

# HARLEM TOWNSHIP

## The Strategic Plan 2025



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# INVOLVEMENT

## Township Trustees

Dave Jackson

Adam Holliday

Jon Trainer

## Residents

Steering Committee:

Chris Truax

Maureen Snowden

Amy Clark

Alice Yuhas

Tom Eldred

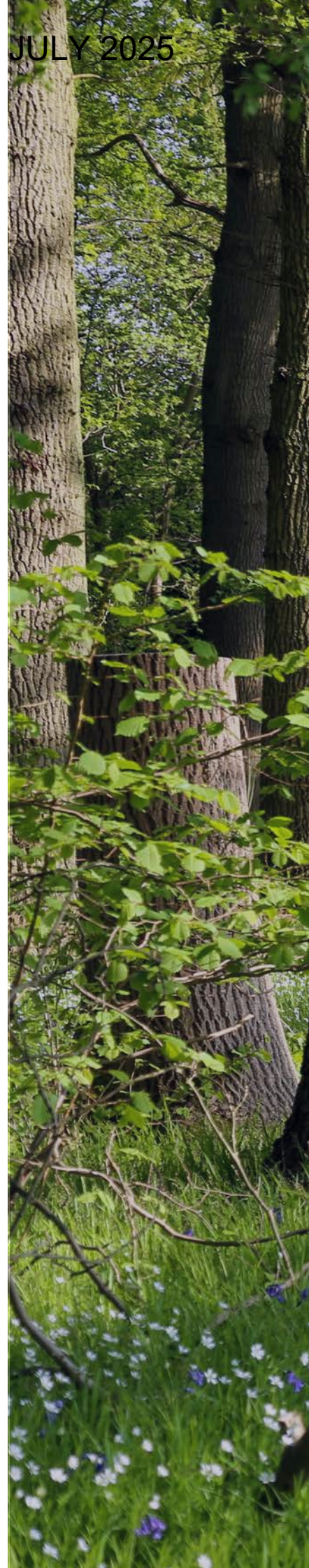
Jeff Ferguson

And the many residents who provided vital input to this plan through public meetings and feedback

## Consultants

Crossroads Community Planning

Krile Communications



# A LETTER FROM THE TRUSTEES



# Chapter 1: An Introduction

## Where have we been?

## Where are we going?

Harlem Township is located in southeastern Delaware County, northeast of Columbus. While the broader region has experienced decades of growth, Harlem Township remained largely insulated from development pressures due to the Hoover Reservoir—until recent years.

Recognizing this changing dynamic, the Township partnered with the Delaware County Regional Planning Commission to update its comprehensive plan, adopting the revised version in 2021. The primary goal was to preserve Harlem’s rural character while addressing growth pressures from nearby New Albany and Johnstown developments and potential sewer service expansion. The planning process ultimately recommended establishing limited commercial districts while maintaining low-density residential development throughout most of the Township.

However, just months after the plan’s adoption, Harlem Township faced an unprecedented planning challenge when Intel announced its semiconductor fabrication facility location just miles from the Township’s borders. Recognizing the imminent transformation ahead, the Township engaged Crossroads Community Planning to develop a Quick Strategy Guide (QSG) as a strategic appendix addressing critical gaps in land use policy, communications, infrastructure, and administrative capacity.

The initiative established a seven-member Strategic Planning Committee comprised of a Township Trustee, Zoning Commission member, Board of Zoning Appeals member, the Zoning Inspector, and three resident representatives. Community engagement proved substantial from the beginning; with the Township-wide kick-off meeting drawing over 200 participants, followed by ten targeted community sessions that collectively engaged more than 400 residents.

The QSG acts as an appendix to the 2021 Comprehensive Plan; providing strategies on minimizing annexations and the loss of Township character.

The process employed comprehensive research methodologies including a

SWOT analysis, infrastructure assessment, development pressure evaluation, and “at-risk parcel mapping” to understand potential impacts. The consultant team conducted field research in Chandler, Arizona—the site of an existing Intel facility—interviewing local officials and experts to develop predictive scenarios for Harlem Township’s future. This research informed community education efforts through public meetings and surveys designed to gather resident feedback while building awareness of anticipated changes.

The QSG established strategic recommendations, including multiple overlay district development, implementation of economic development tools, infrastructure enhancement strategies, and agricultural land protection mechanisms. Following the guide’s adoption in spring 2023, the Township committed to overlay district implementation,

The Township implemented multiple overlay districts targeting high-risk areas for development or annexation. These include the Mixed-Use (MU), Clustered Residential Conservation District (CRCDD), Mixed Service Business Residential (MSBR), and the County Line Road Overlay District (CLR) as shown in Figure 2. These overlays were implemented as a proactive strategy to reduce the likelihood of annexation by surrounding communities. By offering more competitive zoning options while retaining township control over development, Harlem Township aimed to maintain high-quality design standards and guide growth on its own terms. The QSG also recommended a town center overlay to align with the Center Village area to create a sense of place, bolster and expand local businesses, and foster community.

The QSG provided essential short-term strategic positioning for managing development pressures. However, the Township saw a continued need for proactive planning measures to develop a shared vision to guide the Township’s leaders in



their decision-making, setting in motion the development of this 2025 Strategic Plan. This Plan addresses the Township's current growth and development challenges and opportunities while fostering two-way communication with residents, strengthening regional partnerships, and preserving Township autonomy and community character.

