality of life. Meeting housing needs, providing services throughout the County, and growing the economy is key to long term sustainability.

- A. Support employment centers with public and private utilities, supporting transportation improvements, and targeted incentives.**
- B. Support workforce development.**
- C. Meet the growing housing needs of current residents and a expanding workforce.**
- D. Support retail services that meet the needs of local communities.**
- E. Support downtown revitalization.**
- F. Support a strong agricultural economy.**

3.2.4 Preserving rural character. Fairfield County benefits from an attractive rural landscape that both celebrates the County’s agricultural heritage, its numerous scenic streams, and the rolling landscape that serves as an entry to the Hocking Hills. Preserving these assets while accommodating new development is an overriding goal.

- A. Preserve the natural landscape by conserving outstanding natural assets, protecting flood hazard areas, and conserving farmland.**
- B. Support working farms and related agricultural uses through conserving farmland, focusing growth on existing population centers, higher residential densities, and expansion in appropriate locations.**
- C. Promote architectural character, screening, buffering, and lighting standards that reduce impacts on the rural landscape.**

3.2.5 Preserving natural resources. Along with preserving rural character and the role of natural assets, specific efforts should ensure that individual natural resources are

conserved. Implementing this goal should occur at both a regional and a local level, and at the parcel level through development approvals.

- A. Preserve natural resources by conserving outstanding natural assets, protecting flood hazard areas, conserving farmland, and supporting development in existing growth centers.**
- B. Protect the integrity of Federally designated floodplains and promote setbacks and buffering to reduce stormwater impacts on water quality.**

3.2.6 Ensuring the provision of public services, utilities, and infrastructure to support communities and growth, while remaining fiscally responsible. The provision of public services and infrastructure is vital to a healthy, growing economy. But those services and facilities should continue to be provided in a fiscally responsible manner to safeguard public tax dollars. The timing of these investments concurrent with development should be another consideration.

- A. Promote the use of capital improvement planning at all levels of local government to ensure public services, infrastructure, parks, and other capital needs anticipate growth pressure.**
- B. Identify additional resources at each level of local government to fund capital investments, including creative solutions.**
- C. Continue to ensure fiscal responsibility in the planning, construction, and maintenance of public facilities and infrastructure.**
- D. Undertake studies and projects to improve the transportation network.**
- E. Undertake studies and projects to expand utility coverage (water, wastewater, broadband, electricity, and natural gas) to support future growth.**

3.2.7 Supporting appropriate growth management tools at the County and local levels. Managing growth occurs at every level of local government, with each level playing a critical role in the overall process. In implementing those roles, it's important that tools are in place to ensure growth is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, to facilitate the approval process is as expeditiously as appropriate, and to ensure that the resulting development meets the intended goals and objectives of the plan and each community.

- A. Emphasize local adoption of the Comprehensive Plan.**
- B. Support appropriate growth management tools at the local level.**

- C. Consider increasing resources at the County level to support local planning and development management.**
- D. Promote training opportunities for local staff, appointed boards, and elected officials.**
- E. Promote economic development tools and incentives that facilitate private investment.**

3.2.8 Increasing dialogue between citizens and their communities, establishing strategic partnerships. The dialogue within and among jurisdictions continues to be a high priority as Fairfield County grows together. Within jurisdictions, citizens, stakeholders, appointed, and elected officials should continue communicating on development issues important to each community.

PICS: COMP PLAN PUBLIC MEETING
AND STEERING COMMITTEE

- Neighboring jurisdictions and the County should continue working together on areas of mutual interest, especially to advance the policies of this Comprehensive Plan. The Steering Committee appointed by the County to develop this plan was an excellent example of local participation among jurisdictions.
- A. Promote a variety of communication techniques to facilitate two-way dialogue, including education and input into public decision-making at all levels.**
 - B. Implement ongoing reporting of Comprehensive Plan implementation, including annual reporting and public meetings.**
 - C. Implement an annual growth report and related mechanisms to track development activity, including housing, business development and infrastructure in the County.**
 - D. Promote strategic partnerships that coordinate growth, jointly deliver public services, and expand on growth tools.**

3.3 Implementation

Implementation of the goals and objectives is addressed in the individual chapters of the Comprehensive Plan, but more specifically in the Implementation Chapter where specific strategies are summarized, including the applicable level of government in which implementation authority is found. Together this serves as a menu for ensuring the plan has a life beyond its adoption and will result in meaningful change in Fairfield County.

Planning Context

4.1 Planning Area

A diverse landscape comprised of growing suburban areas, multiple population centers of various scales, thriving agriculture, and a rich natural landscape.

The planning area for the 2023 Comprehensive Plan Update is unincorporated Fairfield County. This includes all communities except for Canal Winchester, Lancaster, and Pickerington – although the development activity and related influences of those cities are factors in the preparation of the plan. At the same time, understanding the economy and housing market considers the County in its entirety.

4.2 Regional Context

Fairfield County is one of the fastest growing counties in Central Ohio.

Central Ohio continues to be one of the fastest growing regions in the Midwest and remains one the fastest growing in the United States. According to the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), Central Ohio is to grow to 3.1 million residents and 1.2 million jobs by 2050. This represents an additional 726,000 residents in the region between 2020 and 2050 (30% increase) and an additional 271,000 jobs (30% increase) for the same period. Future population growth will continue to be driven by in-migration from other regions and countries, according to MORPC, further diversifying the demographic makeup of Central Ohio.

MAP: REGIONAL CONTEXT

- A. Recent regional population growth has occurred in the core.** This past decade has shown a reverse of the growing outward trend of prior decades, with a concentration of new residents in Franklin County, as opposed to the other counties in Central Ohio. This concentration in the core reflects national trends as well. Measured as “average new residents by day” by MORPC, Central Ohio’s growth for the past three decades increased from 55 residents per day in the 1990s to 67 residents per day in the 2010s. But like other Central Ohio non-urban counties, Fairfield’s share of that growth declined, from 5.5 residents per day in the 1990s to 3.1 residents per day in the 2010s.
- B. Recent regional economic growth has occurred on the periphery of Franklin County.** Economic growth on the periphery of Franklin County has continued. Intel’s announcement in the Licking County portion of New Albany is just one such example, serving to anchor an expanding high tech business area. Google’s expansion into Lancaster is another such example. The growth of data centers, warehousing and logistics, and healthcare continue to diversify the region’s economic base.

4.3 Population

Population growth continues in Fairfield County, but at a somewhat slower rate, however the County can expect to attract additional residents given regional job trends.

Understanding demographic trends of Fairfield County provides a context for further delving into the unique qualities and attributes of the County.

INSERT INFO GRAPHICS

This includes recent trends for growth, such as population, housing, and employment. Housing trends are addressed in the Housing chapter.

- A. Fairfield County benefits from its proximity to Franklin County.** Fairfield County is the fourth largest county in the Columbus Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), after Franklin County, Licking County, and Delaware County in terms of total population. With adjacency to Franklin, the County has benefited as a growing bedroom community as the population has increased, particularly in the northwest.
- B. Fairfield County has benefited from steady population growth.** Fairfield County had a 2020 population of 158,921, which is 7.4% of the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which has a population of 2,138,946. Over the past 40 years, the County has experienced steady population growth, growing from 93,678 to 158,921, which reflects an annualized growth rate of 1.42%.
- C. Population growth has continued but at a slower rate.** While the most recent population growth spurts occurred in the 1990's and 2000's, the past decade reflected a slowing of population growth with only 12,765 new residents. This reflects an annual growth rate of 1%, which is less than the average of 1.42% for the four decades.
- D. Fairfield County is expected to attract new residents, but the competition for residents will continue across the region.** Fairfield County is forecasted to grow to 187,500 by 2050, which is an increase of 23,579 residents since 2020, as calculated by the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). The County's share of regional growth may continue to decline, as new residents continue to choose Franklin County – following national trends to return to the core. This will put added pressure on the County and local jurisdictions to consider creative strategies to grow its local workforce by facilitating additional housing within the County.
- E. Housing forecast.** A regional housing demand forecast was prepared for the Building Industry Association of Central Ohio (BIA) to cover the 2022-2032 period. Fairfield County was projected to grow between 9% and 12% in population by 2032, and with that comes the need for between 843 and 947 housing units per year, or upwards of 9,470 units total to reach 71,000 units.

COMPARE MSA AND COUNTY POP
TRENDS 1990-2020

4.4 Jurisdictional Demographic Characteristics

A broad range of communities comprise the government landscape in Fairfield County.

The accompanying table presents population, housing, and employment data for each local jurisdiction in Fairfield County, according to the 2020 US Census (employment data reflects the number of residents 16 years and older who are employed, and not the number of jobs in the specific community). It is organized by townships, villages, and cities. As expected, the major population centers in descending order are:

TABLE: JURISDICTIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS
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1. Lancaster.
2. Pickerington.
3. Violet Township.
4. Canal Winchester.
5. Bloom Township.

4.5 Planning Issues

While some local comprehensive planning is underway, the County and its local jurisdictions are facing a range of planning issues and opportunities related to growth and development.

Understanding current planning issues within the County as defined by local jurisdictions provided a foundation for considering planning and growth options. This section summarizes the major findings from interviews conducted by Planning NEXT with leadership from most of the local jurisdictions within the unincorporated area during November and December 2022. This input was the first step in the public engagement process.

- A. Comprehensive planning is strong at the County level, but not many local jurisdictions have undertaken formal planning.** Fairfield County has a consistent practice of adopting a comprehensive plan over the past two decades, while only a small number of local jurisdictions have done the same. At the time of preparing the 2023 plan, Canal Winchester was updating its plan and Violet Township had recently adopted a new plan.
- B. Growth is seen as an opportunity by most jurisdictions.** Many jurisdictions identified the need for growth, including accommodating what is expected to be significant growth pressure over the next few years. This applies to all the villages and municipalities, but it also applies to some townships. Several communities have historically benefited from growth, but others have suffered with disinvestment, especially villages. The majority see the next few years as an important opportunity to capture some share of residential, commercial, and industrial development.
- C. Concurrently, some rural townships continue to support a rural development pattern.** There are some rural townships that support a continuation of their rural and agricultural land pattern, in some cases supporting very low-density single-family housing. Some of these townships do not support road and utility improvements that would drive growth into their jurisdictions. Some have adopted a two-acre minimum lot size and generally don't support the addition of commercial and industrial development within their boundaries. A two-acre minimum lot size does result in the loss of

agricultural land without accommodating much development. Large lots can create health and safety challenges relative to on-lot septic systems and ensuring sufficient on-site water for fire protection.

- D. Expanding (or establishing) a non-residential tax base is critical.** Most communities cited the need to expand their commercial tax base (or to establish one to begin with) by attracting new business investment to meet growing service demands within their communities (e.g., township fire services). This investment can come as small in scale in the smaller jurisdictions, but all tend to recognize that large scale investment is critical to both the local tax base and the continuing viability of (or revitalization) of individual communities with fiscal concerns driving this perspective. Support was often expressed for light industrial, high tech, and logistics/distribution businesses and in some cases, local retail, and services with on-lot septic and water at major intersections.
- E. Providing a degree of new residential development is supported.** While some communities have benefited from a narrow slice of the housing market (e.g., single family homes, whether low density or rural density), many support the need for a broader range of housing options for their residents and to attract a growing workforce (that can support economic development). This can include empty nester step down housing, affordable homes for first time home buyers and young families, and in some cases, rental housing to support workforce development (housing that is affordable to persons, couples, and families with fulltime jobs). In some communities, support is noted for new housing that matches the historic density of an existing community, while others acknowledge the need for higher densities but only if supported by and incorporated into mixed use development that offsets the tax base. However, some townships continue to only support very low density single-family residential.
- F. Focusing on future growth in existing urban centers (villages and municipalities) was supported.** Municipalities continue to be logical locations for denser development, both residential and non-residential, reflecting their current character. But villages have also identified the need for infill development on vacant parcels and new development adjacent to existing corporate boundaries. In all cases, this would ensure expansion of tax bases, provide new housing options for current and future residents, and provide the services requested by residents. Additional residents will strengthen local markets for retail and services. These villages see such growth as critical to their long-term viability, including the ability to provide services in a cost-effective manner.
- G. Infill development and redevelopment is supported.** All municipalities and villages expressed interest in supporting infill development within existing communities, as well as redevelopment of underdeveloped parcels. In some cases, communities have disinvestment and vacant buildings suitable for remodeling and new uses (especially in downtowns). Some also acknowledged that such private investment raises the tax base while reducing demands on public resources (maximizing existing infrastructure investments, lowering operating and maintenance costs).
- H. Preparing communities to manage future growth is a priority.** Many communities acknowledged they may not be fully prepared to manage growth and future development. Many lack a comprehensive plan or land use plan. Most communities have adopted a zoning code or resolution, but some codes have not been updated in a while and others lack new tools that would be beneficial to new development practices (e.g., mixed use zoning, development character requirements, etc.). Local communities may have outdated subdivision regulations as well. Also not discussed is whether

communities are using a Capital Improvement Plan to inform infrastructure budgets and implementation decisions.

- I. **At the same time, many communities and the County have made significant investment in local infrastructure to support growth.** Many communities have been successful at obtaining state and federal grants to support utility, road, and park improvements that respond to current needs, while positioning communities to accommodate future growth without inundating existing infrastructure. The investments made by the County in utility services are viewed as especially beneficial to supporting redevelopment and expansion of development in existing communities and townships (although some townships are skeptical of or object to utility expansions within their boundaries). While the plan will document current and planned utility services, perhaps a participatory County-wide utility master plan is justified.
- J. **Coordinating County utility expansion and local development goals should remain a priority.** The County's utility services support development in the unincorporated area. In many cases, the extension of those services is well coordinated among the County and local jurisdictions with mutual growth goals. In other cases, improved coordination may help to solve growth concerns and ensure cooperation in the long term. Some communities have expressed a desire to see those services expanded to facilitate growth and new private investment.
- K. **Significant investment in workforce development.** Fairfield County has made significant investments in developing its workforce, reflected by the Fairfield County Workforce Center. The center is an important part of the economic development ecosystem of Fairfield County and a pathway for all residents to develop usable skills across a series of industries. Given the aging of the County's workforce and the increasing diversity of the younger population, having multiple pathways into the workforce is critical.
- L. **Local partnerships are critical.** Local partnerships between jurisdictions and the County, or among neighboring jurisdictions was noted as critical in many cases to expanding services to residents by communities with limited resources. Pooling those resources and meeting the needs of the residents has been a high priority for many, such as in the areas of law enforcement, code enforcement, and other staffing needs. Not all communities identified this as a priority, but those that did noted that the provision of enhanced services benefited all involved. Another area that would benefit from partnerships would be joint economic development districts (JEDD), pre-annexation agreements, and other similar mechanisms that facilitate private development among adjacent jurisdictions while sharing tax revenues. This can help townships with struggling tax bases, while providing the adjacent village or municipality a means of strengthening a cooperative relationship with its neighbors. This has been an effective tool in Franklin County that has facilitated development, instead of slowing it down because of local opposition.

Future Land Use

5.1 Introduction

Conserving the best attributes of Fairfield County while ensuring a prosperous future for residents and businesses.

The Future Land Use chapter of the Comprehensive Plan presents a vision for growth and development for unincorporated Fairfield County. As depicted in maps, text, and policies, the vision seeks to accommodate balanced growth throughout the County in a directed fashion that facilitates appropriate investment while protecting the best qualities of Fairfield County.

- A. Traditional growth centers.** Development in Fairfield County has traditionally been concentrated in Lancaster, with smaller villages providing a limited range of land uses, and agriculture dominating the rural townships. Suburban growth emanating from Franklin County expanded into Pickerington, Violet Township, and Canal Winchester, and additional rural residential supporting commuters has occurred in Bloom, Greenfield, Liberty, and other townships. Commercial and industrial development has been historically concentrated in Lancaster due to its historic industrial base and rail and highway access, as well as available water.
- B. Recent growth trends.** Suburbanization, as well as commercial development expanded into Pickerington and Canal Winchester, with some industrial, warehouse and logistics, and healthcare expanding into those communities. Until recently, Violet Township was principally residential, but it has experienced new warehouse and logistics development. Concurrently, Bloom Township has seen continued residential development take place. Very recently, efforts to reinvent Buckeye Lake have been occurring, while solar farm development has reached initial stages in the County (land acquisition in some cases, but no construction to date), and second home and short-term rentals have been developed in the southeastern townships, near the Hocking Hills.
- C. Evolving growth opportunities.** With continued expansion of the Columbus metropolitan area and subsequent employment and residential expansion in the first tier of counties outside Franklin County, Fairfield County has a bright future in terms of attracting its share of regional growth. Improvements to US-33 and access from the north along four interchanges on I-70 ensure residents and employers are within a reasonable commuting distance. The ability to provide public utilities and a coordinated development process will ensure the County can capture its fair share of regional growth, to the benefit of current and future residents.

- D. **Role of conservation.** Balancing the opportunity presented by regional growth with the desire to protect the very best of Fairfield County will require ongoing conservation of priority agricultural areas and natural resources, especially the stream system, floodplains, and woodlands. The County serves as a gateway to Hocking Hills and its rolling topography in the lower portion of Fairfield County is a regional asset. Further integrating conservation development practices will conserve farmland and concentrate new residential development in appropriate, serviceable locations.

5.2 Existing Conditions

Assets define a place and understanding the extent of physical development constraints influences the future development pattern.

The existing conditions section provides context as to land use characteristics of Fairfield County, including recent growth trends relative to land use, zoning, and subdivision activity.

5.2.1 Key Findings

Fairfield County finds itself at a pivotal point as the Central Ohio region continues to expand. Once largely rural, the northwest corner grew into suburbanized and developed a significant commercial center. The western and northern halves of the County are experiencing similar growth pressure.

- A. **General growth trends have concentrated development in cities, some villages, and the northwest quadrant.** Historically, growth has been concentrated in the major cities (Canal Winchester, Lancaster, and Pickerington) and a series of villages. Most townships have been predominantly agricultural and rural in character. But over time and as the region has expanded, Fairfield County captured suburban development in the western communities, Pickerington emerged as a regional commercial center, and the next group of townships attracted lower density, single family housing oriented to commuters (especially Violet Township). Lancaster continued to expand, and Buckeye Lake began to see some reinvestment and expansion. The US-33 bypass improved access through the County and shifted development patterns that could take advantage of this improved access, especially the west and southern sides of Lancaster. Several townships continue to remain rural.
- B. **Fairfield County continues to remain predominantly rural and agricultural in land use character.** From a land use standpoint, Fairfield County continues to be dominated by agricultural uses and rural character, despite an increasing number of large lot, single family homes scattered throughout the townships. Almost 16% of the County is residential, while commercial occupies less than 2% and industrial occupies less than 1%.

- C. Zoning trends promote residential development.** Interestingly, when generalizing zoning among all the local jurisdictions in the County that have adopted zoning (Clearcreek Township, Madison Township, and Thurston have not, although at this writing the village is exploring adoption of a zoning code), these maps zone about 80% of the County as residential (although agriculture is a permitted use in those districts, plus an additional 12% zoned agriculture). Commercially zoned property is 5% and industrial less than 2%. Mixed use zoning is less than 1%.
- D. Environmental assets constrain development but help to provide character to the landscape.** Flood hazard areas and well protection areas occupy about 9 % of the County, limiting development in those locations. Occupying about 22% of the County, forested areas can limit growth opportunities depending on site specific constraints but add to the unique character of the County’s landscape.
- E. Constrained land limits development opportunities.** For the purposes of the plan, constrained lands specifically include protected farmland, parks, and properties currently leased for solar farm development. Together this occupies about 8 % of the County. These constrained lands can also influence what might occur adjacent to specific sites. Some protected farmland precludes the extension of utilities along the adjacent road frontage, for instance.
- F. Oil and gas wells and underground transmission lines are extensive.** Although not quantified, existing oil and gas wells are found throughout the County, concentrated in the eastern half. Underground transmission lines crisscross Fairfield County. Together, this infrastructure can constrain development opportunities on specific parcels or influence site layout.

5.2.2 Existing Land Use

Fairfield County has a land use pattern typical of a semi-rural county in a metropolitan region that includes suburban and exurban communities.

Fairfield County has a typical land use pattern for a county with suburban, exurban, and rural areas located in a major metropolitan region.

MAP: EXISTING LAND USE MAP CHART: EXISTING LAND USE
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- A. Residential land use.** Single-family residential land uses are concentrated in all communities, but suburban and semi-rural residential uses are scattered throughout the County. Single-family uses are the second largest user of land, occupying 15% of the County or 48,600 acres. Multi-family occupies less than 1 % of the County or 900 acres.

- B. Commercial land use.** Commercial uses are clustered along major corridors, as well as concentrated in downtowns, village centers, and scattered “crossroad” locations. Commercial uses occupy 2 %, or 6,980 acres of the County.
- C. Employment land uses.** Industrial uses, including warehouse and logistics, are concentrated in just a few locations such as the industrial areas around Lancaster and emerging centers along US-33 in the Pickerington, Canal Winchester, and Violet Township area. Employment uses occupy 1,300 acres or less than 1 % of the County.
- D. Agricultural land use.** Agriculture dominates the County as a land use. In terms of acreage, agriculture combined with non-CAUV agriculture dominates the County, occupying 75% of the land area or 242,800 acres.
- E. Public land uses.** Public uses (schools, government buildings, etc.) occupy 4% of the County or 14,200 acres and parks occupy an additional 10,000 acres or 4%.
- F. Utility land use.** Finally, utilities (utility right-of-way, electric substations, oil, and gas, etc.) occupy less than 1 % or 800 acres in the County.

5.2.3 Existing Zoning (2023)

Zoning patterns tend to focus on single-use districts, with single-family residential the most prevalent even where agriculture is a permitted use (and dominates).

Summarizing local zoning is challenging given the variety of jurisdictions and zoning codes in place that individually classify property using their own unique zoning district systems. Clearcreek Township, Madison Township, and Thurston have not adopted zoning codes, at this writing, although the village is exploring adoption of a zoning code.

MAP: GENERALIZED ZONING MAP CHART: GENERALIZED ZONING
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A. Residential Zoning. Single family zoning patterns (separate from lower density and rural residential patterns) are found within the cities and villages. The unincorporated areas under township jurisdiction are typically zoned for agricultural, rural residential, or (low density) residential purposes, with scattered nonresidential zonings (e.g., commercial). Tabulating this generalized assessment of locally adopted zoning finds that most of the County is zoned residential (a total of 225,700 acres or 8% of the County). Specifically:

1. Rural Residential, occupying 165,200 acres or 58% of the County.
2. Residential is the next most extent zoning, with 58,800 acres or 21%; and
3. Multi-family Residential occupies 1,700 acres or less than 1 % of the County.

B. Commercial and Industrial Zoning. Commercial and industrial zoning patterns are typically concentrated along major corridors. Industrially zoned properties occupy more vacant land than commercially zoned properties. Industrial zoning is focused along old and new US-33, US-22 within and adjacent to the east side of Lancaster, northwest of Buckeye Lake, and the eastern portion of Canal Winchester. On the commercial side, about 18,400 acres are supported to support such uses (including mixed-use development), occupying about 7% of the County. Specifically:

1. Industrial zoning occupies 4,900 acres or 2% of the County.
2. Commercial zoning occupies another 12,800 acres or 5%.
3. Office zoning occupies 150 acres or less than 1%; and
4. Mixed Use zoning occupies a final 550 acres or less than 1% of the County.
5. Land zoned for agricultural purposes occupies 34,000 acres or 12%.
6. Recreation zoning occupies 84 acres, less than 1% of the County.

5.2.4 Subdivision Activity

While several major subdivisions have been platted over the past five years, a significant number of minor subdivisions (lot splits) have been created at very low densities (average of 6.66 acres in size).

A. Overview. Data regarding subdivision activity for Fairfield County was available for 2017-2021, including major subdivisions and minor subdivisions (lot splits) for approved lots, exempted lots, and exempted lots (tied). For the five-year period, a total of 914 lot splits were created in the unincorporated area. These lots occupy a total of 6,085 acres, which is equivalent to about 19% of Liberty Township for example. This also represents about 6% of the County's developable acres of 94,000 acres, which are agricultural in use.

TABLE/GRAPHS

B. Minor Subdivisions (Lot Splits). The accompanying table summarizes the Minor Subdivision data for 2017-2021. The three categories of lot splits are approximately equal in proportion to the total. The average lot size is a different matter, which the "Under 5 Acre" lot splits averaging 2.42 acres, the "5 Acres and Larger" lot splits average 12.51 acres, and the "Tied Lots" average 5.54 acres. But the total average for all 914 lot splits was 6.66 acres per lot.

For comparison purposes, for the 2017-2021 period the County approved the creation of 1,012 lots in platted subdivisions occupying 1,508 acres. The average lot size in these platted subdivisions was 1.49 acres. These subdivisions are served by public utilities.

Minor Subdivisions, Fairfield County, 2017-2021				
	Under 5 Acres	5 Acres and Larger	Tied Lots*	Total
Lots	312	286	316	914
Acres	755	3,579	1,751	6,085
Average Lot Size	2.42	12.51	5.54	6.66
<i>Note: *Tied lot splits do not create a building site</i>				

Another way to consider this recent trend is one based on lot frontage. Assuming the 914 lots created between 2017 and 2020 had individually a minimum frontage of 150 feet, then these lots would occupy 26 miles of road frontage on one side (the distance between Pickerington City Hall and the Fairfield County Courthouse).

If these lots had an average size of suburban-style half-acre lots instead of the average of 6.66 acres, then the land taken out of food production would decline from 6,085 acres to 457 acres (reserving 92% of that land for food production or other development purposes). While property owners have the right to create parcels for transfer, providing alternative housing options would conserve the existing agricultural landscape in Fairfield County.

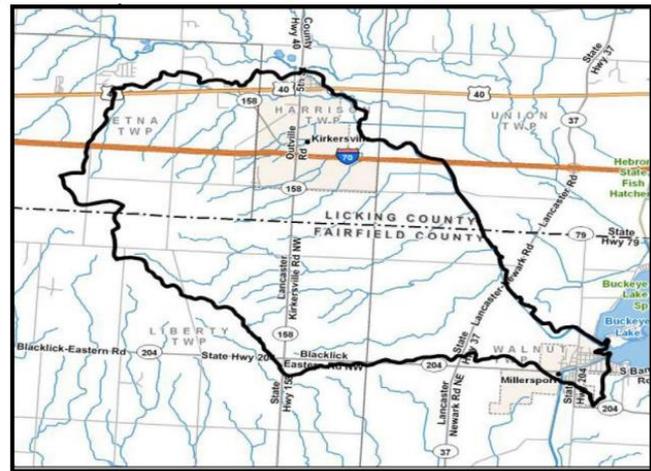
5.2.5 Environmental Assets and Protected Lands

Fairfield County benefits from a rich set of environmental assets that are important to its character, as well as supporting the natural environment and species habitat.

Environmental assets include flood hazard areas, forested areas, and wellhead protection areas. Mapping identifies locations and reaffirms places where development is not appropriate, or measures should be taken to mitigate potential impacts.

A. Flood Hazard Areas and Wellheads. Flood hazard areas and wellhead protection areas are direct constraints to development, as these areas should remain in their natural state. Flood hazard areas are located along stream and river corridors as mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. A total of 23,015 acres of the County is occupied by flood hazard areas, amounting to 7.1%. Wellhead protection areas are sited where groundwater fields are maintained to provide public water.

B. Water Quality and Buckeye Lake. The Feeder Channel begins in Licking County around Kirkersville and extends to the southeast through portions of Liberty and Walnut townships, as well as Millersport. The channel maintains the recreational pool level of the lake, as well as sustains the aquatic environment. But it is the primary contributor of nutrient pollution to Buckeye Lake (see Buckeye Lake Feeder Channel Fact Sheet, Buckeye Lake Region Corporation). As development occurs in the northern portions of both townships requires various improvements to maintain water levels and improve water quality. Constructed wetlands along and integrated into the channel capture and treat runoff from agricultural fields and urbanized areas, and the discharge from the Millersport wastewater treatment plant.



*Buckeye Lake Feeder Channel watershed.
Source: Buckeye Lake Region Corporation*

C. Forests. Forested areas are a natural asset and typically are located on steep slopes or wetland (or poorly drained) places, which together could reflect an unnecessary expense from a development standpoint and should remain protected. Forested areas are concentrated in the southeast portion of the County, which the Hocking Hills begin or otherwise scattered around the County. Forests cover 71,255 acres and 22% of the County.

D. Prime Farmland. About 230,000 acres of Fairfield County has been identified as Prime Farmland, which is about 71% of the County. This does not include the Farmland of State, Local, or Unique Importance, which add another 21%. Farmland protected under easements or other programs total 5,631 acres or 1.7% of the County. Protected farmland is found in several townships, but there's a particularly large concentration in Richland Township north of Rushville.

Many farmers in the County participate in the Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV) program, which, for tax purposes, reduces the land value of properties devoted exclusively to commercial agriculture use. Approximately 70% of the County acreage is part of the CAUV program, and almost 50% of that is cropland, primarily producing grains, oilseeds, dry beans, and dry peas.

E. Parks. There are 76 parks and recreational facilities throughout the County, ranging in size from less than half an acre (Fountain Square) to almost 1,900 acres (Clearcreek Metro Park). Most of the largest properties are located in Madison Township, with others in Bloom (Chestnut Ridge Park) and Violet (Pickerington Ponds Metro Park) townships. In total, parks occupy 10,079 acres or 3.9% of the County.

F. Oil and Gas Network. Oil and gas fields are in the eastern half of the County, but are concentrated in Pleasant, Richland, and Rushville townships, as well as around Baltimore and east of Thurston. Underground transmission lines crisscross the County. There are major pipelines along portions of US-33 that can limit developability and there is a concentration in the southwest quadrant of Berne Township.

MAP: OIL AND GAS NETWORK MAP

G. Solar Farms. About 1.4% of the County or 4,734 acres have been placed under lease for solar farms, although no such farms have yet to be permitted or developed, as of this writing. Land under solar farm leases has been concentrated in Amanda and Walnut townships.

5.3 Development Capacity

Based on certain factors only about 35% of Fairfield County is currently available to accommodate new development, making land a limited resource important to manage moving forward.

Understanding the extent to which new development can be accommodated in Fairfield County serves as a basis for forecasting future land use and identifying development priorities. The planning horizon for this analysis is the next ten years, partly because the data that underlies this analysis addresses the 2023-2033 timeframe. The approach taken to determine development capacity includes the following assumptions.

5.3.1 Methodology

Developability of the planning area was calculated based the following assumptions using GIS data from the Fairfield County Auditor's Office:

- Properties equal to or greater than 5 acres in size.
- Properties not designated for other uses (protected farms, conservation areas, solar leases, etc.).
- Properties with minimal to no floodways or floodplain.

- Properties with no significant slope.
- Properties with a building appraised value less than or equal to \$100,000 (average appraised building value for the County is \$175,000).

A. Housing forecast. The housing demand forecast for Fairfield County was prepared for the Building Industry Association of Central Ohio (BIA) as part of a Central Ohio analysis prepared for 2022-2032.

Fairfield County is projected to grow between 9% and 12% in population by 2032, and with that comes the need for between 843 and 947 housing units per year, or upwards of 9,470 units total to reach 71,000 units. MORPC projects that the County will grow another 13,000 units to 84,000 units by 2050.

TABLE: FORECAST

These forecasts were based upon historic trends for 2000-2020 and adjusted for the potential housing market impact resulting from the Intel and associated development in Licking County. The housing forecast was proportionally allocated to each jurisdiction based upon their current proportion of existing housing in the County. The existing residential development density was calculated for each jurisdiction, then applied to the housing forecast to estimate the potential demand for new growth to accommodate each forecast, measured in acres.

- B. Commercial forecast.** To estimate potential commercial demand, the existing balance of commercial and residential land was calculated for the entire County. The ratio was then applied to the proportional residential growth of each community.
- C. Industrial forecast.** For the next ten-year period, industrial demand was assumed to increase by 50% of the existing amount of industrially zoned land, with the net calculated by subtracting the amount of vacant industrially zoned land in the County. This is based upon a judgement that the County can expect that level of growth given regional industrial trends.

5.3.2 Analysis

The analysis undertaken using the previously discussed methodology resulted in the following findings, showing that only about 35% of the County is available to accommodate future growth without the need for redevelopment. This reinforces the need to carefully consider land use and zoning decisions given that available land is a finite resource, as well as density.

- A. About 35% of Fairfield County is available to accommodate future development.** This amounts to approximately 116,000 acres across the County that isn't

developed, conserved, or constrained with natural features. Obviously, this is a finite resource.

- B. Projected 2032 housing growth would take half of all remaining, developable land.** If each community grew while matching their current housing pattern, then 52% of remaining land would be developed just in the next 10 years. This assumes that no communities increase the historic density of residential development.
- C. Residential density varies significantly across the County.** Overall, the County has an average of one residential home per five acres of land (1 home/5 acres). However, communities like Violet Township are closer to one home per two acres (1 home/2 acres) as an average, while places like Pleasant Township are closer to one home per 10 acres (1 home/10 acres). Suburban residential development often is 2-4 dwellings per acre (and density of 4 du/ac is necessary to financially justify public utilities).
- D. Accommodating housing growth can create challenges for some communities.** Rural communities like Amanda, Carroll, and Rushville don't have enough available land to support this housing growth without annexation. Townships such as Madison, Rush Creek, and Bloom have substantial natural features that should be preserved, which further limits potential growth. Most importantly, public utilities may not be adequate to support growth without additional investments.
- E. Fairfield County could expect to double its industrial uses.** Looking at available industrial land and current building size, the County could add up to 9.5 million square feet of industrial use in the next 10 years.
- F. One-third of communities are planning for industrial growth.** Of the 30 communities in Fairfield County, only nine currently have industrial zoning in place to support employment growth. Taking into consideration the plan's Future Land Use Map, additional communities should consider supporting industrial zoning at recommended locations.
- G. Commercial growth could grow by nearly one-third.** While many commercial areas currently exist, there is still the potential to see up to 8 million square feet of growth based on available land. This assumes a consistent ratio of commercial development concurrent with residential development.
- H. Commercial growth is directed at only one-third of communities.** Like industrial, only 10 communities in the County have commercially zoned land set aside to support such uses. For certain communities, any growth would require rezoning land from another use to allow for new development. Again, as higher density residential

development occurs (at least 1 du/ac in density) then demand will follow for commercial uses.

5.4 Growth Concept

Balancing development and conservation, while building upon public input, and laying the groundwork for the Future Land Use Map.

5.4.1 Overview

The Growth Concept Map reflects the input and data shared in the first phase of the process to develop the Comprehensive Plan. The concept reflects a “high level” direction that growth could take in Fairfield County based on this analysis and input and serves as the foundation for the Future Land Use Map.

It’s important to note that this concept map does not address development character, which is a component of the Future Land Use Map. Development character plays a major role in ensuring that any new development is compatible with and sensitive to the existing landscape and character of a community. These preferred development character types speak to land use, density, development pattern, and architecture, materials, lighting, and landscaping.

5.4.2 Components

The Growth Concept is comprised of the following components that define development in a general way.

MAP: FULL SIZE GROWTH CONCEPT MAP

- A. Employment.** These are areas with potential for job or employment growth based on location and surrounding context. The Growth Concept acknowledges influences resulting from employment growth in Licking County and the proximity of interstate access along I-70. These factors have a significant influence on development patterns, while also responding to the County’s goals of job creation. There is some industrially zoned land in this area as well. Additional employment areas are found in Violet Township and Canal Winchester along US-33, three locations around Lancaster, and a small area west of Thurston.

- B. Mixed Use Center.** These are areas either proposed for a mixed-use development project (Violet Township) or a location appropriate for such development (southwest Liberty Township). In each case the location supports an opportunity for directing development energy into a form new for Fairfield County but found elsewhere in Central Ohio (e.g., New Albany, Dublin, Grove City). Uses are mixed vertically and horizontally, residential is adjacent to commercial and office uses, densities are

higher than typical suburban locations, and the developments are integrated with sidewalks, bikeways, and where appropriate, structured parking.

- C. **Village Center.** These areas are the traditional village centers found throughout the County. These are important historic population centers that provide retail and services to support nearby residents. All villages should continue and expand to support a concentrated and walkable historic development pattern in the County.
- D. **Crossroad Center.** These areas are emerging concentrations of retail and services, generally located at key intersections, supporting nearby residents, travelers, and truck traffic. These should be limited in number so as not to compete with village centers and larger concentrations of regional-scale retail in Pickerington, Canal Winchester, and Lancaster. Off-site impacts should be minimized through enhanced landscaping, graphics, and lighting standards.
- E. **Growth Corridor.** The growth corridor acknowledges the potential location of a US-33 and I-70 connector, which will have an important influence on the development pattern in this location. In the short term, development should occur at a cautious pace recognizing the potential construction of the connector at some point. But with its buildout, the corridor could experience employment development at its north and south termini, with commercial at any intersection, and residential abutting the road (well buffered with landscaping).
- F. **Residential (High).** These areas are appropriate for higher density single-family residential of about four dwelling units per acre (gross), which is a typical suburban density. This development would also be supportable by public utilities, which at a lower density would not be economically viable. These areas reflect the current development pattern of Violet Township and extend east adjacent to employment areas (reducing the need for commuting) and into the northern portion of Walnut Township. Additional concentrations are recommended in the US-33 corridor around Carroll and the northside of Lancaster in Greenfield and Pleasant townships. This level of density would support nearby commercial services and necessitate investments in parks and recreational facilities.
- G. **Residential (Medium).** These areas are lower density (two-acre lots) that don't require public utilities but rely on on-site well and septic. These begin to transition from suburban residential to less dense, rural areas. Bloom Township is the focus of this designation, reflecting its historic development pattern, the fact the township functions as a semi-suburban community, and the lack of commercial or other services.

- H. **Residential (Low).** This area is characterized by very low-density single-family development (10-acre lots) and a mix of agricultural uses in Carrol Township, serving as a buffer and transition area between Bloom Township to the north and agricultural areas in the south and east in Clearkreek, Madison, and Hocking townships. No public utilities are expected, nor commercial uses.
- I. **Low Impact.** This area recognizes the unique qualities of the southeastern portions of the County that are dominated by hills and changing topography, significant woodlands, and scattered lower density single-family home sites along with historic village centers. This area will also benefit from limited growth and development, and care should be taken to ensure impacts on the unique natural environment are minimized.
- J. **Agriculture.** The balance of the County, which is dominated with prime agricultural soils, is designated as agriculture. This recognizes the role of farming in Fairfield County and the areas in which farms are particularly concentrated today. Related uses include homesteads, farm-related businesses, and very low-density single-family homes on scattered sites. No public utilities are expected.
- K. **Stream Corridors.** The County is served by an extensive riparian system of rivers and streams that provide open space, wildlife habitat, and the conveying of stormwater. These corridors should remain intact, without changes to the mapped flood hazard areas, and wooded to maintain habitat and protect water quality as nearby development occurs.

5.5 Future Land Use

A vision for balanced growth, providing for a strong economic future with housing and commercial services for residents, and extensive environmental and agricultural assets.

5.5.1 Overview

Land use speaks to the ways in which land is used for conservation or development purposes. It can reflect not just the actual use of the ground (today or in the future), but also the character of that development as a key descriptor. Taken together, this conveys a vision for Fairfield County in the future, which will be reached over time as individuals make decisions to invest in their property through a public zoning process.

This land use vision is built upon the input and analysis undertaken during this planning process, which was reflected in the Growth Concept Map. Its fulfillment will depend upon updating local zoning maps, the extension of public utilities to priority locations that can be feasibly and financially serviced, and ongoing development demand, which is not expected to lessen. Overriding goals include providing for employment opportunities

for residents (and the related revenue generation for local governments), housing to support those employees, commercial services to support residents, and conservation of key environmental assets and prime agricultural areas.

5.5.2 Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map is further detailed in the next section, which describes its various components, the Character Types. These seek to better detail and explain the broad land use categories used in the map, providing additional policy guidance to communities administering their zoning codes.