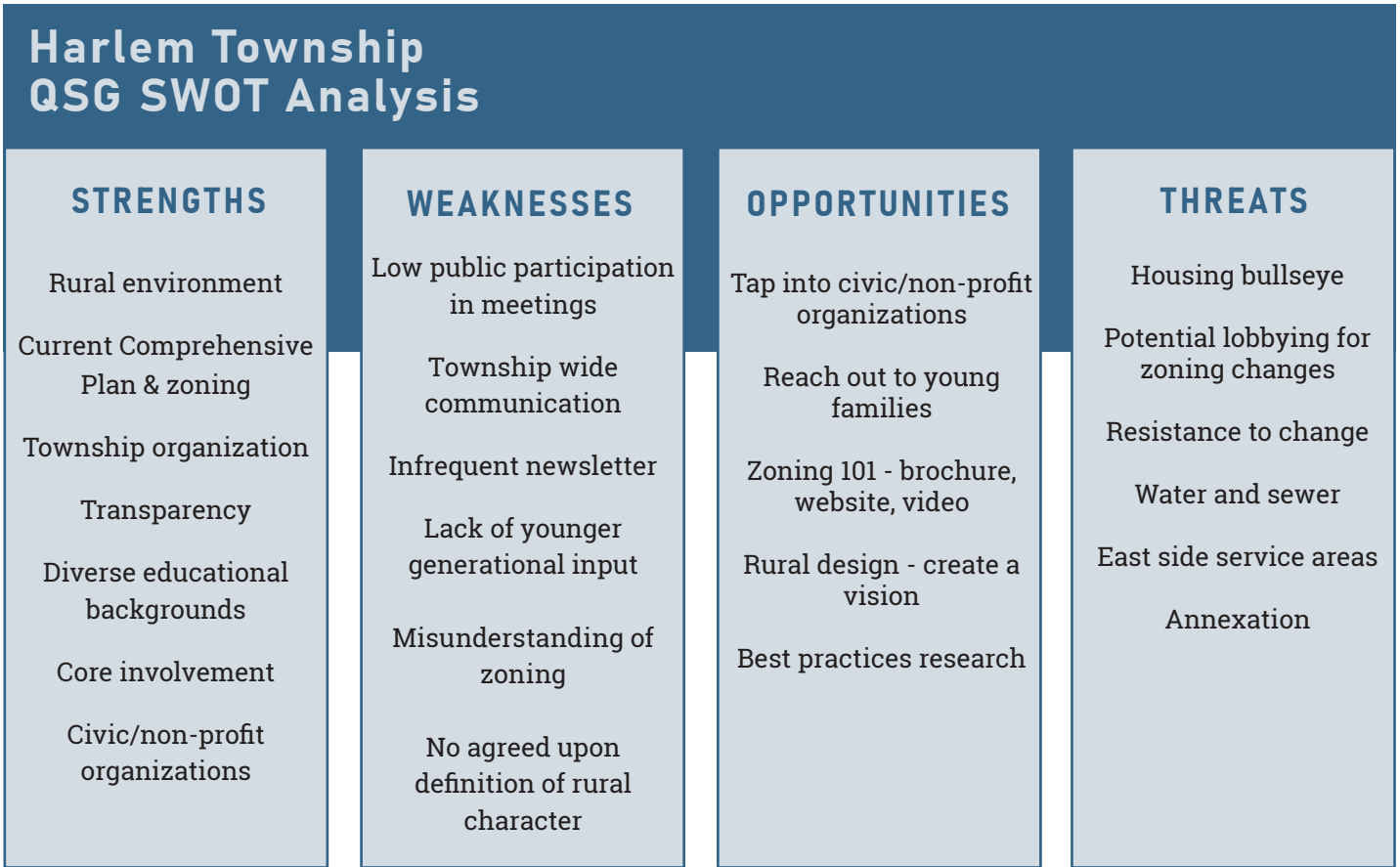


Figure 1: SWOT Analysis from QSG Planning Process

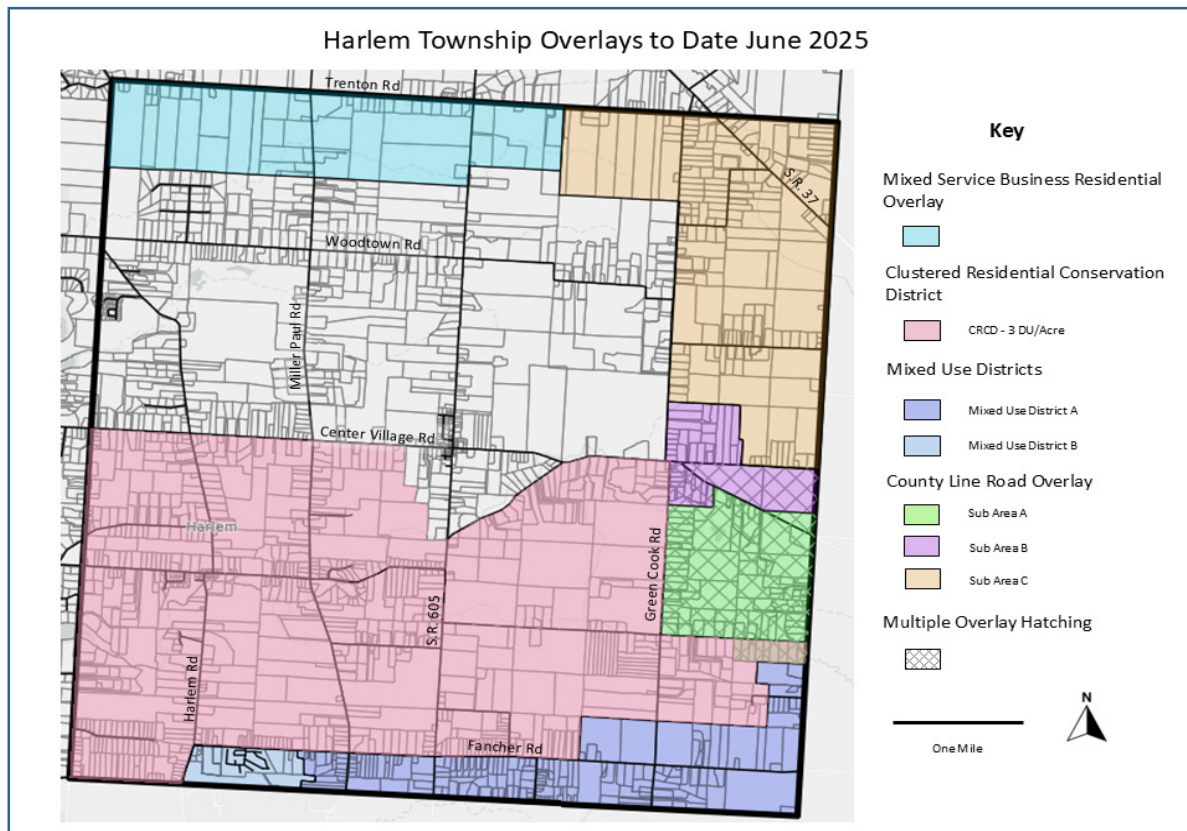


Figure 2: Existing Overlays in Harlem Township

## Chapter 2: Evolving Conditions

The evolving conditions report provides a snapshot of current data on key factors impacting the Township, including utilities, transportation, and demographics. This information serves as a foundation for planning, development, and strategic decision-making by establishing baseline conditions and identifying potential future trends. This baseline serves as the foundational resource for understanding the Township's present state and informs its trajectory.

### Demographics, Housing, and Industry

Harlem Township's convenient location, rural aesthetic, and high-quality services, combined with its position in a rapidly growing region, have driven steady population growth over the past twenty-five years. The Township reached its highest population to date, with nearly 5,000 residents compared to 3,953 in 2010. The 2023 American Community Survey estimate puts the Township's population at 4,745 residents.

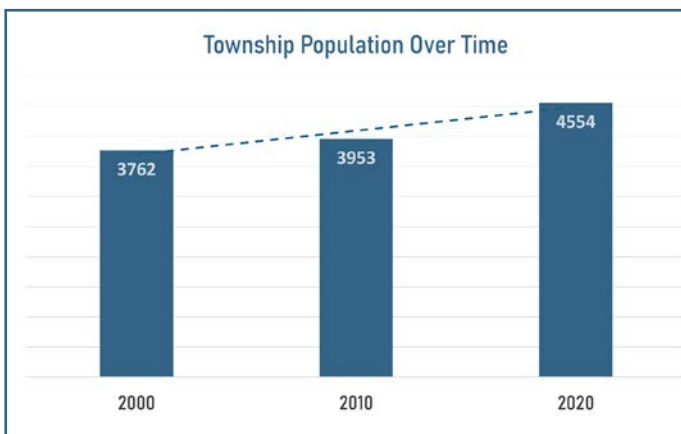


Figure 3: Township Population, 2020 U.S. Census

This population growth may be partially attributed to the high prevalence of residents in the 35-49 age group (25%), many of whom likely moved to the Township to raise their families or live near parents and relatives. The Township has a relatively even population on either side of this 35-49 age group with 38% of residents under the age of 34 and 37% of residents over the age of 50, showing a strong multi-generational community.