MAP: FULL SIZE FUTURE LAND USE
MAP

The Future Land Use Map seeks balance development and conservation into a seamless and integrated growth pattern that responds to the growth potential of Fairfield County. Specifically:

- A.** More intense development is focused on the existing population centers, both large (Lancaster and Pickerington) and small (Baltimore, Carroll, Pleasantville, Thurston, etc.).
- B.** Suburban-scale development is recognized and expected to continue a development path in the northwest, as well as the northern portions of Liberty and Walnut townships given available access to I-70 and the related short commutes into Franklin County.
- C.** Employment uses will be the focus of several Priority Growth Areas to provide an expanded tax base and employment opportunities for current and future residents. And an additional opportunity exists, given the amount of undeveloped land along the US-33 corridor, to combine various lots into a Mega Site capable of bringing a large industrial user to the County.
- D.** Less dense, residential development continues in the balance of the County, in many cases integrated with larger, conserved agricultural areas.
- E.** Conservation should continue along all stream and river corridors, in recognition of the regulatory floodplains, extensive woodlands, and species habitat, and in recognition that a variety of recreational activities can be accommodated.

In terms of accommodating future development, the Future Land Use Plan can support about 57,730 new housing units. Based on a 2021 household size of 2.47 persons per household, this estimate represents an additional 143,000 residents at full buildout. The plan supports 40,000,000 square feet of new employment uses. The accompanying table provides additional detail.

Character Type	Density	Yield
Employment Uses	5,000 sf/ac	40,000,000 sf
Suburban Residential	4 du/ac	50,400
Rural Residential	1 du/2ac	6,050
Mixed Rural	1 du/10ac	1,280
Total		57,730

5.5.3 Character Types

To effectively communicate the vision represented by the Future Land Use Map a series of character types are deployed to provide a richer explanation of and policy direction for the various land use categories. The accompanying tables describe the character types relative to a description, primary and secondary uses, density/intensity where applicable, and photos and patterns as further illustration. These can serve as the basis for new zoning districts. The following is a brief explanation and supporting land use policies.

INSERT: FULL SIZE CHARACTER TYPES GRAPHICS

- A. Open Space.** The Open Space category recognizes the important role of natural features and assets in Fairfield County, specifically river and stream corridors, flood hazard areas, woodlands, and wetlands. For the riparian corridors, the map reflects the Federally designated 500-year regulatory floodplain and an quarter mile buffer as a transition zone in which development practices should minimize impacts to the associated riparian corridor. Larger conserved and preserved parcels are included, as well. This represents 5,300 acres and 2% of the County.

Policies

- 1. Preserve and conserve assets.** Preservation and conservation practices are recommended to either permanently acquire assets or conserve them through conservation easements or appropriate development practices.
- 2. Maintain the floodplain.** In general, the regulatory floodplain should be maintained in its entirety to ensure it will adequately accommodate floodwaters, especially in an increasingly wet climate. If approved at the federal level, fill within the floodplain should be balanced with the creation of additional upstream storage.
- 3. Floodplain buffer.** Adjacent to the stream corridor, a quarter-mile buffer for land use transitions (including a 120-foot-wide buffer of trees along the creek edge) is recommended to protect habitat, reduce stormwater impacts, and protect water

quality. Within the larger buffer, development practices should be used to minimize impacts to the adjacent stream, such as additional setbacks, filtering stormwater runoff, and reduced on-site lighting.

- 4. Parks and recreation.** Open space is an appropriate location for parks, natural areas, and passive recreation (hiking, biking, canoeing, hunting). Extension of regional bikeways into Fairfield County would be appropriate along the major stream corridors, especially where other open space features can be linked and ensuring that siting trails is sensitive to the natural features. Public and privately-owned open space is an excellent use of these corridors.

- B. Traditional Agriculture.** This category includes areas where agriculture and working farms predominate, along with agricultural-related businesses, homesteads, very low density, single-family home sites, and civic uses. Smaller scale retail, such as farm markets, wineries, and garden centers are appropriate as well. This represents 106,000 acres and 33% of the County.

Policies

- 1. Farmland conservation.** Efforts to conserve farmland should continue to be concentrated in these areas to ensure the long-term viability of working farms. Because this land is not under imminent development pressure, the cost of acquiring conservation easements, etc., will allow more land to be conserved than otherwise.
- 2. Public utilities.** These areas should not be served by public utilities (sanitary sewer and water), but trunks and mains may cross these areas to service other more urbanizing locations. The Fairfield County Health Department's regulations regarding on-site well and septic apply, which will define the minimum lot size for single-family uses.
- 3. Solar farms.** While the regulation of solar farms is evolving in Ohio, both concerns and support has been raised regarding this new technology. As solar farms are approved in the County, operators should integrate farm operations wherever feasible to ensure long-term viability of farming on those properties. Screening, enhanced setbacks, and shielded on-site lighting should be incorporated to reduce visual impacts.

- C. Low Impact and Conservation.** The southeastern portion of Fairfield County is unique in terms of its landscape, tree cover, and very low-density development pattern. This includes portions of Berne, Hocking, Madison, and Ruch Creek townships. Future development should respect this pattern and the natural landscape. This represents 25,300 acres and 8% of the County.

Policies

1. **Conserve tree cover.** The extensive tree cover is a valuable aesthetic and environmental resource for the area. Wherever possible it should be maintained to provide wildlife habitat, offset the impacts of a changing climate, maintain water quality on the adjacent streams, creeks, and headwaters.
 2. **Parkland.** Columbus Metro Parks maintains Clear Creek Metro Park in Madison Township is both a regional and local resource. Additional parkland acquisition is appropriate in the Low Impact and Conservation area.
 3. **Public utilities.** These areas should not be served by public utilities (sanitary sewer and water) outside of existing villages, who may otherwise choose to extend utilities to abutting properties to support new development. The Fairfield County Health Department’s regulations regarding on-site well and septic apply, which will define the minimum lot size for single-family uses.
- D. **Mixed Rural.** This designation is focused on Amanda Township given the geographic role it plays between more suburban areas to the north (and within an easy commute to Franklin County), and more rural areas to the south and east in adjacent townships. While largely agricultural in character, the township includes many lower density single-family home sites. This represents 28,100 acres and 9% of the County.

Policies

1. **Residential pressure and conservation development.** The area will continue to see residential pressure, but the density will be very low even if platted subdivisions are created. The plan recommends an average density of one unit per every 10 acres. A development with smaller lots could set aside a portion of the plat as permanent open space to offset the smaller lots.
 2. **Reducing agricultural impacts.** As a means of protecting working farms from the impacts of adjacent or nearby residences, the township could consider adopting an agricultural-specific district that permits individual homesites on very large lots (e.g., 10 acres minimum) and a residential district with a slightly higher maximum lot size (e.g., 2 acres minimum and 10 acres maximum) to direct residential concentrations away from agricultural areas.
 3. **Public utilities.** These areas should not be served by public utilities (sanitary sewer and water), but trunks and mains may cross these areas to service other more urbanizing locations. The Fairfield County Health Department’s regulations regarding on-site well and septic apply, which will define the minimum lot size for single-family uses.
- E. **Rural Residential.** The Rural Residential category is focused on Bloom Township given the role it plays as a more suburban-style township, bracketing the US-33 corridor and more rural Amanda Township to the south. Agriculture is still a

predominant land use, but there are a larger number of large lot and platted subdivisions in the township, none with public utility services. This represents 32,200 acres and 10% of the County.

Policies

- 1. Residential pressure and conservation development.** The area will continue to see residential pressure, with a mix of large lot homesites and lower density platted subdivisions. The plan recommends an average density of one unit per two acres. Conservation development practices would be appropriate in larger platted subdivisions.
 - 2. Reducing agricultural impacts.** As a means of protecting working farms from the impacts of adjacent or nearby residences, the township could consider adopting an agricultural-specific district that permits individual homesites on very large lots (e.g., 5 acres minimum) and a residential district with a slightly higher maximum lot size (e.g., 2 acres minimum and 5 acres maximum) to direct residential concentrations away from agricultural areas.
 - 3. Public utilities.** These areas should not be served by public utilities (sanitary sewer and water), but trunks and mains may cross these areas to service other more urbanizing locations. The Fairfield County Health Department’s regulations regarding on-site well and septic apply, which will define the minimum lot size for single-family uses.
- F. Suburban Residential.** Providing housing options for the County’s existing and growing workforce is a key driver in applying this land use category. This designation is applied to a variety of areas expected to be under pressure from additional suburban-style growth. It acknowledges the pattern already present in Violet Township and applies it to portions of Liberty and Walnut townships along their northern areas (south of Employment Areas) and portions of the US-33 corridor adjacent to Carroll, property along OH37, and the north and east sides of Lancaster located in Greenfield and Pleasant townships. This represents 31,900 acres and 10% of the County.

Policies

- 1. Appropriate residential development.** While this designation recommends an average density of 4 dwellings per acre, it recognizes the development of connected neighborhoods of single-family, two-family, and multi-family homes (smaller scale, owner- and renter-occupied). These areas serve as the “suburban” portions of Fairfield County, highly accessible from US-33, I-70, and the County road network.

2. **Neighborhood amenities.** These developments should include amenities such as sidewalks, street lighting, tree lawns, parks, open space, and set asides for public school sites. Multi-family development should provide additional amenities, including clubhouses, pools, tennis and pickleball courts, etc. Where feasible, larger developments should integrate a variety of housing products to build sustainable neighborhoods.
 3. **Public utilities.** These areas would be served by public utilities, principally provided by Fairfield County. A minimum density of 4 du/ac is necessary to financially justify this significant public investment and ongoing maintenance costs.
- G. Employment Center.** The Employment Centers are the new economic engine of Fairfield County, providing sites for larger employers including hi tech, advanced manufacturing, data centers, light industry, logistics, and office uses. These areas are designated where highway access is available or nearby. They should be supported by nearby Suburban Residential. For planning purposes, a gross density of 5,000 square feet per acre was used to forecast potential development yield. This represents 14,600 acres and 5% of the County. In addition, given the amount of undeveloped land along the US-33 corridor, there is an opportunity to combine various lots into a state-certified Mega Site capable of bringing a large industrial user to the County. This could provide an opportunity to start the southern portion of the US-33 and I-70 connector.

Policies

1. **Ensuring quality development.** Integrating these large buildings into the landscape is an important zoning consideration as development occurs. Without question private investments are important to the County's economic wellbeing, but ensuring these buildings are in harmony with local communities is likewise a priority. Codes should include enhanced standards for setbacks, building materials, landscaping, screening, graphics, and lighting.
 2. **Expediting approvals.** The local and County development processes should coordinate wherever possible to expedite approvals while ensuring high standards are met. Joint review of large projects at the staff level is a start, as is parallel tracking of zoning and platting (if required) approvals.
 3. **Public utilities.** These areas would be served by public utilities, principally provided by Fairfield County. Stormwater management will be critical to minimizing offsite impacts resulting from significant impervious surfaces (buildings, parking, outdoor storage, etc.).
- H. Crossroad Center.** A Crossroad Center is an interchange or major intersection that functions today as a subregional commercial center or has the potential to evolve

into one. Retail, services, and auto-related businesses are appropriate. Along with supporting through traffic, these businesses may also provide goods and services that support nearby residents. This represents 3,400 acres and less than 1% of the County.

Policies

1. **Ensuring quality development.** Since these centers become small, isolated, and successful commercial areas additional attention relative to site layout, architecture, and design should be considered in local zoning to ensure that additional investment is attracted, and these small centers become anchors that support nearby residential development.
 2. **Minimizing off-site impacts.** Because these locations tend to occur in more rural settings, zoning standards should seek to minimize off-site impacts through additional screening, buffering, landscape, and reduced lighting and glare.
 3. **Public utilities.** In most cases, these areas would not be served by public utilities (sanitary sewer and water), however development has occurred (and will continue to occur in some cases) with on-site well and septic under County Health regulations.
- I. **Village Center.** Village Centers acknowledge the historic population centers throughout the County that have provided housing and services to residents since the County was settled. These are mixed use, walkable places reflecting a traditional development pattern of street grids, blocks, and smaller lots. Most offer public water and sewer services to support these communities. They should continue to serve as population centers, with many benefiting from recent investment.

Policies

1. **Building on existing development character.** New development in the Village Centers should reflect the existing development character of street grids, blocks, and smaller lots. Infill on vacant lots and expansion of village boundaries with new development should reflect the current mixed use and walkable character and be supported.
2. **Encouraging new housing options.** Village Centers provide the opportunity for upper story housing in commercial buildings, as well as a development character that would accommodate new two- to three-story housing in close proximity to village downtowns, in many cases.
3. **Public utilities.** These areas are typically served by local public utilities, which supports a higher density than lots with well and septic.

- J. Mixed Use Center.** These centers provide a new form of suburban development in which uses are mixed, residential is near commercial uses, and the environment is denser and more walkable than typical single-use development (e.g., subdivisions, apartment complexes, and shopping centers on separate parcels). Numerous successful examples are found throughout Central Ohio. In Fairfield County, one such development has been proposed in Violet Township and the Comprehensive Plan recommends a second such development within and adjacent to the Growth Corridor near US-33.

Policies

- 1. Mixing the Uses.** Successful centers mix uses both vertically and horizontally, but in a walkable, denser development pattern. Multi-story buildings include ground floor retail and offices, with upper floors dedicated to residential (owner- or renter-occupied). Surrounding a principally commercial core would be complimentary sections of single-family, two-family, and multi-family buildings (and clusters of buildings) providing a variety of housing options. Independent and assisted living would also complement such developments.
 - 2. Design.** Mixed Use Centers are designed on a street grid with blocks and lots that ensure walkability, so that destinations are near housing. Architectural style may range from traditional to contemporary even within the same development. Open space features, including pedestrian and bike paths, should be woven throughout the development, linking its various sections to the core.
 - 3. Public Utilities.** These areas would be served by public utilities.
- K. Growth Corridor.** The Growth Corridor acknowledges the long sought after connector between US-33 and I-70 to direct truck traffic away from local roads. An alignment has not been identified but the corridor in the plan reflects the general location, providing the need to plan from a land use standpoint. The plan supports employment uses at the northern terminus with I-70 and at the southern terminus with US-33, which could include a Mixed Use Center. Any intersections within the corridor could serve as a Crossroads Center and the balance of the corridor would support Suburban Residential uses.

Policies

- 1. Integrating with adjacent development.** It is assumed the connector would provide limited access, so no adjacent properties would benefit from private access to the new road and a limited number of intersections/interchanges is assumed. Development of adjacent parcels would be provided access through the existing road network and higher density/more intense development would be appropriate adjacent to interchanges.

2. **Minimizing impacts on adjacent properties.** The design of the connector should include buffering and screening along its perimeter to reduce visual and noise impacts on adjacent properties.
3. **Multi-modal options.** The connector provides an opportunity to support a multi-modal approach. The design should include separated bike and pedestrian facilities that link with adjacent neighborhoods.

5.6 Priority Growth Areas

Establishing the County’s priorities for attracting and supporting new development over the next decade to fulfill the vision of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan provides a long-term vision for growth and development in unincorporated Fairfield County, but there are short-term priorities and growth expectations presented below. These are large areas in which new development pressure is supported, public and private utility services are or can be available, and the supporting road network is in place (or improvements can be made).

The nine Priority Growth Areas represent a combined 9,341 acres of developable land. Based on the plan’s recommendations, four of the areas are recommended for residential development and occupy 4,001 acres and could accommodate a total of 16,004 housing units. For non-commercial (employment) uses, the remaining 5,340 acres could accommodate 26,700,000 square feet of employment uses with a gross average density of 5,000 square feet per acre. All growth areas are dependent upon the extension of public utilities to facilitate any significant development. The accompanying table provides development yield details by area. Each growth area is summarized below relative to developability, utilities (public and private), and road network requirements.

MAP: INSERT THE FULL GROWTH AREAS MAP

Area	Available Land for Development (Residential)	Density (units per acre)	Gross Projected Residential Growth (units)	Available Land for Development (Non-Residential)	Density (sq.ft. per acre)	Gross Projected Non-Res Growth (sq.ft.)
1	-	0.00	-	1,268	5,000	6,340,000
2	-	0.00	-	1,905	5,000	9,525,000
3	571	4.00	2,284	300	5,000	1,500,000
4	117	4.00	468	500	5,000	2,500,000
5	-	0.00	-	356	5,000	1,780,000
6	1,741	4.00	6,964	249	5,000	1,245,000
7	-	0.00	-	391	5,000	1,955,000

Area	Available Land for Development (Residential)	Density (units per acre)	Gross Projected Residential Growth (units)	Available Land for Development (Non-Residential)	Density (sq.ft. per acre)	Gross Projected Non-Res Growth (sq.ft.)
8	1,572	4.00	6,288	-	-	-
9	-	0.00	-	371	5,000	1,855,000
TOTAL	4,001		16,004	5,340		26,700,000

5.6.1 Area 1: Northeast Violet/Northwest Liberty

- A. Overview.** Area 1 is in the northeast corner of Violet Township and the northwest corner of Liberty Township. Its proximity to I-70 emphasizes the appropriateness of this growth area for a variety of employment uses and nearby residential, which together supports the plan recommendation of Employment Center for the entire growth area.
- B. Transportation.** The growth area falls mostly within the US-33 to I-70 Connector Corridor. Widening of SR-310 is an anticipated need, as well as construction of the connector, although its specific location is yet to be determined.
- C. Utilities.** Water and sewer service is expected to be extended from Fairfield County Utilities from west to east. Electric transmission is within the growth area and three-phase electric distribution is available on most roads. Natural gas transmission lines are southeast of the growth area, which would be extended as the area develops.

5.6.2 Area 2: Northwest Walnut

- A. Overview.** Area 2 is in the northwest corner of Walnut Township adjacent to the Fairfield-Licking County line and near the SR-37 and I-70 interchange. A part of the growth area is zoned Industrial by Walnut Township. Employment Center is the priority recommendation for this growth area.
- B. Transportation.** Background traffic plus development likely will require widening of SR-37 concurrent with buildout in the long term. Intersection and minor widening improvements will likely be needed throughout as the area develops.
- C. Utilities.** Water and sewer service is expected to be extended from Millersport once sufficient wastewater treatment capacity is available or by new facilities built by Fairfield County Utilities. Electric and natural gas transmission are within the growth area, and three-phase electric distribution is available on most roads.

5.6.3 Area 3: Violet Mixed Use Center

- A. Overview.** Area 3 has been identified as an emerging mixed-use center by Violet Township and the associated property owners and investors. The recently adopted township comprehensive plan reflects this land use policy. This is a logical location supported by the County and would provide a range of housing options for current and new residents, as well as amenities and services that would benefit township and other nearby residents.
- B. Transportation.** The growth area is adjacent to the US-33 to I-70 Connector Corridor and connectivity should be planned between the mixed use center and future right-of-way. Background traffic is relatively low at present, but incremental intersection and minor widening improvements will be needed as the area develops.
- C. Utilities.** Water and sewer service is available within the northern half of the growth area, provided by Fairfield County Utilities. Electric and natural gas transmission facilities are within the growth area, and three-phase electric distribution is available on most roads.

5.6.4 Area 4: Baltimore-Thurston

- A. Overview.** Area 4 recognizes the emerging Crossroads Center on SR-37 and SR-256 with its locally focused retail and services, as well as the industrially zoned land located east in Thurston and property west of the intersection identified for residential development adjacent to Baltimore. The plan recommends a mix of uses reflecting these local priorities.
- B. Transportation.** SR-37 is expected to require widening (with the addition of a center turn lane) in the near term due to background and development traffic, and major widening over the long term. Incremental minor widening and intersection improvements will likely be needed throughout over time.
- C. Utilities.** Water and sewer service is available from Baltimore or Thurston and Walnut Creek Sewer District. Electric and natural gas transmission is available within the growth area, and three-phase power is available along most major roads.

5.6.5 Area 5: Northwest US-33

- A. Overview.** Area 5 is a successful development area in Pickerington and Canal Winchester with a range of employment, health care, residential, and commercial uses. It includes logistics investments under construction and the potential for additional Employment Center uses. It stands at the western gateway to Fairfield County along US-33.
- B. Transportation.** Realignment and minor widening of Basil-Western Road is recommended, and other, incremental improvements may be required over time.

- C. **Utilities.** Water and sewer service is available from Fairfield County Utilities, Pickerington, and/or Canal Winchester. Electric and gas transmission services are available within the growth area, and three phase-electric is available along most major roads.

5.6.6 Area 6: West Greenfield / Carroll

- A. **Overview.** Area 6 surrounds Carroll on the east side and extends south along US-33 to Area 7. It has great potential for residential development given its adjacency to US-33 and within good commuting distance to I-270 and Franklin County. Suburban Residential (average density of 4 du/ac) is the recommended use. Retail and services in Carroll and at the US-33 and Coonpath Road interchange would support additional nearby residential (and strengthen the commercial marketability of those locations).
- B. **Transportation.** Growth Area 6 could benefit from improved connectivity to US-33 via a new road from Miller Farm Run (Carroll interchange) and incremental improvements along Coonpath Road.
- C. **Utilities.** Water and sewer service is available from Carroll or Fairfield County Utilities near Carroll, or from Fairfield County Utilities near Coonpath Road and US-33. Electric and natural gas transmission follow the US-33 corridor. Three-phase electric is available in Carroll, as well as along Carroll Northern, Pleasantville, and Coonpath roads.

5.6.7 Area 7: Southwest Greenfield

- A. **Overview.** Area 7 has great potential as an Employment Center given its adjacency to US-33, proximity to other nearby employment and retail uses, and the County airport. The growth area could serve as another important employment area for greater Lancaster, building off the success of growth area 9.
- B. **Transportation.** Defined and improved access to US-33 would benefit this Growth Area, particularly north of the airport, to be built as the area develops (not shown in figure).
- C. **Utilities.** Water and sewer service is available from Fairfield County Utilities or Lancaster. Electric transmission is east and west of the growth area, and three-phase electric is available along the area's periphery. Gas transmission services bisect the area.

5.6.8 Area 8: South Greenfield/Pleasant

- A. **Overview.** Area 8 offers significant potential as an emerging residential area, benefiting from good access to US-33 via Coonpath Road and proximity to employers and services in Lancaster. It is a logical expansion of the city to the north of its

current urbanized area. The plan recommends Suburban Residential with an average density of 4 du/ac if it were to develop in the unincorporated area.

- B. Transportation.** Background growth plus development traffic is likely to trigger the need for at least minor widening along SR-37. Additional intersection improvements will likely be needed throughout the growth area as it develops.
- C. Utilities.** Water and sewer service is available from Lancaster or potentially could be developed by Fairfield County Utilities. Electric and natural gas transmission services bisect the growth area and are sufficient to support residential development. Three-phase electric is present along Coonpath Road, as well as SR-37 and portions of SR-158.

5.6.9 Area 9: Lancaster West

- A. Overview.** Area 9 has benefited from recent industrial investment (e.g., Google), as well as adjacency to US-33 and utility services. The plan recommends Employment Center as the most appropriate use category, building upon this success. Additional advanced manufacturing, data centers, and related uses are expected.
- B. Transportation.** While the growth area is located along US-33, it has poor access to the highway. Minor widening of Whiley Road to SR-188 and its interchange with US-33, as well as a new road between Whiley and Wilson north to Lithopolis Road, and minor widening of Lithopolis Road east to Collins Road would improve access to this area.
- C. Utilities.** Water and sewer service is available from Lancaster. Electric transmission service is available south of the growth area, and natural gas transmission is available just north and east of the area. Lithopolis Road and Mill Park Drive, just east of the area, benefit from three-phase electric service.

5.7 Development Practices

A variety of innovative development practices can assist the County and local communities fulfill the vision of the Comprehensive Plan and ensure new growth is sustainable.

There are several development best practices that will fulfill the intent of the Comprehensive Plan while ensuring sensitive and sustainable development that benefits in the long term. These practices seek to balance the need to facilitate growth and private investment with safeguarding the public interest and limiting impacts to existing development and communities.

5.7.1 Mixed Use Development

This development type has been growing in popularity in Central Ohio, as well as nationally for the past few decades. It represents a return to the original form of

PICS: NEW ALBANY, CANAL WINCHESTER, DUBLIN

urban settlements (e.g., the residence above the shop) but has expanded it to meet evolving needs. Examples include New Albany’s Market District (horizontal mixed use across adjoining blocks) and Bridge Park in Dublin (vertical mixed use in multi-story buildings), as well as individual buildings such as two infill mixed-use structures in downtown Canal Winchester. This concept is being pursued on property in Violet Township and the plan recommends a second location along US-33 north of Carroll.

Policies

- A. Mixed use in the appropriate locations.** Support mixed use development where appropriately located to provide an alternative to the traditional, single-use and auto-dependent development pattern. It can support a mix of housing to meet a variety of needs within the County and the supporting retail, services, and employment in a walkable environment.
- B. Align County and local development regulations and processes.** County subdivision and local requirements and processes should align to support (and encourage) this new development form.
- C. Program County utilities to facilitate mixed use development.** Facilitate County utilities as appropriate to further support this new development form.

5.7.2 Conservation Residential Development

Conservation residential development is a land use practice in which the permitted number of lots is concentrated in a portion of a site, with the balance

AERIAL: CONSERVATION DEVELOPMENT

permanently protected as open space or working farmland held in common ownership. A tool frequently applied around Central Ohio, conservation design has protected individual sites and created open space corridors among adjacent properties, maintaining a sense of rural character and providing wildlife habitat.

Policies

- A. Ensure County and local development regulations support conservation development as an option.** Updating County subdivision regulations and township zoning resolutions to permit this design approach and provide for a joint review process as an incentive to developers, coordinating township development plan and County preliminary plat approvals.
- B. Consider zoning overlays as a more specific regulatory tool.** Consider adopting a zoning overlay in township zoning resolutions as the appropriate zoning mechanism for applying this approach, requiring that the base density is met, but allowing it to be clustered in exchange for a 50% open space set aside on the property.

C. Prioritize conservation development in specific locations within a given township. Identify areas in townships where conservation developments would be appropriate as a transition from adjacent suburban areas and to buffer adjacent agricultural areas.

5.7.3 Open Space and Conservation

It is critical that key natural assets are protected as development occurs in the County. These include flood hazard areas (500- and 100-year floodplains and the floodway as estimated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, wetlands, and mature woodlands). These natural features help to manage stormwater volumes and can filter runoff, provide for wildlife habitat, and are components of the natural landscape that defines Fairfield County's unique character.

Policies

A. Ensure County and local development regulations require park set asides in the development process.

Ensure both the County subdivision regulations and local zoning codes require the set aside of parkland at the national ratio of 10 acres per 1,000 residents. This standard would be applied based upon the number of housing units proposed in a development, multiplied by 2.67 person per household, then compared with the 10 to 1,000 ratio. The set aside land should be placed in a reserve in the development plan and plat and dedicated to the County Parks Department or a homeowner association for ownership and management.

B. Ensure County and local development regulations require permanent preservation of priority natural assets. Ensure both the County subdivision regulations and local zoning codes require the permanent preservation of flood hazard areas, preserve



A comparison of traditional rural residential lot splits and the same number of lots in a conservation development, saving farmland.

MAP: CONSERVATION AREAS

mapped wetlands, and encourage preservation of mature woodlands (through an on-site density transfer or set aside as park space). Examples include a floodplain specific zoning district (or overlay district).

- C. **Implement acquisition programs for priority assets.** Pursue acquisition programs and local funding to add priority resources to the County parks department as opportunities arise.
- D. **Continue to support private conservation efforts.** Support private efforts to conserve natural assets through donations, conservation easements, and similar measures, including land trusts.

5.7.4 Agricultural Preservation

Agriculture will continue to be an important economic sector in Fairfield County, as well as a cultural and community asset. From a development standpoint, primary agricultural areas where working farms are concentrated should be conserved through a variety of measures. Focusing development to more appropriate locations will benefit operations by reducing a variety of land use related conflicts (e.g., nuisance complaints, traffic, rising property values, etc.).

Policies

- A. **Promote agricultural preservation tools and programs.** Continue to promote programs that benefit farms as provided under state and federal law (e.g., CAUV, Agricultural Security Areas, conservation easements, etc.).
- B. **Direct growth away from priority preservation areas.** Limit public utility extensions and access to those areas that are priorities from a development standpoint, thereby discouraging development that otherwise might impact adjacent farmland.
- C. **Investigate local zoning districts that prioritize agricultural preservation.** Consider agricultural zoning districts in township zoning resolutions that limit single-family homes to very large parcels (e.g., a minimum of 10 or 20 acres) to discourage significant numbers of new homesites.

5.7.5 US-33 Corridor Overlay

The US-33 Corridor is both a critical state and local transportation route, but also serves as an economic driver for Fairfield County. Given that, its development

PICS: BILLBOARDS AND NO
BILLBOARD EXAMPLES

character and aesthetics are relevant to attracting quality private investment to the County. Among the various jurisdictions that front US-33, the common goals should be to concentrate development at interchanges, maintaining the current rural character

between interchanges, adopting common development standards, and reducing the impact of billboards.

Policies

- A. Proactively concentrate new development at interchanges.** Focus development at interchanges through the zoning code, targeting public utilities to those locations only along the corridor (or in recognized development areas associated with an adjacent municipality or village). This policy can apply in the long term as additional utility services are extended, such as the SR-22 interchange.
- B. Protect rural character along the US-33 corridor where utility services are not planned.** Maintain rural character along the corridor between interchanges by discouraging inappropriate uses via zoning codes and where public utilities are not planned, unless associated with an expanding municipality or village.
- C. Adopt common and consistent development standards among local jurisdictions.** Adopt a set of common development standards that provide for consistent setbacks, screening and landscaping, signage, and reduced on-site lighting (e.g., shielded, and downcast light fixtures) to reduce off-site light pollution (and retain a rural nighttime character). This can be implemented through a common overlay zoning district prepared with the participation of all affected jurisdictions, led by the County.
- D. Limit the extent of billboards.** Adopt signage standards that reduce the quantity, height, lighting, and related billboard standards (townships cannot prohibit billboards, but they are permitted to regulate them under the Ohio Revised Code).

SIDEBAR

Fiscal Dimensions of Growth

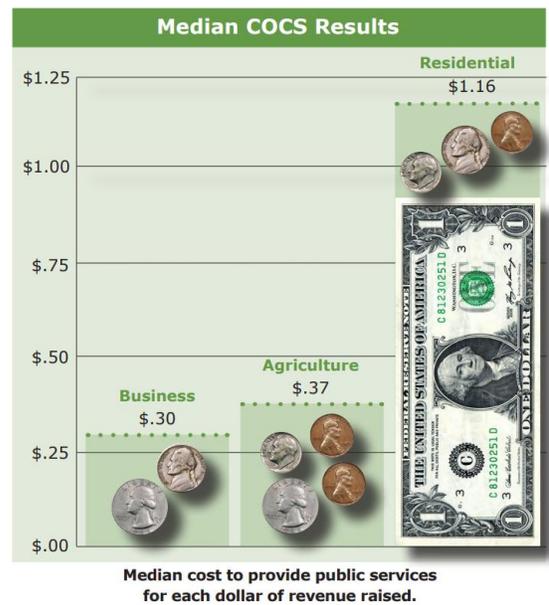
While conversations regarding growth often focus on the physical attributes, development character, and impacts on infrastructure there is a fiscal component that should play a role in establishing growth and development priorities within a community, whether at the County, township, city or village level. The fiscal context generally focuses on tax revenues generated by specific land uses and densities, and the corresponding expenses to provide public services and infrastructure, including operating and maintenance costs. For the Comprehensive Plan Update, an analysis is not part of the work program, but the following discussions provide some insight into this dimension.

Cost of Community Services. Cost of Community Services Studies (COCS) have been an analytical tool used by the American Farmland Trust (AFT) to estimate the fiscal contributions of existing land uses by comparing working agricultural and open lands to residential, commercial, and industrial land uses. Cases studies have been prepared by AFT across the U.S. to assist rural towns and counties that would benefit from fiscal impact analysis in preparing comprehensive plans but lack the resources for more in-depth studies. Also, COCS tends to be prepared for more rural communities, some on the suburban fringe of metropolitan areas.

Since 1980, AFT has completed at least 151 studies across the country. Their findings indicate that the median cost to provide public services is highest for residential development and lowest for business development, with agriculture following between those two categories. This is based upon the higher demand for public services necessitated by residential uses with lower levels demanded for businesses and agriculture. Increasing densities and higher home values can offset public costs through higher revenues (higher home values) or more efficient service delivery (concentrated development).

More specifically, for each dollar of revenue raised the median cost to provide public services was 30 cents for business uses, 37 cents for agriculture, and \$1.16 for residential uses. In 2003, AFT prepared a study for Knox County, which found the cost to provide public services was 38 cents for business uses, 29 cents for agriculture, and \$1.05 for residential uses.

Insight 2050, MORPC and Urban Land Institute, Columbus District. In 2015, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and the Columbus District of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) funded a study to evaluate



Source: American Farmland Trust, 2016

various development patterns at the regional level. The analysis studied various impacts resulting from four scenarios (past trends, adopted local plans, focused growth, maximum infill) assessing projected population growth through 2050. Fiscal dimensions were evaluated, among a host of other impacts.

Among the impacts documented, the study found that the higher the density the less the fiscal impacts were having a negative result on the region. Specifically, capital, and ongoing operations and maintenance costs on infrastructure were reduced as density increased, from \$16.4 billion to \$13 billion, a savings of 21%.

Perhaps more importantly, the study documented savings for individual households relative to the cost of automobile transportation and home energy and water costs as density increased. The annual estimated cost was \$13,100 per new household under Past Trends with a reduction to \$6,800 for the Maximum Infill scenario. While to two end points on this range of four scenarios, the study does reflect the common belief that as development patterns increase in density, cost savings are a result to homeowners through reduced driving, increased walkability, and a reduction in energy and water consumption based on smaller home sizes.

Transitioning from an agricultural to a developed area. A significant amount of agricultural land in the County benefits from participating in the Current Agricultural Use Valuation (CAUV) program that reduces property taxes. As those properties transition to residential, commercial, or industrial land the property tax rate will change, generating revenues for local governments. While that increases revenues, there are public costs associated with these developments as well.

As noted above, certain uses require public services but do not generate sufficient revenues to offset those costs (e.g., residential and retail uses). Employment uses, especially when personal income taxes are generated, more than offset the public costs to serve those properties, other than when significant public infrastructure is necessary (in those cases, it is appropriate for the developments to cover their fair share of such costs or offset that cost with local or state infrastructure grants or loans).

Clearly, the fiscal consideration of these situations is property and use specific.

insight2050 Scenario Metrics Summary

The comparative scenario metrics summarized here are described in more detail in the following sections. For clarity, values are rounded. All costs are expressed in 2014 dollars.

 Land Consumption Includes all previously undeveloped land that is urbanized from 2010-2050.	 Local Fiscal Impacts Capital and ongoing operations and maintenance (O&M) costs for new local roads, sewer, water, waste-water infrastructure, and select services (2010-2050).	 Transportation Miles driven in passenger vehicles in Central Ohio in 2050.
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		O&M	Capital	
scenario A <i>Past Trends</i> This scenario extends the land use and transportation investment decisions of the past decades forward to 2050.	495 square miles	12	4.4	\$16.4 billion <i>\$408 Million</i> Average Annual Costs Capital + O&M 2010-2050
scenario B <i>Planned Future</i> The housing and job distribution of this scenario reflects the direction of local plans and policies from the cities and townships across the Central Ohio region.	270 square miles	11.3	4.5	\$15.8 billion <i>\$383 Million</i> Average Annual Costs Capital + O&M 2010-2050
scenario C <i>Focused Growth</i> This scenario seeks to accommodate more growth in infill and redevelopment locations in and around existing cities and towns.	45 square miles	10	3.2	\$13.2 billion <i>\$329 Million</i> Average Annual Costs Capital + O&M 2010-2050
scenario D <i>Maximum Infill</i> This scenario strives to maximize growth accommodated through infill on previously developed lands and within existing urban areas.	15 square miles	10	3	\$13.0 billion <i>\$328 Million</i> Average Annual Costs Capital + O&M 2010-2050

Source: Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission and Urban Land Institute. 2015

Economic Development

6.1 Introduction

The Economic Development chapter of the Fairfield County Comprehensive Plan addresses economic performance, workforce needs, the agriculture sector relative to the ongoing success of business attraction and retention in the County, and tourism. Fairfield plays a key role in the regional economy, has benefited from recent economic diversification, and continues to provide workers for the regional economy.

INSERT CHARTS/TABLES/GRAPHS

6.2 Key Findings

- A. The County economy continues to grow, but at a slower pace than the region.** Fairfield County's economy grew approximately 17% between 2010 and 2020, from \$3.5 billion to \$4.1 billion, based on the latest available data, which is slower than the regional growth rate of 24%.
- B. Jobs within the County are dependent on consumer spending.** The County's job base is very dependent on consumer driven spending. Retail and Hospitality equal 23% of the local job base versus 16% for the Columbus metropolitan area, by example.
- C. Commuting is extensive in that a significant portion of the workforce commutes outside the County.** Fairfield County has a resident workforce of 72,000, but only 43,000 jobs are located within the County, resulting in a large amount of commuting to Franklin County.
- D. There is a disconnect between available jobs in the County and the skill set of the residents.** It appears the job mix for the County's residents is different than the opportunities available in Fairfield County. For example, approximately 8,000 residents work in office-based jobs in finance or corporate headquarters, whereas Fairfield County hosts about only one-half of that number of jobs.

6.3 Economic Performance

Fairfield County's economic performance has remained strong and diverse, priorities have been established to improve wages, skills, and opportunities.

6.3.1 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Growth

The size of the Fairfield County economy is approximately \$4.1 billion in inflation adjusted terms. The private sector represents \$3.6 billion or 87% of the total, which is slightly up from 85% in 2010. The County economy peaked from a GDP perspective in

2019. Neither Fairfield nor the state have kept pace with the Columbus metropolitan area, which was up 24% in the past 10 years.

6.3.2 Annual Wage and Salary Earnings

Fairfield County wages are 30% lower than the state and 38% lower than the metro region. Wages have grown by 72% since 2011 lagging the growth rates of the metro (74%) and the state (73%). The wage difference has increased from approximately \$13,000 to \$16,456. On an inflation adjusted basis, Fairfield County wages in 2011 are equivalent to \$39,413 in 2021, meaning real wages have increased by more than \$6,000 since 2011.

6.3.3 Employment

Prior to COVID, the County hosted over 66,000 jobs with more than 20,000 representing self-employed people. The County has added more than 8,800 jobs since 2010 and slightly more than half (52%) has been from persons self-employed. Total self-employment represents 31% of the employment base versus only 22% across the Columbus metro area. At the same time, the County's employment base has been growing slower than the region. Self-employment in Fairfield grew by approximately 25% versus 23% for the region.

6.3.4 Employment by Industry

Retail, healthcare, government, and hospitality are the largest industry sectors in Fairfield County. However, employment is not highly concentrated, which is a strength. The top five sectors only represent 53% of total County employment. Transportation and warehousing have more than doubled since 2011; hospitality and construction have also grown by almost 30% and nearly 50% respectively. Office-based jobs in contrast have grown 6% and manufacturing has grown by 5%. Consumer spending driven businesses are a large part of the total growth.

Fairfield County has a different industry mix than the region. The County is significantly more dependent on retail and hospitality. It is also more dependent on manufacturing, but only half as dependent as the metro area on transportation and warehousing. Fairfield has less presence in industries such as professional, technical services, finance, and corporate office jobs than the region overall.

Location quotients measure industry concentration in one geography relative to a larger geography. It's often used as an indicator of recruitment potential. Like the previous mix assessment, retail-related businesses and some selected manufacturing have much higher concentrations in Fairfield than nationally.

6.4 Workforce

More residents commute outside for higher paying jobs than those found in the County, which continues to be a policy priority in business attraction and retention to grow the local workforce.