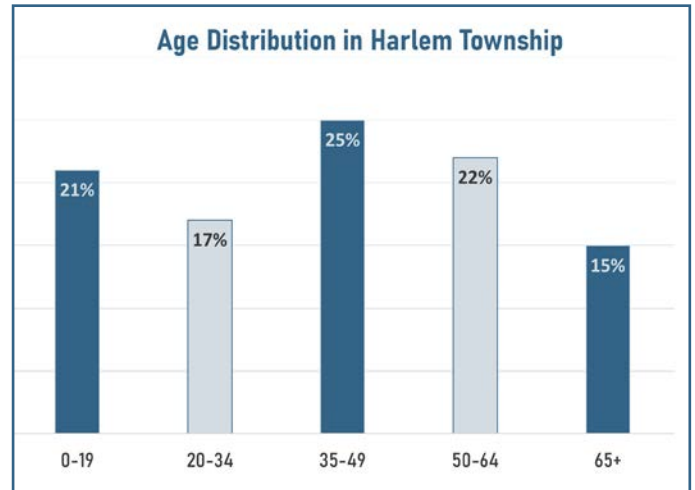


Figure 4: 2022 Age Distribution of Township Residents, 2022 American Community Survey

Harlem Township is a relatively affluent community with a 2024 median household income of \$115,000. The largest income bracket, representing 26% of residents, falls between \$100,000 and \$149,000 annually. Two other significant segments each comprise 23% of households: those earning \$50,000-\$99,000 and those earning \$200,000 or more.

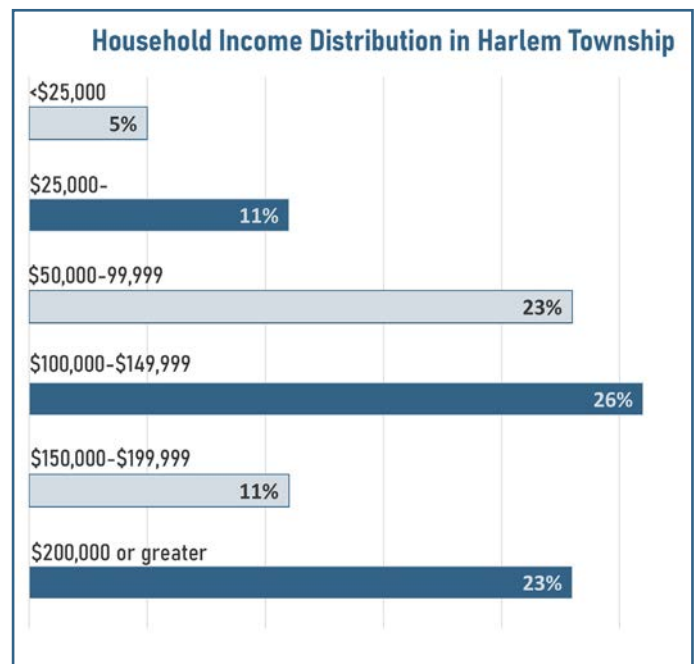


Figure 5: 2024 Household Income Distribution, Esri Business Analyst

## Chapter 2: Evolving Conditions

This annual income distribution mirrors the value of homes within the Township, with over 55% of homes valued between \$500,000 and \$749,999. Another significant portion of homes, just over 17%, are valued between \$400,000 and \$499,999.

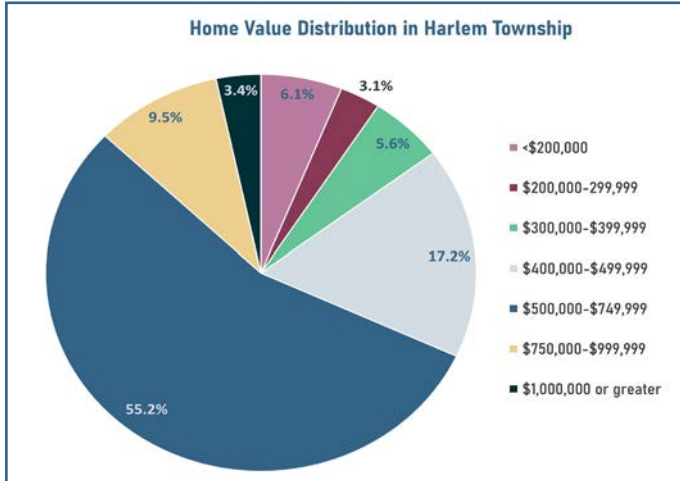


Figure 6: 2024 Home Value Distribution, Esri Business Analyst

Harlem Township experienced its largest housing boom between 1980 and 1999, when 31% of the Township's homes were built. This construction surge followed a significant period from 1960 to 1979, during which 24% of the Township's homes were constructed, as shown in Figure 7. While only 12% of the homes within the Township were built after 2010, the Township can expect significant additional residential development due to the impacts of Intel, central water and sewer expansions, and the growth of the Central Ohio region.

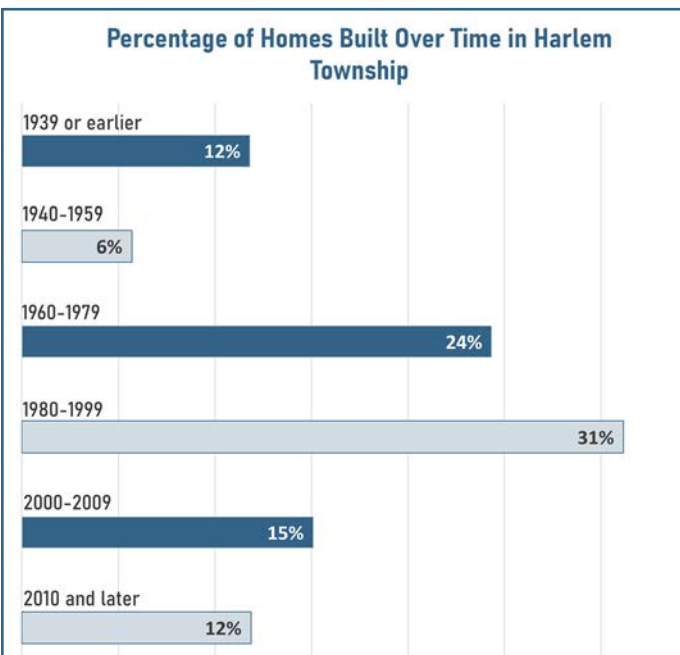


Figure 7: Home Construction Over Time in Harlem Township, 2022 American Community Survey

In fact, the Building Industry of Central Ohio (BIA) and Vogt Strategic Insights conducted an updated housing needs study to estimate the need for new residential housing in the 10-county Central Ohio area based on the projected job growth in the region through 2032. The new Housing Need Assessment found a need to double previous housing production to meet demands through 2032. Figure 8, from Vogt Strategic Insights, visualizes the predicted additional housing units by income in Delaware County.

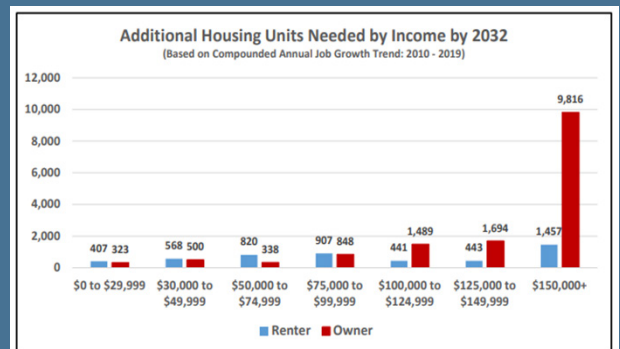


Figure 8: Additional Housing Needs in Delaware County by 2032. By Vogt Strategic Insights

Harlem Township's residents have a wide variety of educational backgrounds, with 28% of residents holding a bachelor's degree, 26% holding a high school diploma, and 18% holding an advanced degree such as a master's or PhD, as shown in Figure 9.