6.4.1 Commuter Flow of Funds

Fairfield County residents who commute outside the County earn more than the workers commuting into the County to work. Approximately \$748 million of income left the County versus \$3.5 billion was brought back by commuting workers. It appears to be about a \$30,000 per year difference in average annual pay – \$60,000 versus \$30,000. The data also indicates that the gap between inflow and outflow of incomes is growing, indicating potential wage gaps between metro compensation versus local compensation.

6.4.2 Workforce Distance and Direction

Fairfield County fills its employment needs from multiple geographies across Central Ohio. County residents are not as geographically diverse and orient toward Columbus. In either commuting situation, nearly 70% are commuting less than 25 miles. Increasing housing opportunities within the County will attract additional local workers to relocate to Fairfield County to reduce commutes.

6.4.3 Employment Surplus/Deficit

Employment surplus/deficit measures the number of jobs in a community by industry versus residents who work in that industry. Its primary role is to help a community understand what it means to fully employ its residents by industry and occupation, and understand identify the resulting gaps, which can be taken into consideration in business recruitment. OnTheMap by the U.S. Census Bureau provides an opportunity to compare commuting workers versus resident workers by industry. However, it lags by two years therefore should be considered in context to changes from more current workforce statistics.

Relative to Fairfield County, in 2019 there were 835 jobs in the County in transportation and warehousing. A total of 4,619 residents works in that industry implying a “surplus” of 3,784 County residents working in transportation and warehousing than there are jobs in the County. The most recent employment data shows that this sector is the one that has added the most jobs in the County, which closes this gap, but it is still substantial.

6.4.4 Workforce Demographics

The County's workforce is younger than the state but older than the Columbus metropolitan area. However, in a few key industries such as manufacturing, Fairfield's workforce is substantially older than either comparison geography. And the workforce is gradually becoming more diverse:

1. Latino workers have increased from 2% to 3% of the workforce between 2011 and 2021.
2. Women currently represent 49% of the workforce.

6.5 Agriculture in Fairfield County

The agricultural sector has a small impact in terms of employment and economics, but a significant one in terms of land use and the landscape.

According to the most recently available data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, in 2021 the agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting sector contributed \$52 million to the Fairfield County economy (this excludes food processing). This is an increase in inflation adjusted GDP of 32% over 2011 compared to a statewide growth rate of 17%. Farm employment totaled 1,202 people in 2021, up from 1,162 in 2011. In terms of scale, agriculture is twice the size of the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector in terms of contributions to the County economy.

However, agriculture has a large impact on the landscape. The sector represents about 70% of the acreage of Fairfield County. The sector is diverse, ranging from livestock and basic crops, such as soybeans, to specialty crops, like landscaping plants and aquaculture. In some of these categories the County is a national leader. For example, according to the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture, Fairfield County is in the top 15% of counties across the U.S. in fruits, nuts, and berry production.

The sector has challenges. About 31% of the producers are over the age of 65. As noted by the 2022 Agriculture Development Plan, adding value through support activities with key local food brokering, processing, and other support services is becoming increasingly difficult.

6.6 Policies and Strategies

6.6.1 Continue the workforce development efforts of the Workforce Center. The Fairfield County Workforce Center is an important part of the economic development ecosystem of Fairfield County and a pathway for all residents to develop usable skills across a series of industries. The County's Career Readiness program connects the emerging workforce graduating high school to local careers. Continued expansion and investment is critical to reach as many students as possible. Fairfield County's student population is growing,

which is rare in the state. Given the aging of the County's workforce and the increasing diversity of the younger population, having multiple pathways into the workforce is critical. The Fairfield Career Center and Lancaster's Career Technology programs are critical to developing skills for high school students. The Career Center is looking at expanding programs for more in-demand jobs and a focus should be placed in continuing that expansion to serve more careers.

Strategies

- A. Expand educational responses to technology changes.** Continue to track technology changes in the regional economy and determine when additional non-degree programs should be added, such as coding skills, exposure to GMP manufacturing practices, among others.

- 6.6.2 Develop additional land to support employment growth.** The County's current zoned and vacant land suitable for employment uses totals an estimated 4,600 acres (although not all this land is served by public utilities). The Comprehensive Plan identifies four Priority Growth Areas that are targeted for employment uses, again public water and wastewater services are currently lacking in most locations. In addition, given the amount of undeveloped land along the US-33 corridor, there is an opportunity to combine various lots into a Mega Site capable of bringing a large industrial user to the County. With the additional focus on large land users, like warehousing and data centers, this inventory can be depleted in the next several years.

Strategies

- A. Develop priority employment sites.** The County should support additional development of sites that span a spectrum of size needs within the designated future employment corridors.
 1. JobsOhio large scale Priority Sites should remain a priority, however given potential water demand of such users as data centers, a focus on developing public utility capacity and distribution is critical.
 2. Smaller scale sites for companies that fall outside of JobsOhio targets and priorities (50 acres or less) which represented nearly 50% of the One Columbus lead stream in Q3 2022.

- 6.6.3 Monitor the evolution of ESG criteria in the site selection process and respond as needed.** Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) issues play an increasing role in site selection as companies race to meet their own corporate ESG goals. The Counselors of Real Estate annual survey shows that ESG has become a top 10 real estate issue for

companies and ranked #3 in the 2021-2022 Survey.¹ Site Selection magazine publishes an annual metro level Sustainability ranking². TEAM NEO in northeast Ohio has developed an online tool (<https://wherematters.teamneo.org/>) to help companies understand how different locations can support corporate goals such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and a diverse labor force.

Strategies

- A. Increase staff knowledge of ESG.** Staff should gain familiarity with ESG as it relates to economic development by supporting professional education opportunities.
- B. Work with One Columbus to address ESG considerations.** The staff should learn from One Columbus regarding the ESG considerations that influence the lead stream and deal flow. This will provide Fairfield County with a competitive edge.
- C. Share gained knowledge with local partners.** The staff should brief the Fairfield 33 Development Alliance on the role of ESG in business recruitment and provide ongoing updates.

- 6.6.4 Support implementation of the Fairfield Growing Agricultural Economic Development Plan.** Agriculture is an important part of the heritage of Fairfield County. As the County has become more suburban the size of the agricultural sector and associated value-added processing activity has declined.

Strategies

- A. Revitalize the local food council.** The staff should revitalize the Fairfield County Local Food Council with the goal of providing a focal point and leadership to this important agricultural sector.
- B. Identify market opportunities for value-added agriculture.** The last several County agricultural sector development plans have called for increased value added activity. The County should work with local partners (e.g., Farm Bureau) to undertake a study into the market opportunities for creating more value-added agriculture in the County and region, and what sources of capital are available.
- C. Clarify and streamline processes and additional support to increase direct-to-consumer linkages.** The County should work with local partners (e.g., Farm Bureau) to create additional direct to consumer opportunities for farms with clear regulatory processes (including zoning, licensing, and health inspection,

¹ <https://cre.org/real-estate-issues/from-materiality-to-risk-mitigation-esg-at-a-tipping-point-for-real-estate/>

² <https://siteselection.com/press/releases/220705.html>

plus additional marketing, and distribution access such as supporting reinstituting festivals like Taste of Fairfield).

- 6.6.5 Launch an effort to revitalize the town and village centers of Fairfield County.** The County is home to several towns and village centers that are in various stages of repair and activity. As part of the movement toward place types in this plan (e.g., Village Centers, Crossroad Centers, Mixed Use Centers) support should be provided to help encourage revitalization.

Strategies

- A. Create a local façade program.** The County should consider creating a façade redevelopment incentive program to upgrade building exteriors in village centers. The program could offer low interest loans and grants, such as the existing revolving loan fund, utilizing state grants and local dollars to encourage small business reinvestment.
- B. Consider a streetscape program for villages.** The County should investigate options to support streetscape improvements in Village Centers, utilizing local and state dollars. Many successful programs include cost sharing with villages and a contribution from benefiting property owners (e.g., front footage annual fee). In some cases, streetscape enhancements can be programmed into ongoing road maintenance programs.

- 6.6.6 Create a tourism economic development strategy.** Tourism is a growing part of the Hocking Hills area economy with more than five million visitors. And the Hopewell Culture sites in Licking County have been designated by the National Park Service as a nominee for UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Fairfield County serves as a key jumping off point for visitors into these historic and natural scenic areas and can capture additional visitor visits and stays that benefit local businesses.

Strategies

- A. Investigate strategies for tapping into regional tourism.** Working with Visit Fairfield County, the Buckeye Lake Region Corporation, and other local partners, the County should consider a strategy that attracts day trippers, agritourism, and complementary activities to the outdoor tourism hub in Hocking Hills. Fairfield County offers numerous destinations such as Buckeye Lake, dining options, and other visitor experiences that might attract day trippers traveling through to the Hocking Hills and Southeastern Ohio.

Housing

7.1 Introduction

Housing remains a critical priority for Fairfield County, partly due to expansion of Central Ohio and the demands that places on the regional housing market, to meet the needs of current residents, and to attract new employees to the County, which will reduce commutes and provide the County with a competitive advantage to attract and retain companies.

In acknowledging these challenges, the Housing Chapter seeks to provide a framework for considering a variety of strategies to attract housing, as well as in undertaking more direct actions in subsequent policy work. The Land Use Chapter provides development policy guidance that supports housing priorities.

7.2 Key Findings

- A. Single-family housing dominates the County residential market.** Fairfield County’s housing market is dominated by single family housing with housing prices that have been rising slower than the region but still nearly doubling in a decade. The lack of housing options (e.g., doubles, townhouses, condos, empty nester product) constrains the County in both serving the needs of current residents, as well as attracting new residents of various demographics (e.g., young professionals, young families, etc.).
- B. Renters are paying more of their income in Fairfield County than the metropolitan average.** Renters pay a higher percentage of their income on rent than renters in other parts of Central Ohio, especially Franklin County. The rental market is an important component of the housing market, in that many demographic groups cannot afford or are choosing not to purchase housing, including young singles, young professionals, and young families, as well as seniors.
- C. BIA 10-year housing forecast is strong.** The Central Ohio Building Industry Association (BIA) forecast a potential demand of 9,470 housing units in Fairfield County between 2022 and 2032, an increase of 15% as compared to the current housing stock of 63,340 units noted by the U.S. Census (2021). This is a significant increase in housing demand that currently is not being met by present construction levels.

7.3 Housing Characteristics

Fairfield County has 58,000 occupied housing units. The County is predominately owner occupied at 78%. Fairfield is more heavily concentrated in single family with 86% of units being

single homes or two units. Fairfield's housing stock mirrors the region in terms of age. And 21% of the housing stock is less than 20 years old, which mirrors the region.

7.3.1 Fairfield County Mid December 2022 Housing Market

It is important to remember that all real estate markets and particularly housing markets are snapshots in time. Markets change quickly and housing markets under the 2023 interest rate environment are constantly changing. Therefore, an assessment reflects the moment it was conducted and can be different within a few days.

The following summarizes current activity for 2023 and market dynamics (source: Realtor.com):

1. 568 homes for sale and 86 homes for rent.
2. \$294,000 median listing price.
3. Median listing price of \$155 per square foot.
4. Time on market has been shrinking from 140 days in January 2020 to 33 days, a decline of 76%.

For-sale housing average total listings has been 461 units with the peak being 674. The price per square foot is up 64% since January 2020.

7.3.2 Home Values

The Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) is a federal agency that has created an index that looks at home values based on a range of transactions including refinancings, mortgages, and sales prices among others to ascertain what is happening to home values across the market instead of relying solely on home sales, which can have more volatility based on what housing comes to market at a given moment. Fairfield County housing values have nearly doubled in the last decade while the Columbus metro home prices have increased by 127%.

7.3.3 Rental Cost Burden

About 48% of Fairfield residents live with the high-cost burden of rent, which is significant. High-cost burden is defined as over 30% of gross income. This is higher than the Columbus metropolitan area.

7.4 Housing Demand

Housing demand can be calculated in various ways, such as looking at historic trends, population forecasts, market forecasts, and various other variables.

7.4.1 BIA Housing Study Forecasts

The Building Industry Association of Central Ohio (BIA) regularly issues a Housing Needs Assessment that forecasts housing demand based on historic trends, in this case the past two decades, the impact of Covid on the economy, and the Intel effect. The current assessment was issued in 2022 and forecasts demand through 2032. The assessment addresses demand for the 10-county region around Columbus.

For the region, the assessment forecasted an employment increase of between 145,000 and 202,000 jobs, which served as the basis for projecting new housing demand. For Fairfield County, the assessment forecasted a population increase of 17,882 persons, increasing from 164,038 to 179,056. This represented an annualized increase of 1.21%.

This translated into a projected housing demand of between 138,659 and 193,476 units (owner- and renter-occupied). For Fairfield County, the assessment forecasted housing demand of between 8,428 and 9,470 housing units. Of those, owner-occupied units would comprise 5,973 to 6,712 units and renter-occupied units would comprise 2,455 to 2,658 units.

To meet this demand on an annual basis would require the issuance of 842-947 building permits for owner-occupied units and 245-265 building permits for renter-occupied units. However, in 2022 the County issued 572 residential building permits according to the U.S. Census.

7.4.2 MORPC Regional Forecasts

MORPC forecasts that Fairfield County's 57,312 households (2018) will grow to almost 69,000 (a 20.4% increase) by the year 2050. This would maintain its position in the region as the county with the fourth highest number of households, after Franklin, Delaware, and Licking.

Similarly, Fairfield County has the fourth highest number of housing units, with 61,578 (2018), projected to grow to 74,132 by 2050 (a 20.4% increase), expecting the continuation of a 93% occupancy rate.

7.4.3 New Living Units

The number of new living units available in Fairfield County has been steadily increasing over the past couple of years, with an average of 1,000 new housing units added per year starting in 2020.

GRAPH: INSERT BAR CHART

Most living units constructed in the County have consistently been individual dwellings, save for 2012. An average of 305 dwellings per year has been added since 2010, but it has been steadily increasing since 2013. New apartment units are added each year as well, though considerably less in quantity than individual dwellings, with an average of 126 units per year. Apartments are growing at a much more unsteady pace, with spikes in 2012 and 2018. The number of mobile homes is barely increasing, with some years losing as many as 60 units.

The number of new addresses established per year has also been increasing since 2010, with dwellings increasing at a consistently higher rate than other living types since 2012. Apartments are the next fastest growing, then multi-unit housing, and then trailers, which grow at a rate of less than 10 new addresses per year.

The total number of units available each year has remained consistent since 2009, at around 54,000 units, with a slight uptick since 2018. Single-family housing has been steady at around 45,000, representing 83% of the total housing in the County. Apartment units stay around 6,500 units, and Two and Three Family units stay around 2,300 and are the only type to show a decrease since 2012.

7.4.4 Demographics Influencing Future Housing Decisions

A diverse housing mix is a critical component of a livable community. The County has several different key age cohorts that also represent potential life stages. These include:

- A. Starting households (under 25 years of age) represent approximately 3% of the households.
- B. Family formation (25-44 years of age) which is roughly 50% of the households.
- C. Empty nest / downsizing households (45-64 years of age) representing approximately 20% of households.
- D. Retirement / aging in place age households (64+ years of age) which is an estimated 28% of the households.

These life stage groups are order of magnitude estimates to help frame the discussion around housing types that might be needed.

Another important consideration is the income levels of these households. Of note is that 60% of all the households at 50% or less of median household income in Fairfield County (\$77,241) are over the age of 55, even though this group represents less than 50% of total households. The implication is that providing downsizing and aging in the community options need to be conscious of the income levels of this age group.

7.5 Housing Challenges

The BIA forecast of population growth for Fairfield County over the next 10 years is an increase of 12%, which is 15,000 additional residents. However, forecasted housing demand has declined since 2018. But most new units required in Fairfield County are at upper income ranges (\$100,000 and higher), given current housing stock and demographic changes.

With the median value of \$213,500 (U.S. Census) and the median listing price of \$355,000 (May'23 - Realtor.com), the median household could buy a home in Fairfield County with 20% down and excellent credit at a financing rate of 5% but could not buy a home with a financing rate of 6% with the same credit and 10% down. This reflects the current economics of the housing market and potential demand.

On the rental side of the housing market, 53% of rental units will have rents that are at least 35% of median income, demonstrating the challenge of meeting this need in the County. Median rent based on demographics should be \$963 per month, but actual fair market rents in the County are \$1,032 per month.

A diverse housing mix is vitally important. The housing market can be defined by age, income, and life stage. For Fairfield County, that means that 3% are starter households, 49% are families, 20% are empty nesters/downsizers, and 28% are retirement/aging in place. However, younger households have higher incomes and persons 55 years and older occupy 60% of the population with a 50% or lower median household income. The result being that those households that can afford new construction are younger with unique housing needs, while the older more established senior population needs more affordable housing than is otherwise being constructed.

The resulting financial needs to construct affordable housing in Fairfield County are significant. About 17% of owner-occupied housing will require some form of support either on rents and/or construction for incomes below 60% of median income (roughly \$49,000) and 51% of rental units will require some level of subsidy, such as construction and/or rental support.

7.6 Policies and Strategies

7.6.1 Increase housing options. About 50% of homeowners in Fairfield County are over the age of 55. Attracting new construction of downsizing housing stock will make available existing housing stock that would be more affordable to younger households and working families that may lack the financial resources to afford new construction. This process is called “naturally occurring affordable housing”.

Strategies

- A. Support downsizing and “aging in the community” housing options.** Investigate different models and development concepts, working with regional developers and builders, and match those concepts against local zoning and other development regulations to evaluate the steps needed to attract this type of residential development.
- B. Facilitate zoning and other regulatory changes to support new housing investment.** Develop and promote a package of regulatory changes that would support new housing models in Fairfield County. The County could provide the technical assistance needed to support these code changes among local communities.
- C. Offset development costs in exchange for an affordability commitment.** Providing appropriate financial assistance can offset development costs as part of a commitment to provide affordable units in a development, such as infrastructure assistance, leveraging public land, and support for state or federal financial assistance.
- D. Promote Fairfield County as a suitable investment for “empty nester” housing.** Work with local and regional builders to attract attention regarding the County as a strong market for these products and as a dependable location for such investment decisions (e.g., appropriate zoning and subdivision regulations once in place, as well as promoting the county’s transit capabilities).

7.6.2 Develop programs to support renovation of older housing stock. About 49% of the County’s housing stock was built before 1970. It is a critical part of the housing stock and cannot easily be replaced with new construction at a level that most County residents can afford, given the costs of new construction.

Strategies

- A. Explore regulatory and financial obstacles that hamper renovation.** The County should work with local jurisdictions to identify zoning barriers that discourage reinvestment in and expansion of existing housing. In addition, financial incentives should be explored to offset these costs, such as property tax abatement, grants funded by state and federal programs, and related tools.
- B. Develop a plan regarding public sector support for housing development.** Providing housing that is financially affordable for the work force in Fairfield County will require some form of public support, either through direct investment or through indirect support (e.g., tax abatements and similar tools).
- C. Commission a Housing Study.** The County and local housing partners should work together to under a housing study that evaluates housing typologies (e.g., townhouses and workforce housing), identifies development models and

partnership approaches, and delineates financial resource options to support new housing development.

SIDEBAR

National Housing Preferences

The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) regularly issues study findings regarding housing preferences of the U.S. population. In 2021, NAHB conducted a special study of these preferences, partly considering any potential impact of Covid. Relevant to this planning process, the following findings are pertinent.

- A. 67% of home buyers preferred to purchase a single-family detached home, while 15% preferred a townhouse and 8% a multifamily condominium.
- B. 60% of buyers would prefer to buy a newly built home over an existing home and desire a median finished space of 2,022 square feet.
- C. When asked whether the pandemic changed their housing preferences, buyers with at least one teleworker and one virtual student were found to prefer a larger home, 35% of the 67% who preferred a larger home, due to Covid.
- D. The percentage of buyers preferring to buy their next home in an outlying suburb increased from 26% to 30% due to Covid, the largest shift in preference for any location during this period.
- E. When asked if they would prefer a home designed for multiple generations (the buyer, plus a younger and an older generation), buyers were evenly split: 39% want it and 39% do not (with the remainder not being sure).
- F. 50% of buyers would be willing to consider buying a home in an age-restricted (55+) community.
- G. 60% of buyers would prefer accessibility features (full bath on main level, wider doorways, wider hallways, non-slip floor surfaces, entrance without steps).
- H. 78% of buyers reported being concerned about the impact building their home has on the environment.
- I. The top five most wanted community features were walking/jogging trails, a typically suburban neighborhood, a park area, being near retail space, and a walkable community.

Source: *What Home Buyers Really Want*, 2021 Edition, National Association of Home Builders

SIDEBAR

Alternative Housing Forms

Housing can take a variety of forms, partly in response to housing preferences and market demands, and partly due to public policy at the local level. As examples, below are various types of housing product that would be appropriate in Fairfield County as it seeks to meet ongoing housing needs and to provide a full range of options for current and future residents.

Typical Single Family

The predominant form of housing in the County is typical single-family detached units on a variety of lot sizes. In more suburban locations, that density can be 2 dwellings per acre.

INSERT HOUSING EXAMPLES

To cost effectively provide public utilities, that dense can be closer to 4 dwellings per acre. In more rural locations lacking public utilities, these lots can range upwards of 10 acres in size; Fairfield County townships can have a 2- or 3-acre minimum lot size (two acres is usually necessary for on-site well and septic).

Attached Units (Doubles and Quads)

Attached housing is a common product found throughout Central Ohio and the United States. It is often in the form of doubles (two attached units) or quads (four attached units). These are commonly structured as condominiums with shared common spaces, recreational facilities, and private streets and utilities. More so, it's not uncommon to find these developments fee simple (homes are located on separate tax parcels) but with the balance of the development held in common by the owners.

Townhouses

Townhouses are another form of an attached housing product, often providing a competitively priced option either as fee simple (owner occupied) or rental product. These structures can be designed in a variety of ways, including to reflect a single-family architectural style. Typically, townhouses are two to three stories in height. The accompanying example has a density of 10 dwellings per acre.

Live/Work Units

A new form of housing, live/work units are usually attached townhouses but provide a ground level space that can accommodate an office or other less impactful commercial use. This product has been popular in urban and semi-urban locations, especially along commercial corridors, but has also gained favor in more suburban locations. The accompanying example from Orange Township, Delaware County,

is a live/work unit placed at the end of a row of seven attached townhouses. The density is 18 dwellings per acre.

Traditional Neighborhood Design

Traditional neighborhood design (TND) is a land planning and architectural approach in which land uses are mixed horizontally and vertically within a development, and office and commercial spaces are included on major roads and within multi-story buildings. Some TND developments in Central Ohio are strictly residential in character and include elaborately designed shared facilities (e.g., clubhouses, etc.). The accompanying example is from Northwest Columbus (townhouses placed opposite single-family homes).

Transportation

8.1 Introduction

A key element of prosperity is the ability to move people and goods safely and efficiently. Overall, Fairfield County is well suited to continue growing but continued investment is needed to address current and anticipated congestion issues, increase street safety, and better accommodate those who prefer to walk, bike, or use transit.

8.2 Existing Conditions

8.2.1 Key Findings

- A. US33 remains the critical corridor in Fairfield County.** US-33 is the County's most critical transportation corridor, yet congestion is caused by at-grade intersections and traffic is increasing the length of commutes and decreasing travel-time reliability. The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) is initiating additional improvements in the northwest portion of the County to address these issues. Additional attention may be needed at other locations as growth continues throughout the County.
- B. Congestion is increasing.** Time-of-day congestion is increasingly an issue at intersections along key cross-city and cross-county routes, as well as in Violet Township. This congestion will necessitate intersection and other roadway improvements over time, based on increasing rates of congestion, development pattern changes, and as funds are available to design and construct such improvements.
- C. Various transportation improvements are underway to facilitate economic development.** Local agencies are working to advance projects to improve opportunities for economic development. Additional improvements will be necessary as such development continues, given the strong growth trends expected in Fairfield County.
- D. Transportation policy framework and regulations should be updated.** The County's transportation policy framework and regulations should be updated to provide a stronger policy basis and regulatory authority to manage the network as growth and development continues. In particular, the Thoroughfare Plan would benefit from additional modeling and updated access management standard will assist in obtaining the necessary right-of-way to support road improvements.

8.2.2 US-33 is the County’s Primary Gateway and a Key Resource, Yet Has Congestion Issues

The US-33 expressway is one of the County’s most important resources. It provides relatively reliable and quick access to Columbus and its suburbs, I-270 and both I-71 and I-70, as well as southeast Ohio. As such, it’s a lifeline for commuters and freight operators, as well as those looking for goods and services along the corridor’s reach.

MAPS: INSERT FULL SIZE

The corridor is a four-lane divided highway, with about half officially or effectively limited access or only accessible via high-speed entrance and exit ramps. The remainder is controlled access by at-grade intersections, some signalized—and ODOT’s intent has been to convert US-33 to limited access between Columbus and Lancaster. This stretch has the highest traffic volumes, ranging from a high of 52,000 vehicles per day at the west county line to 45,000 at N. Memorial Drive (Old US-33) where approximately half of the traffic travels to/from Lancaster and the other half uses the Lancaster Bypass. Volumes decline from 25,000 at the north end to 16,000 at the south end along the bypass. Between S. Memorial Drive (Old US-33) and Hocking County, volumes increase to about 27,000 vehicles per day.

Substantial investments have been made along the corridor over the past 30 years. These include the construction of the Lancaster Bypass, the Diley Road and Winchester Road interchanges, and the closures of some at-grade intersections and commercial drives. Between the west county line and N. Memorial Drive, one at-grade signalized intersection at Pickerington Road remains and will be addressed as a part of a new improvement to US-33. Two unsignalized intersections with Allen Road were closed by ODOT in June, 2023. The last but substantial issue remains congestion in Franklin County, between I-270 and Fairfield County, which adds travel time to Fairfield County commuters.

8.2.3 Time-of-Day Congestion is Increasingly Along Key Routes

Some congestion during peak hours and shift change is a common occurrence and a sign of economic vitality. Yet, excessive, and extended periods of congestion is a concern. The following are known areas of substantial congestion, at least during peak hours. These findings are based on 1) comments from County staff, 2) public knowledge, and 3) a review of ODOT data sources including a Travel Demand Model estimated Level-of-Service findings covering a portion of the study area and ODOT’s Traffic Operations Assessment Tool (TOAST) data which covers major routes throughout the County:

- A. **US-33.** US-33 from Pickerington Road west to the County line (discussed above)

- B. SR-37.** Lancaster-Newark Road NE (SR-37) between Lancaster and I-70 (in Licking County).
- C. County Intersections.** Numerous intersections in Pickerington and northern Violet Township along Blacklick Eastern Road NW (SR-204), Refugee Road, Hill Road North (SR-256), and others.
- D. Main Street, Lancaster.** Main Street (US-22) through Lancaster.
- E. N. Memorial Drive, Lancaster.** N. Memorial Drive (old US-33) from northwest Lancaster south through downtown.
- F. Lancaster Intersections.** Intersections along W. Fair Avenue on the west side of Lancaster, in the vicinity of Collins Road and Mill Park Drive.

As growth occurs, congestion in these and other areas will likely increase. Congestion and the need for intersection improvements will continue.

8.2.4 Major Transportation Projects Underway in Fairfield County

The following projects are under development by ODOT and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC):

MAP: LOCATION MAP OF THESE PROJECTS

- A. Pickerington Road Interchange (ODOT PID 77555).** This project currently includes the construction of the interchange at Pickerington Road and US-33 and the removal of access to Allen Road north and east of US-33. Assuming funding sources remain in place, construction is scheduled to begin in the Summer, 2024 and wrap up in the Autumn, 2026.
- B. US 33 Southeast Corridor Project (ODOT PID 76687).** This project covers widening efforts on US-33 between I-270 and the County line (or potentially the Pickerington Road Interchange). While the project is mostly outside of Fairfield County, it will substantially benefit continued growth in Fairfield County. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) is requesting funding for this project through ODOT's Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC). A preliminary schedule shows environmental and engineering tasks planned through 2025, setting up the potential for construction to start as early as 2026, assuming the project is ultimately funded.

8.2.5 Local and County Agencies Work to Address Priorities, Particularly to Support Economic Development

MORPC and One Columbus (the regional economic development agency) work with local and county agencies to identify strategic infrastructure investments

MAP: LOCATION MAP OF THESE PRIORITY PROJECTS

through its Competitive Advantage Projects program with the aim of attracting state and

federal funding. In consultation with the Fairfield County Engineer and Fairfield County Transportation Improvement District, the following five such projects have been identified:

- A. Southeast US-33 Corridor between I-270 and Pickerington Road.** A project to widen US-33 from two to three lanes in each direction, construct interchanges at Bixby and Pickerington roads, and remove access to remaining at-grade intersections from I-270 to Allen Road. The Competitive Advantage project located in both Franklin and Fairfield counties combines the mainline widening and two interchanges, with a combined cost estimate of \$193 to \$213 million.
- B. Basil Western Road Realignment and Intersection Improvements in Violet Township.** A realignment of Basil Western Road to become the east leg of the King's Crossing/Hill Road intersection, improving capacity and eliminating an extremely sharp curve. The project will improve the viability of developing industrial and warehousing uses along Basil Western Road by improving safety and access for trucks and employees. The current estimate for this project is approximately \$10 million.
- C. Far-East Freeway (I-70) Taylor Road Interchange in Violet Township.** This interchange will decrease congestion along Hill Road North (SR-256) and Blacklick-Eastern Road NW (SR-204) in northern Violet Township, and better accommodate traffic from residential development in Pickerington and Violet Township. Costs have not been estimated for this project; however, similar interchange projects vary from \$20 million to \$50 million. Costs for this interchange may be on the higher end given its proximity to the Hill Road NW (SR-256) interchange and, therefore, a potential need to braid on- and off-ramps between the two interchanges.
- D. The I-70 to US-33 Connector through portions of Violet and Liberty townships.** This project will substantially reduce travel times and distances between the vicinity of US-33 at Pickerington Road and I-70 near SR-310 for those traveling north toward Intel/New Albany or east along I-70, while removing truck traffic from local roads. The current route is circuitous, following several mostly north-south two-lane roads, none of which were built to accommodate trucks or substantial traffic volumes. The cost of this new freeway alignment is currently estimated at \$240 million.
- E. Eastside Industrial Connector in Lancaster.** A system of new roads which aim to provide a bypass for US-22 traffic around downtown Lancaster, while also improving street and utility access to potential industrial properties. Current estimates place the cost of this project at \$20 to \$40 million.

Availability of funding is a challenge for all projects and the above total to more than \$500 million—well beyond the capacity of Fairfield County and likely the State of Ohio.

Beyond cost, the US-33 to I-70 Connector in particular faces some stiff headwinds. Current and prior exhibits show an approximate corridor traversing Violet Township and

potentially part of Liberty Township. Yet, the rapid pace of development in Violet Township is quickly transforming agricultural ground to residential uses, potentially limiting some possible alignments for the future expressway. Further, federal funding cannot be used to assemble land for federally-funded projects until they have environmental clearance—which is typically a long and difficult process for new expressways.

8.3 Policy Framework for Regulating and Improving Transportation

8.3.1 Thoroughfare Plan

With growth it is critical to ensure transportation improvements occur concurrent with development as local tax revenues alone are often insufficient to make such improvements after the fact. This involves securing appropriate right-of-way to support road improvements and gain developer financial contributions to offset transportation impacts.

MAP: EXISTING THOROUGHFARE PLAN

The Fairfield County Thoroughfare Plan establishes a road classification system, which is nearly identical to ODOT’s functional classification of local roads with exception to recent amendments for several new road alignments. Brief definitions for the classifications are found on the Regional Planning website under “Development Strategy and Land Use Plan.” From here, regulations for right-of-way widths and contributions, as well as traffic impact studies are contained within the Fairfield County Subdivision Regulations, but only apply to “major subdivisions.” As such, development of parcels which do not require subdividing are not subject to these regulations.

Beyond the County itself, most cities and Violet Township have their own thoroughfare plans—a convenient and developer-friendly way of presenting all applicable regulations. In the case of Violet Township, the document is robust including forecasted traffic, expected full-build out lane configurations, classifications, and right-of-way widths. Cities and home-rule townships like Violet may require contributions of right-of-way and street improvements as a condition of rezoning and other permits.

The 2018 Comprehensive Plan recommended the development of a Transportation Plan, including an Access Management plan and more robust Thoroughfare Plan. This recommendation is consistent with ensuring growth occurs in an orderly process and that steps are taken to manage congestion, improve road safety, and ensure developers mitigate the traffic impacts of their developments. Such regulations can be targeted to the Priority Growth Areas recommended in this plan, as well as the other fast-growing areas of the County and can be designed to facilitate rather than hinder economic development.

8.3.2 Access Management

The County Engineer requires permits for driveways; however, the focus of this process is trying to assure at least Stopping- Sight Distance and ensure new drives do not cause a drainage issue. The County does not have Access Management standards to regulate driveway placement in relation to other drives—something that will be increasingly necessary to maintain roadway safety in fast-growing quarters of the County.

Further, the driveway permit process does not address the quantity of traffic or stipulate a traffic impact study process for any large-scale developments occurring outside of the major subdivision process. The County Engineer is working on a roadway design manual; however, this document is not expected to regulate access. Access Management regulations must be developed and adopted per the process prescribed in Ohio Revised Code Section 5552.

8.3.3 Transit Services

Fairfield County and the City of Lancaster partner to provide a Section 5310 rural public transportation service. The agency operates six flex routes—where riders can request to be picked up or dropped off at locations within three-quarters of a mile of from the system’s published routes; as well as location to location demand responses services, including to destinations outside of Fairfield County. The service connects to three other services: the Central Ohio Transit Agency (COTA), Logan Public Transit in Hocking County, and GoBus. At present, the County is conducting a study to consider if the service should become a County agency and determine if the agency should work with employers to determine the best route times for transit services.

8.3.4 Active Transportation and Complete Streets

Given Fairfield County's predominantly rural character, active transportation such as walking or biking to work, school, or other destinations is particularly difficult for most residents. Most streets outside of residential subdivisions lack sidewalks or wide paved shoulders, all but requiring pedestrians and bicyclists to walk or ride on the road. While this may be acceptable to many on low speed and low volume roads with good visibility, walking and biking on higher speed (35-55 MPH) rural roads without wide paved shoulders or separated paths are seen by many to be unsafe. Within the County are some shared use paths or unpaved trails for active recreation—predominantly near the cities of Lancaster, Canal Winchester, and Pickerington, as well as around Buckeye Lake.

From a planning and policy perspective, the County recently completed an Active Transportation Plan, which includes an assessment of issues and offers recommendations. To date, the County has not passed a Complete Streets resolution. Such resolutions are a policy statement to provide safe accommodations to all expected

to use streets. Practically, this directs those building or improving streets to build sidewalks, sidepaths, or other accommodations in areas where pedestrians and bicyclists are expected such as in neighborhoods and between neighborhoods and schools, parks, employment, and retail uses. This would affect developer-contributed projects approved by the County, and serve as an encouragement to the County Engineer, ODOT, and other potential project sponsors to incorporate these improvements into road projects.

8.4 Policies and Strategies

8.4.1 Corridor Study Program

Highly traveled and congested corridors should be the focus of studies (*see 7.2.3 Time-of-Day Congestion is Increasingly Along Key Routes*) to identify current and likely future congestion bottlenecks and safety challenges, then define staged improvement plans and serve as the basis for seeking funding to implement solutions. To this end, the Fairfield County Engineer is encouraged to explore opportunities to partner with ODOT and other jurisdictions to look at wholistic, regional approaches to address safety and congestion issues. The priority corridors are the following.

UNINCORPORATED AREA

- A. **US-33 from Pickerington Road west to the County line.** This is an important travel corridor and applications for TRAC funding are supported. Given the project's size and regional significance, it will require substantial federal funding to move forward. As such, local funds are not recommended for allocation to this project.
- B. **Congestion in Northwest Fairfield County.** Congestion is an issue in the northwest corner of the County, including numerous intersections in Pickerington and northern Violet Township. Issues are known to be problematic along several roads, including Blacklick Eastern Road NW (SR-204), Refugee Road, and Hill Road North (SR-256). A study of congestion and safety issues should be undertaken within unincorporated areas, led by the County Engineer and/or the Transportation Improvement District. If supported, the study may be a joint effort with the City of Pickerington, ODOT District 5, and/or other partners.
- C. **Lancaster-Newark Road NE (SR-37) between Lancaster and I-70 (in Licking County).** Substantial time-of-day congestion is reported as being an issue at locations along SR-37 between Lancaster and I-70, exacerbated by the amount of freight traffic using the route. The County, potentially in partnership with ODOT District 5, is encouraged to study the corridor to identify areas concerned for congestion, safety, and travel-time reliability. The County is then encouraged to pursue federal and state funding for specific intersections or segments of concern.

LANCASTER

- A. **Main Street (US-22) through Lancaster.** US-22 is a critical east-west traffic corridor and congestion is a substantial concern in downtown Lancaster. The City of Lancaster is recognized for taking the lead in addressing congestion and protecting the character of this commercial and cultural hub for all of Fairfield County.
- B. **N. Memorial Drive (old US-33) from northwest Lancaster south through downtown.** Memorial Drive is an important commercial corridor and source of tax revenue for the County, with portions experiencing substantial time-of-day congestion. Most of the corridor is within the City of Lancaster, which is recognized as the lead for addressing corridor concerns. The County benefits from improvements to this important commercial corridor.
- C. **Intersections along W. Fair Avenue on the west side of Lancaster, in the vicinity of Collins Road and Mill Park Drive.** The W. Fair Avenue corridor on the west side of Lancaster is an important industrial, logistics, and commercial hub and time-of-day congestion is an increasing issue. The City of Lancaster is support in working to address congestion issues within this portion of the City.

8.4.2 Develop Countywide Transportation Master Plan

The County would benefit from preparation of a detailed Transportation Master Plan that would address several current transportation issues that will become larger concerns as development continues. This was a recommendation of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission is recommended to lead this effort with support and input from the Fairfield County Engineer. Given the nature of the work, it is recommended that a consultant be retained to perform this project with an estimated budget of \$150,000 to \$200,000. Elements of this plan should include:

- A. **Updated Thoroughfare Plan.** The Fairfield County Thoroughfare Plan should be updated to incorporate traffic modeling that addresses current congestion issues and accommodates future growth with existing and improved streets, as well as potentially new streets. The updated plan should include limited travel demand modeling to help determine which intersections and streets may need to be improved or widened, as well as any new street connections which may be needed. The plan should also provide guidance on traffic impact study requirements and methodologies.
- B. **Access Management Standards.** The County should develop and adopt formal access management policies to better regulate the creation of new driveways and street intersections, making sure they are in safe locations and do not adversely affect traffic flows. This issue will grow in importance as development continues. Preparing such standards must comply with the procedure set out under Section 5552 of the Ohio Revised Code.

- C. Financing and Cost Containment Strategy.** A strategy and related policies should be developed that addresses both the financing and cost containment of transportation improvements, especially related to development-related impacts on the existing road network. This strategy would define clear policies and methodologies for ensuring development pays its fair share of necessary road and intersection improvements.
- D. Expanding Public Transit.** The County is currently studying the management and expansion of Lancaster-Fairfield Public Transit. The Comprehensive Plan acknowledges and supports transit services connecting residents to employment, health care, and related destinations.

8.4.3 US-33 to I-70 Connector

The proposed US-33 and I-70 connector continues to be identified as a critical transportation improvement that would provide access between these two critical corridors, while removing truck traffic and other thru traffic from local roads that were not designed to accommodate such loads and volumes.

The location of the connector has only been generally identified as the project has not moved into the design phase. A broadly defined corridor is found in this chapter, as well as the Land Use Chapter. Likewise, the design could range from a limited access (freeway scale) cross-section or could reflect a less impactful at-grade boulevard (parkway).