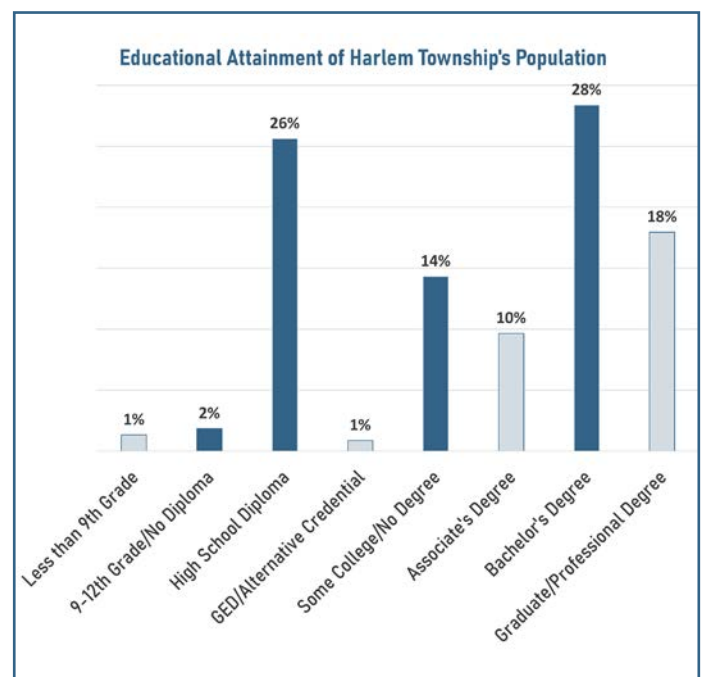


Figure 9: Educational Attainment Distribution, 2024 Esri Business Analyst



## Chapter 2: Evolving Conditions

Harlem Township residents work across diverse industry sectors, with healthcare and social assistance employing the largest share at 20%. Construction represents the second-largest employment sector at 13%, followed by scientific and technical professional services at 9% and manufacturing at 8%. This employment profile aligns well with the Township's educational attainment and income distributions.

These industries also reflect the broader economic growth occurring throughout Central Ohio. Healthcare remains a leading regional industry, while technology, manufacturing, and both residential and commercial construction are experiencing significant expansion across the area.

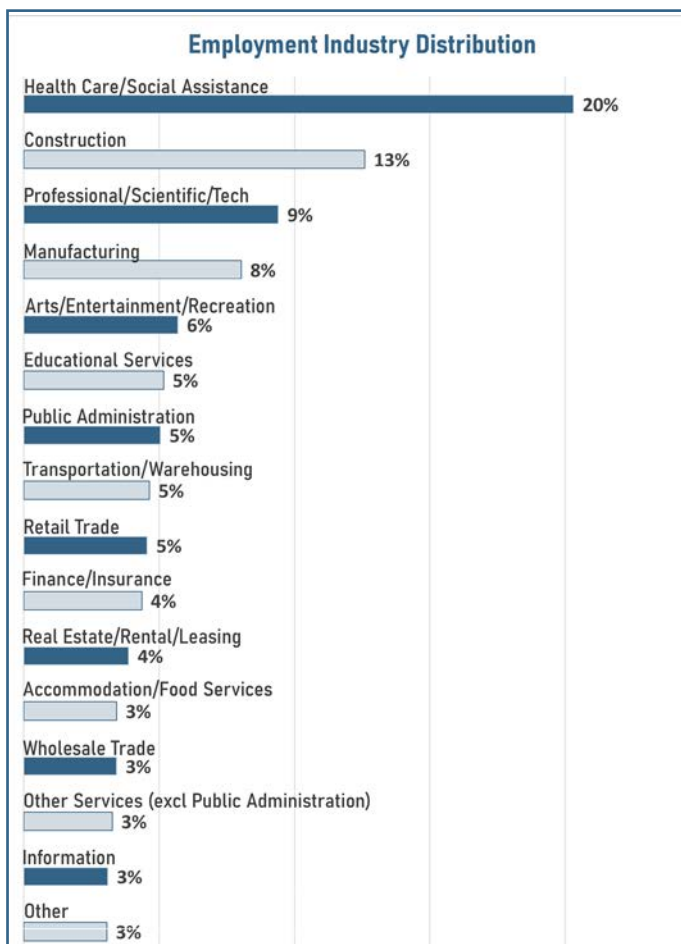


Figure 10: 2024 Employment Industry Sectors, Esri Business Analyst

### Infrastructure, Development, and Relationships

#### Sewer

The City of Columbus is currently extending sewer service into Harlem Township through the

installation of a 72-inch trunk line that will reach the intersection of Smothers and Harlem Roads, with project completion anticipated by early 2027. Following Columbus's completion of this initial phase, Delaware County will assume responsibility for the subsequent extension, which involves carrying the sewer line northward past Fancher Road through a project designated as the Lower Big Walnut Trunk Sewer (LBWTS). Under the established inter-jurisdictional agreement, the City of Columbus will provide wastewater treatment services for Harlem Township's service area, with operational coordination managed through the Delaware County Regional Sewer District.

The project faces higher-than-typical costs due to engineering challenges. The sewer line must eventually flow beneath Duncan Run, requiring excavation to 35 feet below surface near the south county line to provide gravity flow. If costs exceed projections, TIF reimbursement may provide additional funding support.

Delaware County contracted with Black and Veatch Engineering to conduct a comprehensive study evaluating multiple aspects of the sewer extension project. The study will include geotechnical analysis, construction techniques, cost estimates, and alignment options. Black and Veatch will also assess groundwater and environmental impacts, cultural resources, operations and maintenance planning, public impacts, and easement requirements.

Black and Veatch are also considering construction methods through an open cut or microtunnelling sewer construction. While more costly, microtunneling provides the benefit of less surface disturbance and fewer impacts to property owners.

Black and Veatch is evaluating six preliminary alignment designs for the sewer system, as illustrated in Figure 13. Each alternative offers distinct advantages and trade-offs regarding construction methods, property impacts, and future expansion potential.

## Chapter 2: Evolving Conditions

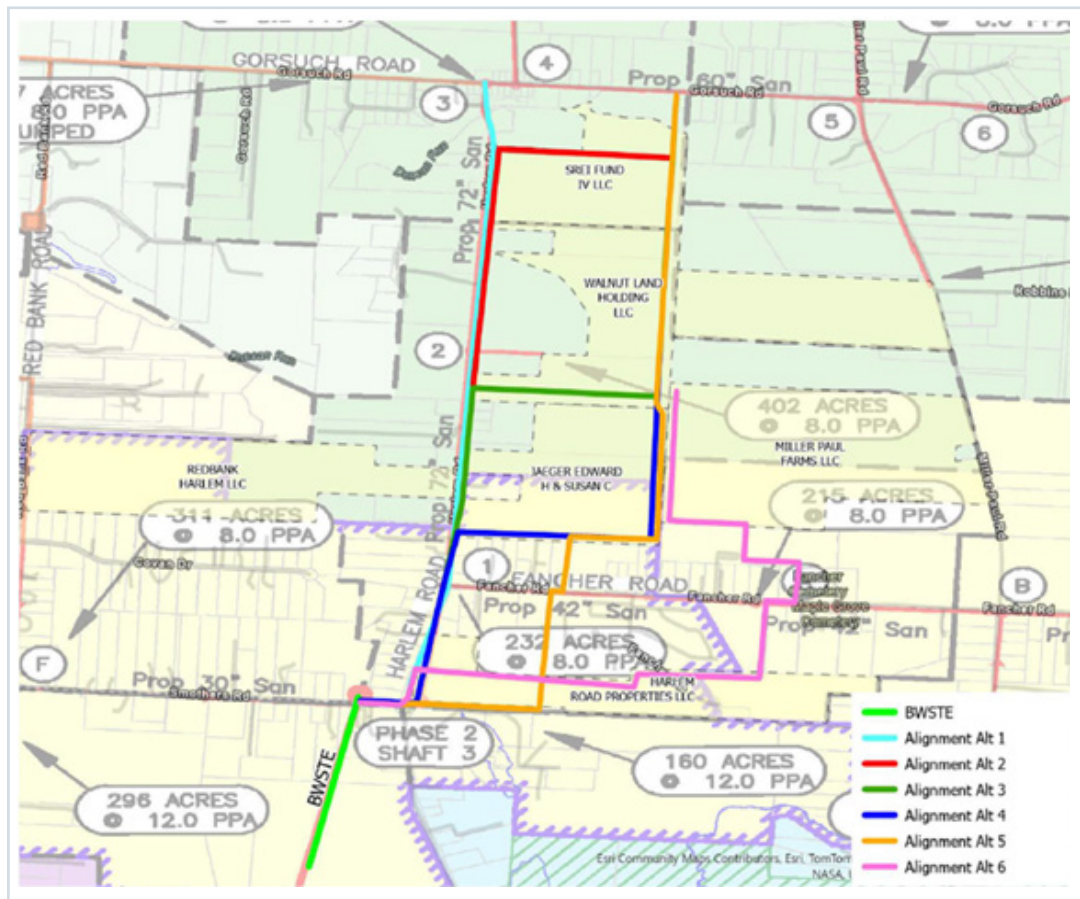


Figure 11: Sewer Alignment Alternatives as of June 4, 2025 From Black and Veatch

### Alternative 1

This alignment travels north on Harlem Road within the road right-of-way using open cut construction.

### Alternative 2

Following the same northward path as Alternative 1 along Harlem Road before moving eastward and then north to terminate at Gorsuch Road, this option uses microtunneling construction methods.

### Alternative 3

This alignment travels north within the Harlem Road right-of-way, shifts eastward, then continues north using microtunneling construction.

### Alternative 4

This alignment runs north on Harlem Road before moving eastward north of Fancher Road and continuing north to Gorsuch Road. This alternative uses microtunneling construction.

### Alternative 5

This alignment runs eastward past the terminus of Smothers Road before turning northward, crossing Fancher Road, and moving northeast to reach Gorsuch Road and would be constructed using open cut methods.

### Alternative 6

This alignment runs eastward south of Fancher Road before turning north and ultimately northwestward, constructed using open cut methods.

Black and Veatch are expected to provide their 30% designed plans by February of 2026. These plans will include conceptual alignment and may include cost estimates. Final design is expected to be completed by early 2027 with construction through the year into mid-2028. Beyond the selected alignments terminus, future sewer extensions will be developer-driven. Each developer will be required to extend the sewer line to their property boundary and provide easements enabling future developments to connect to the system.

## Chapter 2: Evolving Conditions

In order to complete the initial planning effort for the proposed sewer line, the tributary area to the sewer and the land use in that tributary area need to be confirmed. With that information, the anticipated flow rates from the area can be calculated to determine the required pipe size. Once the tributary area and pipe size are determined, the horizontal and vertical alignment of the sewer can be fully evaluated.

The trunk sewer will serve the majority of the tributary area in Harlem Township along with portions of Licking County, Franklin County and Genoa Township. Discussions with the City of Columbus regarding the portions of the tributary area in Franklin and Licking Counties are ongoing along with the potential to expand the tributary area beyond the current City 208 Boundary into northeastern Harlem Township. DCRSD is exploring the possibility of Columbus or other entities funding part of the necessary sewers that would service the areas outside of Delaware County along with options to expand the service area of the trunk sewer into northeastern Harlem Township. If changes to the tributary area are made in the future, it will not likely affect the alignment alternative selection process but may affect the pipe size.

DCRSD recently met with the City of Columbus to discuss their existing sewer agreement and explore potential modifications to better serve the region's evolving needs. During these discussions, several critical technical and jurisdictional issues emerged that will influence the LBWTS project moving forward.

One of the primary topics addressed was the establishment of consistent pipe sizing criteria for sewer calculations. While Columbus is currently evaluating which standards should be applied, the LBWTS team will continue operating under DCRSD's established criteria for the time being. Additionally, the parties confirmed that DCRSD will maintain responsibility for owning, installing, and maintaining flow metering devices as outlined in the current agreement, with DCRSD actively exploring various

equipment options to meet these requirements. The meeting also addressed service arrangements for areas in neighboring counties that fall within Columbus's current 208 service boundary, or facility planning area (FPA). Columbus has expressed interest in having DCRSD assume responsibility for sewer flows from both Licking County and Franklin County portions within this boundary. While DCRSD must conduct further discussions with Licking County regarding their areas, and requires more detailed negotiations concerning Franklin County arrangements, the LBWTS design team will incorporate anticipated flows from both counties into their pipe sizing calculations to ensure adequate system capacity.

Perhaps most significantly, the parties discussed the potential for expanding service into northeastern Harlem Township beyond Columbus's current 208 boundary. Although Columbus demonstrated some reluctance to modify their established service boundaries, they agreed to consider this expansion proposal. DCRSD has committed to evaluating service provision for the county's entire 208 area extending up to State Route 37, with comprehensive data to be delivered to Columbus by July 2025. While any boundary changes could impact the proposed pipe sizes for the LBWTS system, these modifications should not affect the ongoing alignment alternatives evaluation, as pipe sizing adjustments can be incorporated during the preliminary design phase.

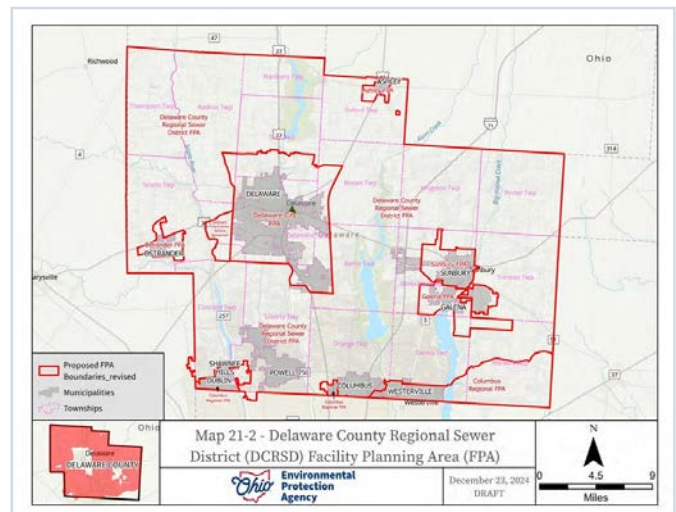


Figure 12: Draft Delaware County FPA, from Ohio EPA



## Chapter 2: Evolving Conditions

### Water

Del-Co Water Company (Del-Co) operates as a private non-profit organization that serves as the primary water system provider for Delaware County. Del-Co currently has a water line running under the Hoover Reservoir that provides service to areas of Harlem Township, as shown in Figure 13. However, this current system faces mounting pressure from anticipated population growth and rising water demand that could outpace its capacity, creating a need for expanded infrastructure investment. Del-Co is studying how to establish additional water connectivity across the Hoover Reservoir to Harlem Township with a 24-inch line from Genoa Township to expand capacity and connect to the new water tank being constructed in Center Village, the second tank in the area. This new composite tank represents a \$3.7 million investment by Del-Co and will have a capacity of 750,000 gallons. Combined with the existing tank's 250,000-gallon capacity, this will provide the Township with a total water capacity of 1 million gallons—a four-fold increase.