Regardless, right-of-way acquisition and construction will necessitate developer participation given the scale of the corridor. The Thoroughfare Plan, along with additional studies, will serve as a mechanism for identifying right-of-way needs and the County could work with developers to implement construction of individual segments through a public-private partnership (PPP) strategy.

The Future Land Use Plan identifies the land use implications represented by the connector, which would drive a different development pattern that might otherwise occur.

8.4.4 Transit

The County is encouraged to complete its study of transit services and implement recommendations. This is expected to include a review of funding streams, looking for funding and grant opportunities to implement recommendations, and expanded outreach to local employers—helping connect residents to jobs. Moreover, the County is encouraged to help promote the Gohio commute mobility program to help residents find and compare transit, carpool, vanpool, and other options to commute.

8.4.5 Active Transportation and Complete Streets

Current and future residents are seeking safe opportunities for active transportation and recreation. As the County continues to develop, it will be important to ensure supportive infrastructure is built concurrent with growth. The following are recommendations pertaining to Active Transportation and Complete Streets.

- A. Work to Implement Recommendations of the Recently Produced Active Transportation Plan.** The County's recent Active Transportation Plan includes an assessment of needs and offers recommendations to build active transportation solutions. The County and local jurisdictions are encouraged to apply for funding and construct improvements when possible. The County may also consider asking Fairfield County Park District to take the lead on such projects, pursuing funding and providing local match through its current or an expanded property tax levy.
- B. Complete Streets Resolution.** The County is encouraged to pass a Complete Streets Resolution, directing County agencies sponsoring or approving street improvement projects to safely accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists when building or improving streets, and encouraging partner agencies such as ODOT and local jurisdictions to do the same for projects within the County. This may be a standalone effort or occur as part of an updated Thoroughfare Plan (see 8.4.2-A).

Utilities

9.1 Introduction

Public and private utilities provide critical services to a variety of development types and have a significant influence on the development pattern. Public utilities, specifically water and wastewater services, meet the public need for potable water and wastewater collection and treatment, but require a minimum density or intensity of development to be cost effective. On the residential side, that often means a residential density of four housing units per acre at a minimum. Broadband is an increasingly important piece of infrastructure that supports residents as well as businesses, and is increasingly an important economic development consideration. Private utilities, in this case electricity and natural gas provide a similar supportive service to development. In the economic development arenas, these services (especially electrical load) are critical to attracting and supporting employment uses.

9.2 Water and Wastewater Facilities

This section presents a summary of findings regarding water and wastewater services in the County, with a focus on the unincorporated area. Adequate water and sanitary sewer services are necessary to support most types of development including moderate- to high-density residential, commercial, and most manufacturing uses. While those services are provided by public utility providers, in particular Fairfield County, on-lot systems (well and septic) are regulated by the Fairfield County Health Department.

9.2.1 Key Findings

- A. A broad number of independent water and wastewater providers cover a relatively small geography.** Fairfield County has 17 separate water and/or wastewater utility providers that provide service to more than 11 percent of the land area within Fairfield County. The County has studied service expansion and given expected growth in the short- to mid-term, additional pressure will be placed on public providers to expand services to support expected development.
- B. Available wastewater treatment capacity is limited and could stall growth if not addressed soon.** Based upon available data and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) planning assumptions, available wastewater capacity is sufficient to support an additional 72,000 new residents (or about 27,000 new homes) or equivalent demand from businesses and others (for comparison data centers can require up to 50 million gallons per day of water, which is comparable to an additional 41,660 new residents or about 15,600 new homes). However, two-thirds of this capacity is available in the city of Lancaster, with the balance spread between

Violet Township and Baltimore. Since expanding plants or building new ones can take years, there is a risk that development demand will exceed current treatment capacity over the next five to 10 years, if not sooner.

- C. Service planning boundaries and strategies are dated.** The most recent County-approved planning area boundaries are over 20 years old. Given the amount of growth that has occurred in the intervening years and the amount forecasted for the next 10 years, it would be helpful to have new boundaries established.

9.2.2 Area Water and Wastewater Utility Providers

About 11% of Fairfield County is served by the following 17 water and/or wastewater providers, covering about 55 square miles. These are systems operated by the communities of Amanda, Baltimore, Bremen, Canal Winchester, Lancaster, Lithopolis, Millersport, Pickerington, Pleasantville, Rushville, Sugar Grove, Thurston, and West Rushville, as well as Fairfield County Utilities, Earnhart Hill Regional Water and Sewer District, Walnut Creek Sewer District, and Buckeye Lake Sewer District—part of Licking County Water and Wastewater.

MAP: INSERT FULL SIZE UTILITIES MAP

9.2.3 Available Water and Wastewater Treatment Capacity

Currently available water and wastewater treatment capacity (including under construction facilities) is available from the City of Lancaster and in the center of the County. Fairfield County Utilities has the next highest amount of capacity, though this capacity is primarily in the vicinity of Violet Township. Available capacity is somewhat limited in the northeast portion of the County and very limited in the western, southern, and eastern portions of the County. This capacity information is documented in the accompanying table and map.

MAP: UTILITY FACILITIES OVERLAID ON THE PLANNING AREAS

Current Water and Wastewater Treatment Capacity, 2023

Utility Provider	Available Water Capacity	Population Equivalent*	Available Wastewater Capacity	Population Equivalent^
Central / Lancaster vicinity				
City of Lancaster	6 MGD**	60,000	5.7 MGD	47,500
Northwest (Violet Township, western Liberty and northern Bloom twps.)				
Canal Winchester [#]	1.19 MGD	11,190	0.91 MGD	7,580
Fairfield County	2.09 MGD	20,900	1.4 MGD	11,480
Lithopolis	Not Provided	--	(served by Canal Winchester)	

Utility Provider	Available Water Capacity	Population Equivalent*	Available Wastewater Capacity	Population Equivalent^
Pickerington	1.5 MGD	15,000	0.65 MGD	5,400
<i>Northeast (eastern Liberty and Walnut Township)</i>				
Baltimore	0.48 MGD	4,800	0.65 MGD	5,400
Buckeye Lake SD^^	NA	-	0.81MGD	6,750
Millersport	0.715 MGD	7,150	0.082 MGD	680
Pleasantville	Not Provided	--	(served by Walnut Creek SD)	
Thurston	0.104 MGD	1,040	(served by Walnut Creek SD)	
Walnut Creek SD	N/A	--	0.26 MGD	2,160
<i>Western, Southern, and Eastern Townships</i>				
Amanda	0.166	1,660	0.015	125
Bremen	Not Provided	--	0.074	616
Earnhart Hill RWSD##	1.1 MGD	10,900	0.07	583
Rushville	Not Provided	--	0.0	0
Sugar Grove	Not Provided	--	0.024	200
NOTES: Not all communities provided capacity information. Where possible, data was supplemented by available data from OEPA. *Assumes planning assumption of 100 gallons per person per day. Non-residential uses will count against this population equivalent. ^Assumes planning assumption of 120 gallons per person per day, including inflow and infiltration. Non-residential uses will count against this population equivalent. ^^Buckeye Lake Sewer and Water District provides sewer to customers around the lake in Fairfield, Licking, and Perry counties. **Includes net increase in production from the north water plant under construction. #Available capacity may be used within Fairfield or Franklin counties. ##Available capacity may be used within Fairfield or Pickaway counties.				

At present, water treatment capacity exceeds that of wastewater. And wastewater is the predominant concern as developing treatment capacity is costly and can take years to permit, design, and construct.

The above planning assumptions are expressed in population-served equivalents, but the following are additional considerations.

- A. Non-Residential Demand offsets Residential Development.** Non-residential uses such as businesses, schools, and factories have varying demand, but will count against the number of new residents which could be supported. Examples include the following.

Non-Residential Uses and Comparable Water Demand Standards

Use	Estimated Water Demand
Fast Food Restaurant	1,750 gallons per day or 15 people
Warehouse (300k SF)	6,000 gallons per day or 50 people
Data Center	0.5 to 5 MGD per day or 4,166 to 41,660 people

B. Inflow and Infiltration Impacts. While OEPA suggests the above planning rules of thumb, the amount of inflow and infiltration (I&I) can vary substantially and is often greatest in combined wastewater and stormwater sewers, as well as systems which may have maintenance issues. During wet weather events, the peak flows in wastewater collection systems can vary from three to eight times the system’s average flow. These events can result in sewer overflows into creeks and rivers, or even backflow into customer’s basements. OEPA may limit the ability for a system or plant to be expanded if collection systems or treatment plants experience overflow events and fall out of compliance. Working through such issues often requires studies and maintenance work, which can be costly and take a lot of time.

9.2.4 Ability to Grow and Serve Large Prospective Clients

The ability to grow a community’s wastewater service area and add more flow is limited by the capacity of its treatment and collection system. When undersized, untreated wastewater can back up into basements and overflow into creeks and rivers during heavy rain events—potentially leading the OEPA to declare that a system is *out of compliance*. In such cases, OEPA may limit the ability for a system to be expanded or add customers until such issues are resolved. Working through such issues often requires studies and maintenance work, which can be costly and take time.

Growing a community’s water treatment and distribution system is often not as difficult. The prevalence of substantial aquifers, surface water, and annual precipitation means the water is available, though permits are still required. Treatment plants and distribution networks can be expanded with relatively less concern, except when the pace of growth exceeds the pace at which improvements are financed and can accommodate that growth.

9.2.4 Utility Planning

On April 8, 2003, the Fairfield County Commissioners adopted Resolution 03-04.08g, the Fairfield County Development Strategy and Land Use Plan (FCDSLUP),

MAP: WATER PLANNING AREA EXHIBIT and WASTEWATER PLANNING AREA

including exhibits showing Wastewater and Water Treatment Systems. These maps delineated existing utility service areas along with projected service areas. Knowledge of planned service boundaries is important so multiple utilities do not make investments to serve the same area, which would ultimately waste ratepayers' money.

While Resolution 03-04.08g defines projected service areas, these are not the same as Facility Planning Areas (FPAs) and a utility's Section 208 plans that define the areas that utility may serve. Such planning areas must be based on studies and approved by the Ohio EPA, following approval by the County Commissioners.

9.2.5 Policies and Strategies

Most of the utility providers in Fairfield County will continue to operate within their current 208 boundaries in the foreseeable future. The City of Lancaster, following their planning studies in 2005 and 2014, has continued to expand service within their 208 boundary and currently plan for growth in areas north and west of the city. Likewise, EHRWSD can provide additional service to areas along the west side of the County.

- A. Priority Growth Area Utility Studies.** The Priority Growth Areas have been identified as those locations in the County to which short-term development pressure is expected or to be encouraged. In order to fully understand development needs, utility studies should be undertaken for each subarea.

Strategies

1. **Identify immediate priority locations.** Given potential development demand and likelihood of economic development potential, the County should identify priority locations benefiting from local support (e.g., zoning) to initiate utility studies.
 2. **Conduct utility studies.** The County Utilities Department should conduct utility studies to estimate the timing and cost of extending services, both temporarily and permanently. These studies would estimate demand, identify providers (existing or proposed plants, by Fairfield County Utilities or other cities/villages/special districts), author strategies to serve including staged implementation and capital financing plan, and next steps.
- B. Countywide Utility Master Plan.** The County should consider preparing a countywide utility master plan that would provide a long-range design, strategy, cost estimates, and funding options for building a larger system capable of supporting build out of the Comprehensive Plan. This should be consensus based and include all utility providers in the planning process.

Strategies

1. **Undertake the plan.** The County Utilities Department would manage this planning project. This may take 12 to 18 months to complete. A working group with representatives of all providers should work together to arrive at a consensus-based set of recommendations.
 2. **Integrate with Priority Growth Area utility planning.** Short Term Growth Area utility studies would feed into this countywide planning effort.
- C. **Consolidate Providers Where Fiscally Appropriate.** The large number of very small providers limits the ability of the County and smaller jurisdictions to respond to development demands, especially when engaging businesses. Consolidating small providers with County Utilities would provide operational cost savings and provide a means of expanding systems when necessary. Existing capital debts and repayment riders should remain contained to the communities that authorized them.

Strategies

1. **Consider management agreements.** As opportunities arise, the County should consider mutual agreements to assume the management of smaller system providers, but not ownership.
 2. **Enhancing local services.** This would provide a coordinated management approach across the County with certain budgetary efficiencies and help to ensure that systems are well maintained, and the public and environmental health is safeguarded.
- D. **Use JEDDs and other instruments to finance improvements.** Financing utility system expansions can be costly and beyond the ability of ratepayers' financial capacity to finance through fees. Some of these costs can be offset through other financial instruments, directly by developers and companies, as well as tapping available state loans and grants.

Strategies

1. **Continue to work with developers.** The County and utility providers should continue to work with developers to ensure utility expansions that are development-specific are financed by the private sector.
2. **Establish additional mechanisms for financing expansions.** In other cases, or as part of economic recruitment efforts, Joint Economic Development

(JEDD) and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts, and state grants and loans should be utilized to offset utility system expansion.

9.3 Broadband

9.3.1 Findings

A recent analysis by Broadband Ohio, a Ohio Department of Development initiative, indicates that nearly half (47%) of the County's populated areas and 11% of its households lack access service providing real world speeds of 25/3, or 25 megabits per second (MBPS) for download speeds and 3 MBPS upload speeds. The same analysis shows that of the 11%, about half (44%) do not even have speeds meeting the slower speed of at least 10/1.

It should be noted that many consider the 25/3 speed too slow to meet the need of households with multiple users watching videos in a residential setting, or for commercial use. Data for this analysis was aggregated from individual user speed test data for actual end-users of fixed broadband providers such as fiber optic, cable, fixed wireless, satellite, or DSL services.

9.3.2 Policies and Strategies

A. Broadband Development. The County should pursue federal and state broadband development programs to help address gaps in service and improve the speed and quality of served areas. High speed internet (fiber) with at least 100/100 MPBS download/upload speeds are all but required by most businesses and it will be imperative to work with providers to ensure access is developed in current and prospective commercial development areas.

9.4 Electrical and Natural Gas Services

Electrical service in Fairfield County is generally provided by South Central Power Company (SCPC) while natural gas distribution is provided by Columbia Gas of Ohio (CGO). In general, capacity is sufficient to support growth, however individual sites may require localized upgrades, especially relative to commercial users, especially "hyper-scalers" or high intensity users.

9.4.1 Findings

A. Extent of Services. Electric and natural gas are readily available in the County, with transmission facilities crisscrossing the County. Natural gas distribution lines and three-phase electric power—needed to support commercial and industrial customers—are most common in and near developed areas.

- B. Capacity.** Transmission infrastructure is available in some places to support high-demand users, such as hyper-scaler data centers and manufacturing facilities with transmission taps or substations. Other locations may require distribution system upgrades for commercial customers. For residential purposes, the current system is generally sufficient to meet that level of demand.
- C. Distribution Upgrades Triggered by New Customers.** Investments into electric and gas infrastructure occur concurrent with new development where capacity and distribution are insufficient, especially relative to commercial users. Early coordination with the utility provider will be necessary to ensure sufficient timing of such investments.

9.4.2 Electric Infrastructure

With respect to electric service, Fairfield County is in a good position to support growth. Numerous American Electric Power (AEP Ohio) transmission facilities cross the County, providing opportunities to support additional users in the short- and long-term. Distribution of power to customers is primarily provided by SCPC with small pockets covered by AEP Ohio, including Lancaster and small pockets in northeast, east, and southeast portions of the County.

The AEP transmission network can support both extremely large-power users, such as hyperscale data centers and other large-scale users, such industrial manufacturers. Custom service plans are developed by the utility for each user at their preferred site and developed based on the customer’s load profile and the available transmission circuits closest to the site. Industrial and other high-power users will likely tap 138 or 69KV services, which traverse the County. Lower-power commercial users typically prefer three-phase power services from SCPC or AEP Ohio which are located in and around more developed areas.

When it comes to accommodating new, large customers, the electric system can provide ample capacity—though some lead time is often needed to thoroughly study the impact of the new load on the network, to construct any new facilities requiring long-lead-time materials, and to complete any upstream enhancements on the system.

9.4.3 Natural Gas Infrastructure

While CGO is the predominant natural gas distributor for the County, Lancaster is generally served by Lancaster Municipal Gas (LMG), a city utility, and other smaller distributors serve small pockets of the County. Distribution infrastructure generally exists where it has been economical to install—primarily in developed areas. Where services do not exist, CGO will evaluate how to provide service and whether the extension will be

economical. In some cases, those seeking service may be asked to pay for some of the cost to extend service.

As noted, the County has a substantial amount of transmission infrastructure and some of these entities may allow a high-demand customer to directly tap those lines to serve a factory or similar user. Such taps are expensive but often a necessary project cost for such facilities.

9.4.4 Policies and Strategies

- A. Priority Growth Areas.** To be in a position to respond to expected growth in the Priority Growth Areas, the County should continue to coordinate with utility providers to understand the utility service opportunities and constraints.

Strategies

- 1. Work with utility providers.** Continue to work with utility providers to understand the opportunities and constraints for service expansion in each growth area.
- 2. Communicate with potential developers, companies, and property owners.** Continue to work with key stakeholders in sharing utility information so that development decisions are fully informed and considered when costing development projects.

- B. Coordinate with Utility Providers.** Along with focusing on the Priority Growth Areas, the County should continue to work with area utilities and keep them advised of future land use plans and development interest. Utilities have discretion when making investments to improve or install new infrastructure and such information can help utility providers pre-plan for development.

Strategies

- 1. Ensure ongoing coordination with local utilities.** Continue to share information on a regular basis with local utilities, such as development inquiries and utility system needs and investments. Facilitate meetings between developers and companies and the related utility providers.

Implementation

10.1 Introduction

Key to long term success in comprehensive planning is implementation. This chapter presents an overview of the key County implementing agencies, a summary of short- to mid-term implementation priorities, and a summary of plan recommendations, organized by goals and objectives, and indicates the level of local government(s) that plays a role relative. Where appropriate, other partners are noted in the narrative. Also included is a narrative and table that summarizes the role of individual levels of government in the development process.

10.2 Implementing Agencies

The following County agencies have authority to manage implementation of specific components of the Comprehensive Plan. They will be supported by the villages and townships through their own governmental responsibilities, particularly relative to zoning and utility provisions. The local cities will continue to serve as partners in managing growth and development. Additional supporting public entities include the Fairfield Parks District and OSU Extension - Fairfield County Office.

10.2.1 Board of County Commissioners

The Commissioners serve as the primary policy body for Fairfield County and funds various county services and facilities within their authority. This includes adoption of the Comprehensive Plan and changes to related county-level regulations and supporting plans (e.g., Subdivision Regulations, Thoroughfare Plan, and Access Management Standards). In terms of the development process, the Commissioners approve public improvement plans and plats related to subdivisions. Regarding economic development, the Commissioners approve various programs and development agreements.

10.2.2 Regional Planning Commission

The Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) serves as the platting authority and provides recommendations to member jurisdictions regarding rezonings. The commission works with a Technical Review Committee in assessing development proposals and plats under the Subdivision Regulations. The RPC provides the Commissioners with a recommendation regarding the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan. The RPC also provides technical assistance to its member jurisdictions.

10.2.3 Economic and Workforce Development

The Fairfield County Economic and Workforce Department manages the County's economic development programs and services, including business attraction and retention. It coordinates the development process with the RPC staff, as applicable.

10.2.4 County Engineer's Office

The Fairfield County Engineer's Office is charged with managing the road network, outside of municipalities, which includes coordination with the Fairfield Transportation Improvement District and the Ohio Department of Transportation. The Engineer's Office implements the Thoroughfare Plan and participates in the technical review of subdivision plats, including public improvements associated with a plat.

10.2.5 County Utilities Department

The Fairfield County Utilities Department is charged with managing public utilities provided by the County, as well as review of stormwater management. These responsibilities include the design and construction of water, wastewater, and stormwater systems. The department provides technical review of development under the Subdivision Regulations.

10.2.6 County Health Department

Among the various duties of the Fairfield County Health Department is the review and approval of on-site well and septic systems for parcels not served by public utilities. The department provides technical review of minor lot splits under the Subdivision Regulations, as well.

10.2.7 Soil and Water Conservation District

The Soil and Water District provides a range of services to the agricultural community, as well as rural homeowners, including a focus on stormwater management and erosion control to protect water quality. Staff assist property owners in understanding and addressing these and other related development issues.

10.3 Short- to Mid-Term Priorities

The following priorities are identified as short- to mid-term actions relative to Comprehensive Plan implementation.

10.3.1 Promote the Comprehensive Plan

To help ensure ongoing success with implementing the Comprehensive Plan and ensuring long-lasting change in Fairfield County, the plan itself should be promoted on a regular basis. This includes consistent education of the public and stakeholders regarding the plan and the role it plays in the development process, as well as recognizing implementation successes.

Actions

- A. Publicize and celebrate adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, provide copies to all member jurisdictions (electronic and physical), and place physical copies in local libraries and other publicly accessible locations.
- B. Maintain a web presence of the plan on the County website, updated regularly to promote implementation successes, relevant best practices, and ongoing development-related news.
- C. Consider adding a section to the Board of Commissioners agenda to report on implementation successes, perhaps on a quarterly basis.
- D. Consider requiring departmental work programs and capital requests to identify support of such proposals and requests relative to the plan's policies and strategies.

10.3.2 Implement Priority Growth Areas

The Priority Growth Areas recommended in the Land Use chapter identify the County's development priorities for the next five to 10 years. These areas fulfill the intent of the Comprehensive Plan, respond to likely infrastructure support, and acknowledge market forces that could be tapped by the County in capturing its fair share of regional growth while conserving natural areas and the vast majority of productive farmland.

Actions

- A. Among the nine growth areas, prioritize those most likely to respond to development interest in the near term (one to three years) based on township support for rezonings, feasibility of public utility extensions, availability of electric and natural gas services, supporting road network, and related factors.
- B. Execute growth agreement(s) with the respective townships to document local and County support for implementing the vision of each growth area.
- C. Once prioritized, undertake engineering studies to extend public utility services to support growth, as well as engineering studies for road and intersection improvements.
- D. Ensure all relevant economic development tools are in place or initiated based on development potential and reflected in the growth agreements. Certain tools, such

as a tax increment financing (TIF) district, joint economic development districts (JEDD), and new community authorities (NCA) may require an actual development project to initiate the negotiation process.

- E. Educate local leadership and the public regarding the status of the Priority Growth Areas, including updates regarding development, utility, and road projects, and ensuring stakeholders are afforded an opportunity to learn about development opportunities and benefits.

10.3.3 Prepare Model Zoning Districts and Update Local Zoning

The planning process identified the need in some jurisdictions to update their zoning codes to ensure modern zoning tools are available in managing future growth and development. Also, such tools promote implementation of the Comprehensive Plan by ensuring development is consistent with the plan's vision and expectations, while also supporting regulatory consistency across jurisdictions. These tools would include districts that implement the Character Types that define the Future Land Use Map (or as an alternative could be written in a more traditional manner). The County, through the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) would prepare the model zoning language and promote these tools to individual jurisdictions.

Actions

- A. Prepare model zoning districts by RPC staff and/or consultants, working with a committee of County agency, township, and village stakeholders.
- B. Present the final model districts to the RPC Board for approval and recommendation to the members for implementation.
- C. Conduct outreach to interested jurisdictions to assist them with code updates and zoning map amendments, which would also return to the RPC for a recommendation under the Ohio Revised Code.

10.3.4 Establish Growth Management Agreements

The County has consistently conducted education and outreach to local jurisdictions, especially townships, to ensure that all communities are well prepared to manage expected growth pressure and development opportunities. Consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the County's vision, a formal growth agreement can serve as a tool for formalizing partnerships between the County and individual townships. The agreement would document zoning commitments on the part of a township to update their code, preferably using the model districts recommended above, and the County commitments to extend public utilities, invest in the road network where appropriate, and support economic development tools to facilitate private investment.

Actions

- A. Work with the Fairfield County Prosecutor to prepare a model growth agreement that would be executed by the Board of Commissioners and a Board of Township Trustees.
- B. Conduct outreach to townships relative to interest in a formal arrangement, linked to Priority Growth Areas and other locations facing development pressure.
- C. Negotiate and execute the agreement(s).
- D. Undertake implementation of the various commitments reflected in the agreement under an agreed upon timeline reflected in the growth agreement, with funding commitments as appropriate.

10.3.5 Coordinate Review of Residential Development (Townships and County)

The review of residential development proposals located within townships involves a multiple-step process that can be very lengthy. This includes the zoning process at a township, the subdivision platting process at the County, and the review and approval of associated public improvements by the County Engineer. In addition to streamlining the review and approval process, the County and local partners should work together to address the housing supply, with a particular focus on those segments that are not being addressed by the private sector, as noted in the Housing Chapter.

Actions

- A. To shorten the process and more importantly, ensure consistent standards from a township and a County perspective, Fairfield County through the Regional Planning Commission and each township could consider a joint review process of residential development proposals. This would begin with a joint staff review and the concurrent submittal of the relevant subdivision documents for parallel review and approvals. This may involve a development plan under a township's zoning resolution and a preliminary plat under the County subdivision regulations. The existing processes are complicated and have multiple tiers. But given housing demand, both existing and forecasted, it would behoove all to consider leading the design of a coordinated process and test case with one township to determine whether it could be duplicated in other townships under significant growth pressure.
- B. In addition, the County, the cities, and other local partners should consider undertaking an indepth study of the housing market to ensure that all local governments are best positioned to ensure a range of housing products are

GRAPHIC: COORDINATED REVIEW
PROCESS OPTION

delivered to meet the various needs of current and future residents as well as a growing workforce.

10.4 Implementation Matrix

The Implementation Matrix presents a range of actions identified in the Comprehensive Plan that will guide implementation. It is organized by goals and objectives, with relevant strategies noted and a reference to the level of local government(s) that can play an implementation role.

1. Managing growth in a sustainable way, revitalizing existing communities, and supporting new development in appropriate locations.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
A. Ensure future development is sustainable using updated development regulations, targeted incentives, and higher residential densities where appropriate.	Adopt the Fairfield County 2023 Comprehensive Plan	X	X	X
	Consider preparing parcel-specific plans consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan		X	
	Prepare model zoning districts and promote to local jurisdictions	X		
	Update local zoning codes consistent with the model zoning districts and consider zoning map amendments		X	X
	Facilitate economic development in appropriate locations to strengthen the tax base	X	X	X
	Support mixed use development at key locations recommended in the plan	X	X	X
	Consider increasing residential densities to preserve agriculture and open space through adoption of the model zoning districts		X	X
	B. Revitalize existing communities by encouraging private investment, updating zoning codes, adopting zoning incentives, and promoting walkability.	Encourage new private investment and mix of land uses in villages to strengthen local economies, provide services to residents, and revitalize local communities		X

1. Managing growth in a sustainable way, revitalizing existing communities, and supporting new development in appropriate locations.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
	Consider zoning incentives in villages to facilitate new investment (e.g., higher densities, mixed uses, higher height maximums, reduced parking requirements)		X	
	Support commercial and employment uses within walking distance of residences, consistent with adopted plans and zoning		X	X
C. Support new development in appropriate locations consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, as well as local plans and supported by updated zoning codes.	Support new development that is consistent with the County comprehensive plan and local plans	X		X
	Ensure zoning codes are up to date to ensure consistency with adopted plans and to provide appropriate zoning mechanisms that support new development compatible with adopted plans			X

2. Ensuring that growth benefits all communities.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
A. Support development in cities, villages, and other growth centers through the extension of public utilities consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.	Consider public utility extensions that support additional development in growth centers	X		
	Support retail and services concentrations in villages that will support a larger trade area (e.g., the surrounding townships)		X	
	Facilitate new residential and mixed use development in villages through zoning code amendments		X	
B. Support development in townships with County economic development incentives and the	Target Priority Growth Areas in which growth agreements have been executed between the County and a township	X	X	

2. Ensuring that growth benefits all communities.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
targeted extension of public utilities.	Continue to implement economic development incentives, but emphasize Priority Growth Areas	X		
	Undertake the necessary utility master planning to serve Priority Growth Areas	X		
	Implement utility extensions concurrent with new development projects	X		

3. Supporting appropriate economic expansion and workforce development, a full range of housing options to support current residents and a growing workforce, retail services that meet the needs of local communities, downtown revitalization, and a strong agricultural economy.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
A. Support employment centers with public utilities, supporting transportation improvements, and targeted incentives.	Develop priority employment sites (JobsOhio and smaller scale sites)	X		
	Target Priority Growth Areas with executed growth agreements that include employment uses	X		
	Continue implementing appropriate economic development tools and incentives to facilitate appropriate private sector investment	X	X	X
	Support key infrastructure projects that facilitate appropriate employment development through capital improvement planning	X	X	
	Increase staff knowledge of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) to respond to site selection requirements	X		
B. Support workforce development.	Expand educational responses to technology changes	X		
C. Meet the growing housing needs of current residents and an expanding workforce.	Support downsizing and “aging in the community” housing options	X	X	
	Facilitate zoning and other regulatory changes to support new housing investment	X	X	

3. Supporting appropriate economic expansion and workforce development, a full range of housing options to support current residents and a growing workforce, retail services that meet the needs of local communities, downtown revitalization, and a strong agricultural economy.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
	Offset development costs in exchange for an affordability commitment	X	X	
	Promote Fairfield County as a suitable investment for “empty nester” housing	X		
	Explore regulatory and financial obstacles that hamper renovation	X	X	
	Develop a plan regarding public sector support for housing development, working with local partners	X	X	X
	Commission a Housing study, working with local partners	X		
D. Support retail services that meet the needs of local communities.	Strengthen local retail markets through the addition of new residential development and employment uses in local communities	X	X	
	Work with property and business owners to ensure economic successes	X	X	
	Implement a targeted tourism strategy to build local retail markets	X		
E. Support downtown revitalization.	Create a local façade program	X		
	Consider a streetscape program for villages	X		
F. Support a strong agricultural economy.	Revitalize the local food council working with the Farm Bureau	X		
	Identify market opportunities for value-added agriculture working with the Farm Bureau	X		
	Clary and streamline processes and additional support to increase direct-to-consumer linkages working with the Farm Bureau	X		X

4. Preserving rural character.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
A. Preserve the natural landscape by conserving outstanding natural assets, protecting flood hazard areas, and conserving farmland.	Use local zoning and County subdivision regulations to minimize impacts on natural features (e.g., park set asides, setbacks, landscaping, stormwater management)	X	X	X
	Implement acquisition programs for priority assets	X	X	X
	Continue to support private conservation efforts, including land trusts and other non-profits that conserve natural areas, outstanding natural assets, and farmland	X	X	X
B. Support working farms and related agricultural uses through conserving farmland, focusing growth on existing population centers, higher residential densities, and expansion in appropriate locations.	Support Priority Growth Areas to focus new development away from predominantly rural areas	X		X
	Support conservation development practices that cluster residential development in exchange for significant open space set asides (e.g., 50%)	X		X
	Promote agricultural preservation tools and programs, working with the Farm Bureau and Soil and Water	X		
	Investigate local zoning districts that prioritize agricultural preservation			X
	Raise residential densities to preserve farmland through zoning code amendments, particularly when supported by public utilities			X
C. Promote architectural character, screening, buffering, and lighting standards that reduce impacts on the rural landscape.	Concentrate new development in appropriate locations and at higher densities that preserve farmland		X	X
	Consider corridor standards for US-33 that manages setbacks, landscaping, buffering, lighting, and other measures to protect the County's rural atmosphere	X		X
	Consider consistent zoning standards to minimize the visual impact of billboards			X

5. Preserving natural resources.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
A. Preserve natural resources by conserving outstanding natural assets, protecting flood hazard areas, conserving farmland, and supporting development in existing growth centers.	Use local zoning and County subdivision regulations to minimize impacts on natural features	X	X	X
	Ensure County and local development regulations require park set asides in residential developments	X	X	X
	Support conservation development practices that cluster residential development in exchange for significant open space set asides (e.g., 50%)	X		
B. Protect the integrity of Federally designated floodplains and promote setbacks and buffering to reduce stormwater impacts on water quality.	Enforce County floodplain regulations and discourage infill and development in the floodway fringe without appropriate and federally approved mitigation measures	X		
	Encourage buffers and other landscape techniques that minimize storm runoff into streams	X		
	Consider local zoning overlays or districts that further implement floodplain zones by applying land use and development standards		X	X

6. Ensuring the provision of public services, utilities, and infrastructure to support communities and growth, while remaining fiscally responsible.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
A. Promote the use of capital improvement planning at all levels of local government to ensure public services, infrastructure, parks, and other capital needs anticipate growth.	Adopt a detailed water and wastewater facilities master plan	X		
	Adopt access management standards	X		
	Prepare and adopt capital improvements plans at the County and local levels	X	X	X
B. Identify additional resources at each level of local government to fund	Explore the full range of appropriate funding solutions, under the County's lead	X	X	X

6. Ensuring the provision of public services, utilities, and infrastructure to support communities and growth, while remaining fiscally responsible.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
capital investments, including creative solutions.				
C. Continue to ensure fiscal responsibility in the planning, construction, and maintenance of public facilities and infrastructure.	Consider adopting capital improvement plans to proactively forecast infrastructure needs and funding	X	X	X
	Ensure local development pays its fair share of capital infrastructure requirements	X	X	X
	Expand the tax base to ensure sufficient revenues are generated to support public services and facilities	X	X	X
	Support Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDDs) that generate income tax revenue in townships as part of a joint agreement with a city			X
D. Undertake studies and projects to improvement the transportation network.	Undertake a corridor study program of highly traveled and congested corridors	X		
	Adopt an updated Thoroughfare Plan based on appropriate modeling	X		
	Develop and adopt Access Management standards	X		
	Adopt a financing and cost containment strategy for transportation improvements	X		
	Expand public transit wherever feasible and cost effective to improve local services and connect residents to jobs	X		
	Complete its study of transit services and implement recommendations	X		
	Work to implement recommendations of the recently produced Active Transportation Plan.	X		

6. Ensuring the provision of public services, utilities, and infrastructure to support communities and growth, while remaining fiscally responsible.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
	Consider adopting a Complete Streets Resolution	X		
E. Undertake studies and projects to expand utility coverage (water, wastewater, broadband, electricity, and natural gas) to support future growth.	Identify Priority Growth Areas that are under immediate and short-term development pressure and undertake utility studies	X		
	Undertake and adopt a countywide utility master plan, working with all utility providers	X		
	Consider management agreements to consolidate utility operations under Fairfield County where fiscally appropriate and to enhance local services, working with interested utility providers	X		
	Continue to work with developers to consider alternative financing mechanisms to fund development-related County utility system improvements	X		
	Establish additional mechanisms for financing County utility system expansion	X		
	The County should pursue federal and state broadband development programs to help address gaps in service and improve the speed and quality of served areas	X		
	Work with electric and gas providers to identify opportunities and constraints for service extension; communicate with potential developers, companies, and property owners	X		
	Ensure ongoing coordination with local electric and gas utilities	X		

7. Supporting appropriate growth management tools at the County and local levels.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
A. Emphasize local adoption of the Comprehensive Plan	Adopt the County Comprehensive Plan Update	X	X	X
	Update the County Subdivision Regulations to ensure consistency with the intent and recommendations of the adopted Comprehensive Plan Update	X		
B. Support appropriate growth management tools at the local level.	Align local zoning codes to the recommendations of the adopted Comprehensive Plan Update		X	X
	Support development and annexation agreements among adjoining cities/villages and townships		X	X
	Adopt economic development tools that ensure development is consistent with the adopted Comprehensive Plan Update	X	X	X
C. Consider increasing resources at the County level to support local planning and development management.	As appropriate, consider expanding resources available at the County level and to assist local jurisdictions (e.g., MORPC staff and consultant services)	X		
D. Promote training opportunities for local staff, appointed boards, and elected officials.	Fund planning and zoning commission members attendance at the annual Central Ohio APA Workshop	X	X	X
E. Promote economic development tools and incentives that facilitate private investment.	Continue ongoing promotion efforts and outreach	X		

8. Increasing dialogue between citizens and their communities, establishing strategic partnerships.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHIP
A. Promote a variety of communication techniques to facilitate two-way dialogue,	Implement communication strategies by the County and local communities to ensure current and ongoing information sharing	X	X	X

8. Increasing dialogue between citizens and their communities, establishing strategic partnerships.				
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	COUNTY	VILLAGE	TOWNSHP
including education and input into public decision-making at all levels.	Maximize use of the County web site	X		
B. Implement ongoing reporting of Comprehensive Plan implementation, including annual reporting and public meetings.	Hold an annual meeting to celebrate implementation successes; share annual report and annual growth report	X		
C. Implement an annual growth report and related mechanisms to track development activity, including housing, business development, and infrastructure in the County.	Implement an internal system for tracking housing, business development, and infrastructure projects supporting the Comprehensive Plan	X		
	Consider an annual growth report to be prepared by the Regional Planning Commission summarizing zoning, platting, and permitting activity across County departments	X		
D. Promote strategic partnerships that coordinate growth, jointly deliver public services, and expand on growth tools.	Establish a quarterly staff-level meeting among County and local jurisdictions to discuss current development and infrastructure projects	X	X	X
	Support joint service delivery partnerships among local jurisdictions	X	X	X

SIDEBAR

The Roles of Local Government

Under Ohio law, units of local government have various functions and authorities in managing growth and development, which are summarized below and in an accompanying summary table.

In addition to such legal authorities, units of local government can enter into collaborative Inter-governmental Agreements (IGA) to jointly undertake a variety of services, such as joint provision of services (e.g., water, fire protection, etc.), policy coordination and information sharing, joint review of development, and Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDD).

1. County

Authority to adopt and implement subdivision regulations for the creation of parcels to support development; health regulations for managing on-site water and wastewater facilities; thoroughfare plan and access management standards to manage the public road network; engineering standards for the review and approval of public improvements relative to development; building codes to regulate residential and commercial development; stormwater regulations to manage on- and off-site drainage related to development; provide water and sanitary sewer services; incentives to support economic development; and adoption of sales taxes and fees to raise revenues for public services and facilities.

2. Townships

Authority to regulate the use and intensity of development through zoning resolutions; design guidelines for informing public and private development decisions; code enforcement; incentives to support economic development; and adoption of property taxes and fees to raise revenues for public services and facilities. Under the Ohio Revised Code, townships have the ability to enact limited home rule.

3. Cities and Villages

Authority to adopt and implement subdivision regulations for the creation of parcels to support development; code enforcement; thoroughfare plans and access management standards to manage the public road network; engineering standards for the review and approval of public improvements relative to development; capital improvement planning; building codes to regulate residential and commercial development; stormwater regulations to manage on- and off-site drainage related to development; provide water, sanitary sewer, and stormwater

services; incentives to support economic development; and adoption of property and income taxes and fees to raise revenues for public services and facilities.

Implementation Summary Table / Fairfield County			
Service	County	City/Village	Township
Development Policy and Regulations			
Comprehensive Plan	X	X	X
Zoning		X	X
Design guidelines for informing public and private development decisions		X	X
Subdivision regulations for the creation of parcels to support development	X	X	
Building codes (residential and commercial)	X	X	
Code enforcement	X	X	X
Infrastructure			
Capital Improvements Plan	X	X	
Thoroughfare plan	X	X	
Access management standards	X	X	
Road maintenance	X	X	X
Engineering standards for the review and approval of public improvements relative to development	X	X	
Utilities			
Production and distribution of public water	X	X	
Collection and treatment of sanitary sewer services	X	X	
Health regulations for and enforcement of on-site water and wastewater facilities	X		
Collection and management of stormwater	X	X	
Stormwater regulations to manage on- and off-site drainage related to development	X	X	X
Incentives			
Incentives to support economic development	X	X	X
Incentives to support housing development (workforce and/or affordable)	X	X	X
Revenues			

Implementation Summary Table / Fairfield County			
Service	County	City/Village	Township
Adoption of sales tax	X		
Adoption of income tax		X	
Adoption of property tax	X	X	X
Adoption of fees and charges	X	X	X