Additionally, Del-Co identified potential future connections, as shown in a red dotted line in Figure

14. These potential water lines would run north to S.R. 37 and toward the southeast corner of the Township, where an additional water tank would be constructed. The service provider for this potential southeast area is undetermined and could be either Del-Co or the City of Columbus, pending further study and negotiation.

Del-Co and Harlem Township may benefit from entering into some Public-Private Partnership agreements to facilitate the ease of serving sites with water that align with Harlem Township's development goals. This could potentially provide a funding mechanism where costs for extending water infrastructure would be shared by the development community from revenues received through economic development agreements. These Public-Private Partnerships could also facilitate access for Del-Co to Township-controlled properties and rights-of-way, which would expedite the ability to install water infrastructure rather than having to secure private easements.

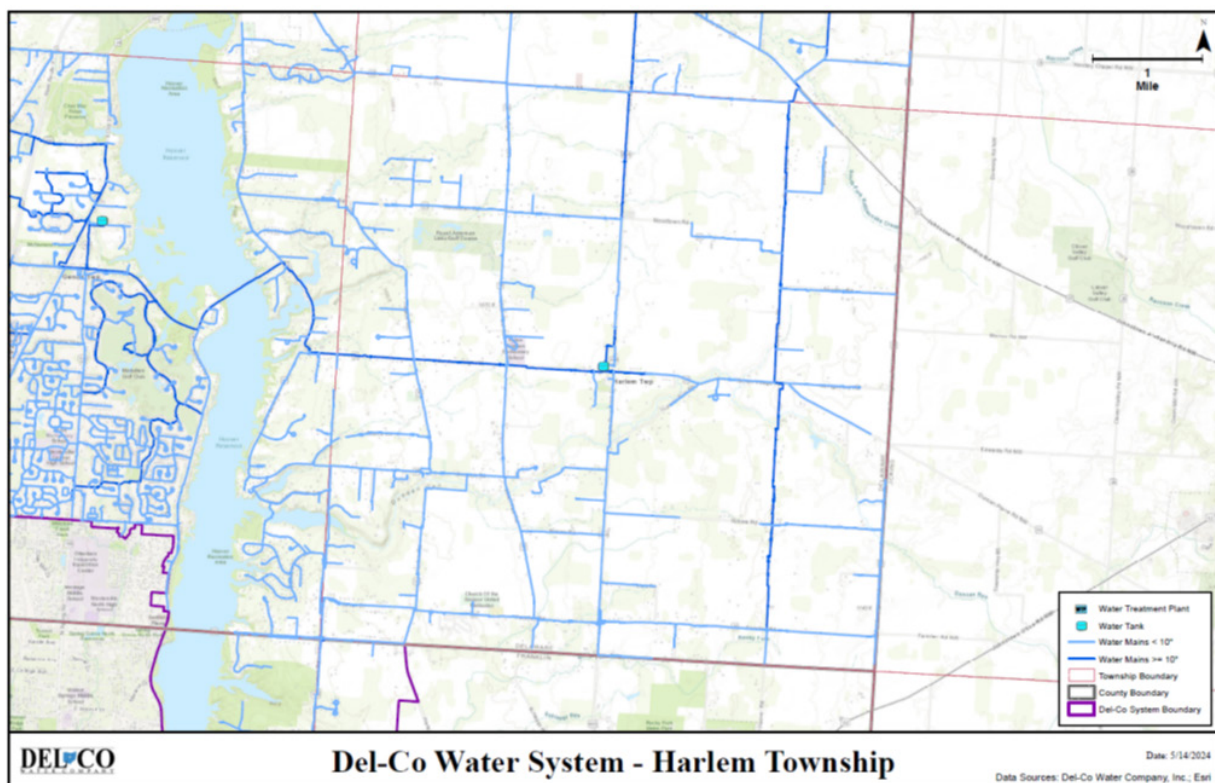


Figure 13: Del-Co Water Service in Harlem Township. From Del-Co Water

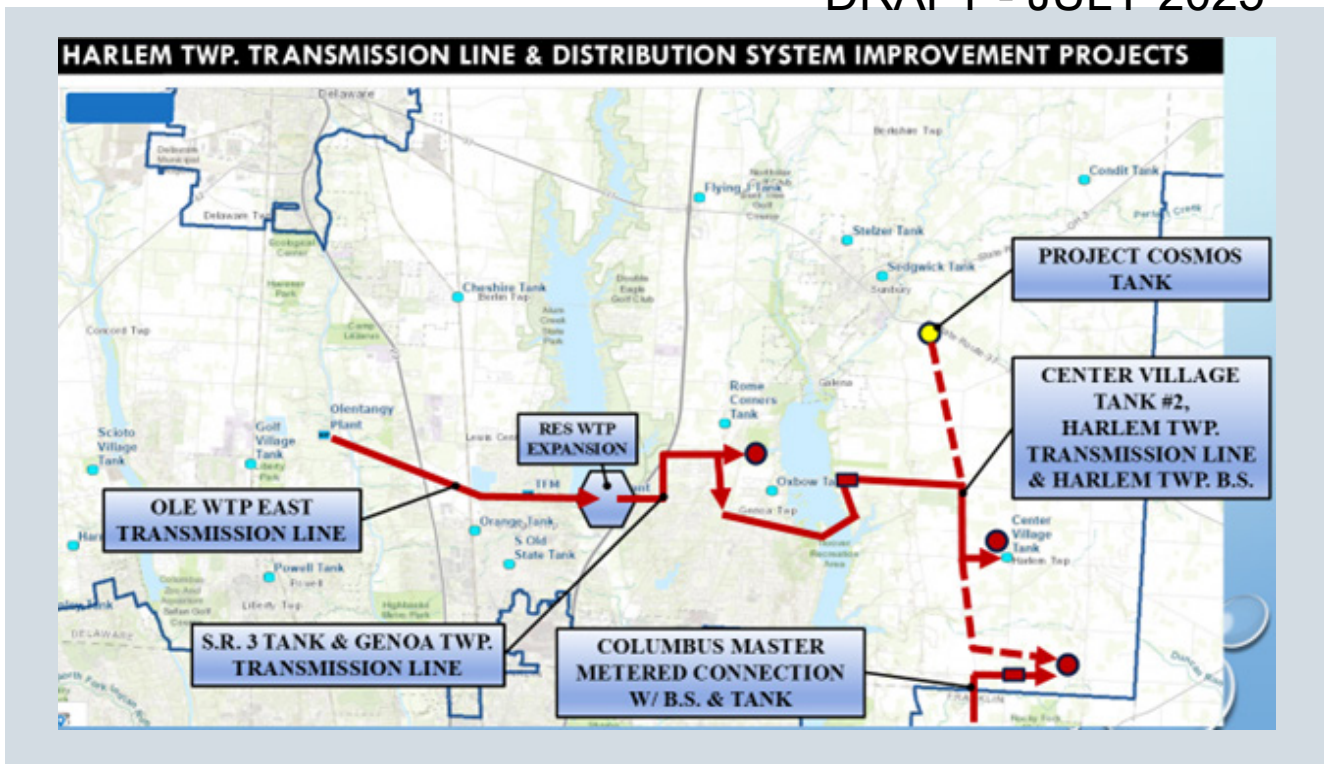


Figure 14: Del-Co Planned and Potential Infrastructure Improvements

## Electricity

AEP planned two new 345-kV transmission lines, each with a new substation to connect to the existing Vassell Substation, as shown in Figure 15. The Vassell-Green Chapel Line represents the initial phase of construction and will cross through the northeastern portion of the Township via 150-foot-tall transmission towers within a 150-foot-wide utility corridor. Construction is scheduled to continue through late 2026. The subsequent Vassell-Curleys line will impact a more extensive area of the Township, originating in the northwest quadrant and extending diagonally southeast to intersect County Line Road near the Township's central corridor. Construction of the Vassell-Curleys line is expected to occur between early 2026 and the spring of 2027.

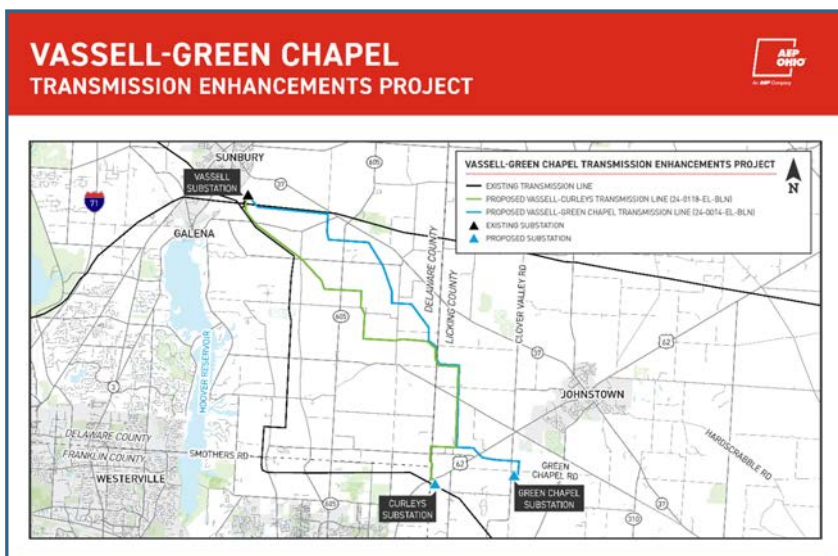


Figure 15: AEP Proposed Transmission Lines, From AEP

## Stormwater

Harlem Township's growing population led to its designation by the Ohio EPA as a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4). MS4 discharges contain high concentrations of pollutants from development and impervious surfaces such as driveways, parking lots, rooftops, and streets. During storm events, these pollutants are washed into the storm sewer system and subsequently discharged into surface waters. MS4 areas must also meet drainage, erosion, and sediment control (DESC) regulations overseen by the Delaware County Engineer. Once an area receives the MS4 designation, any disruption of one acre of land or more requires filing a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit with the Ohio EPA.



## Chapter 2: Evolving Conditions

### Roads

A series of transportation improvement projects branded under the Silicon Heartland initiative are planned within and around Harlem Township to accommodate anticipated traffic increases from Intel's semiconductor facility, New Albany's expanding technology park, and other major regional developments.

Three roundabouts are scheduled for construction along County Line Road as part of this comprehensive traffic improvement initiative. The first project at Center Village/Duncan Plains Road and County Line Road will convert the existing stop sign-controlled intersection into a single-lane peanut-shaped roundabout, as shown in Figure 16. Similarly, the intersection at Fancher Road and County Line Road will upgrade from its current two-way stop configuration to a single-lane roundabout.

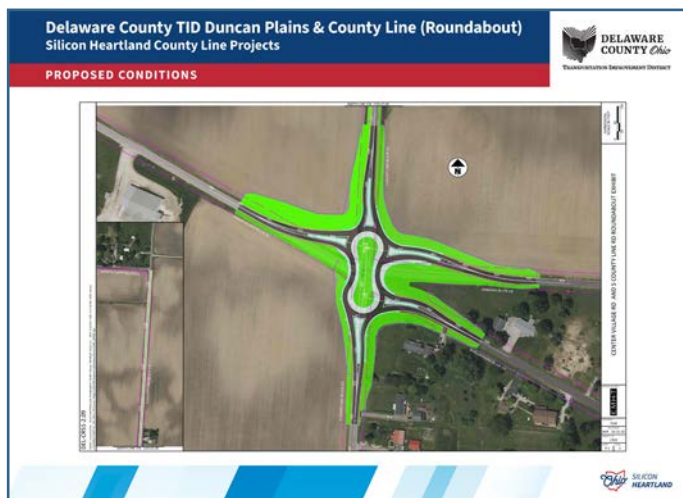


Figure 16: Proposed Center Village/Duncan Plains Road & County Line Road Roundabout

Both projects are funded through the Ohio Department of Transportation's Silicon Heartland Program and administered by the Delaware County Transportation Improvement District (DCTID), with each carrying a \$3 million price tag. Construction for both roundabouts is scheduled to begin in fall 2025 and continue through summer 2026. Each project involves complete intersection reconstruction and will include pedestrian crossings, stormwater management systems with catch basins and sewers, roadside drainage ditches, limited street lighting, landscaping, and wayfinding signage.

The third roundabout project is located at the intersection of S.R. 37 and County Line Road. This initiative will replace the existing two-way stop sign-controlled intersection with a single-lane roundabout featuring the installation of new lighting, drainage structures, and Best Management Practices (BMPs). This \$4 million project is managed by the Ohio Department of Transportation with funding provided through DCTID. Final design plans are expected by summer of 2026 with construction occurring from winter 2026 through summer 2027.

Additionally, two major road reconstruction projects will enhance County Line Road between Montgomery Road and S.R. 37, and Duncan Plains Road from County Line Road to Clover Valley Road. Both projects are administered by the Licking County Transportation Improvement District (LCTID) and funded through the Ohio Department of Transportation's Silicon Heartland Program.

The reconstructions will widen both roadways to include two 11-foot travel lanes with 2-foot paved shoulders and 4-foot graded shoulders (6 feet total shoulder width), along with regrading and improvements to existing roadside drainage ditches, as shown in Figure 17. The County Line Road reconstruction carries a \$3.8 million cost and is scheduled to begin construction in August 2026, while the Duncan Plains Road project is set to commence in April 2026.

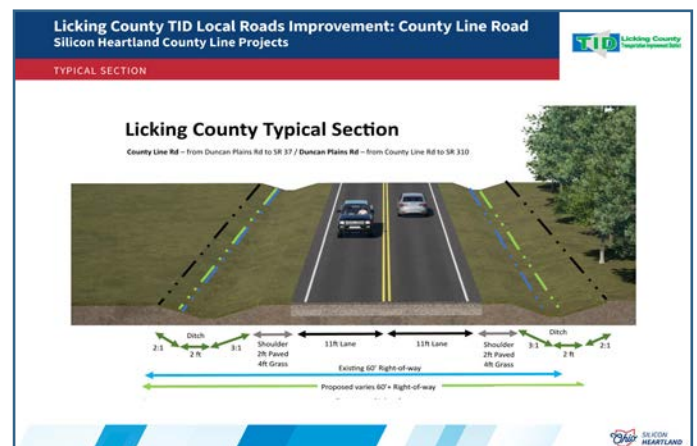


Figure 17: Visualized Proposed Improvements for County Line & Duncan Plains Road Reconstruction



## Chapter 2: Evolving Conditions

### *Delaware County Engineers*

While numerous projects are planned to enhance north-south connectivity within and around the Township, east-west transportation corridors require equal attention. According to the Delaware County Engineer's Office, the Smothers Road bridge over Hoover Reservoir will remain a two-lane facility with no plans for lane additions. The Engineer's Office also confirmed that no additional east-west roadways are currently planned for construction within the Township under county jurisdiction. Given the importance of east-west connectivity for regional transportation networks, future improvements will likely depend on private development initiatives and will primarily occur in currently undeveloped areas of the Township.

### Surrounding Communities

#### *Columbus & Westerville*

Harlem Township identified the need for strategic partnerships to retain autonomy, limit the possibility of annexations, and guide growth and development. To build upon this identified need, the Harlem Township Trustees began engaging in preliminary conversations with surrounding communities, most notably the City of Columbus, to understand their future plans, identify shared goals, and potentially foster vital partnerships.

Notably, the City of Columbus recently annexed city-owned property from Blendon Township, as shown in orange in Figure 18, effectively blocking Westerville's access to annexation through Blendon Township.

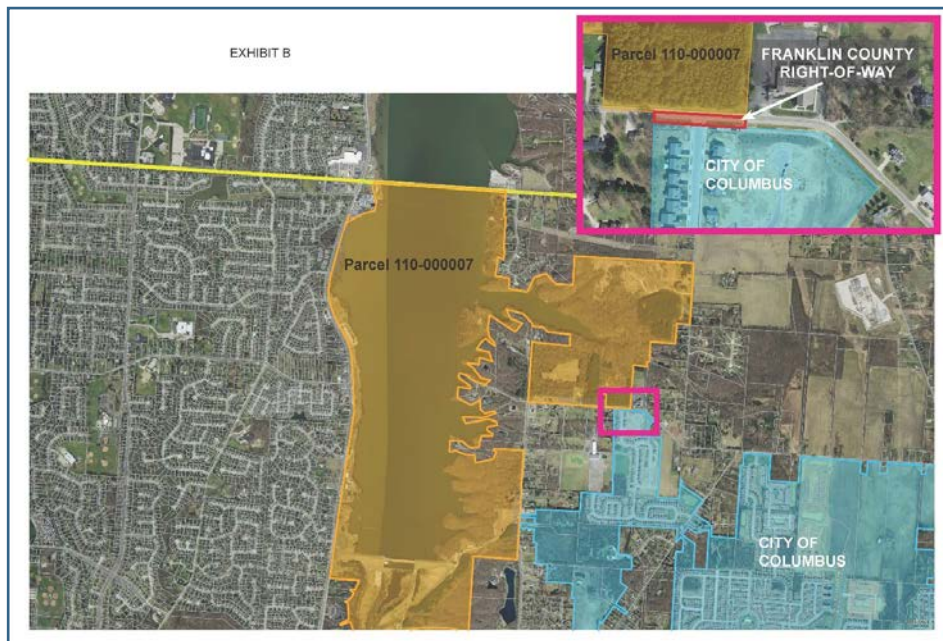


Figure 18: Area annexed by the City of Columbus from Blendon Township. From the City of Columbus.

The Township Trustees held three exploration meetings with the City of Columbus' Deputy Director of Strategic Growth and Development to discuss the challenges, goals, and potential avenues for partnerships

between the two. These conversations highlighted the need to prioritize mutual benefit while preserving the Township's autonomy. While no terms, agreements, or partnership parameters have been set, the Township and Columbus discussed potential non-annexation and economic development agreements that would explicitly protect Harlem Township from unwanted Columbus annexation while creating opportunities for strategic collaboration. Columbus voiced there is no interest in annexing into Harlem Township or extending sole utility services into Delaware County beyond existing trunk sewer infrastructure to the county line. The City of Columbus also agrees that the Township should retain its own zoning aimed at maintaining the Township's character and identity.

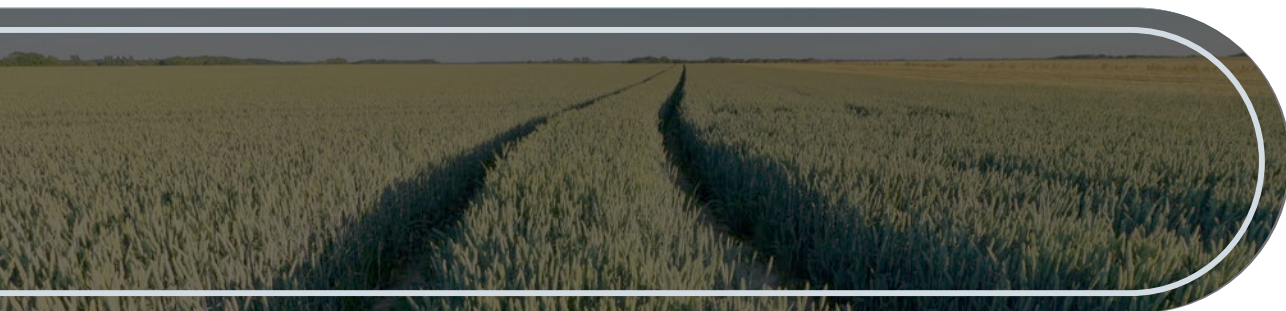
Any agreed partnership model would revolve around Columbus serving as a supportive partner in economic development opportunities identified by Harlem Township, rather than driving development decisions. A key component may involve establishing an "option to annex" corridor that would allow Columbus future access to annex into Licking County through a mutually agreed path, with the Township exercising control over land use decisions for the corridor area through the agreement language. Any

annexed properties would be subject to Columbus zoning but could include protective provisions limiting density, use types, and development scale to align with Township preferences. Columbus would seek either land ownership or formal agreements with property owners to secure this pathway.

Typical non-annexation and economic development agreements span 25 years with renewal and amendment options. This could include Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) provisions allowing Columbus to apply income tax rates to designated areas while ensuring all property taxes remain with Harlem Township. Additionally, Columbus would like to see the potential partnership address regional housing challenges through collaborative development using tools like Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Neighborhood Commercial Area (NCA), and Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) designations. A partnership with the city may provide a solution that prevents unwanted annexation, maintains township autonomy, enables responsible strategic growth, and creates economic development opportunities that benefit both communities while addressing broader regional needs including the housing crisis.

## **SUNBURY**

While a partnership with the City of Columbus acts as an important part of the puzzle, attention should also be focused north on Sunbury. In the past year and a half, Sunbury annexed over 1,000 acres from Harlem Township's northern neighbor, Trenton Township, bringing Sunbury's municipal borders to Harlem Township's doorstep. Conversations should continue between the Township and Sunbury's leadership to evaluate the possibility of a cooperative partnership that would prevent future annexations into Harlem Township.



## CHAPTER 3: OUR PROCESS

A primary objective of the 2025 Strategic Plan was to enhance two-way communication with residents—an effort that will extend beyond the planning process. To support this goal, a Steering Committee was established to provide oversight and validation of plan recommendations developed from public input. The Steering Committee was selected through a blind application process designed to assemble a diverse group of residents representing varying levels of planning experience, perspectives, and areas of expertise.

### The Steering Committee Members

- Chris Truax
- Maureen Snowden
- Amy Clark
- Alice Yuhas
- Tom Eldred
- Jeff Ferguson





## Chapter 3: Our Process

### Steering Committee Meeting #1

The kick-off Steering Committee meeting was held in March 2025 to introduce committee members, elect a chair, and provide an overview of the strategic planning process, including proposed deadlines and completion steps. During this initial meeting, members reviewed the S.O.A.R. analysis (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results) conducted at the first community-wide meeting on February 8th to understand the feedback gathered from residents thus far. The Committee also discussed and assigned responsibility for conducting "soup sessions" to collect additional resident perspectives on the planning process.

The Steering Committee and additional residents also hosted "soup sessions"—intimate gatherings where community members hosted small meetings in their homes over a shared meal. These miniature town halls created a comfortable environment for residents to share their thoughts and feedback more openly. The sessions specifically targeted residents who were unable to attend the larger community-wide meetings, ensuring their voices were heard in the planning process.

Committee members received updates on Columbus's annexation activities, including the recent annexation of Blendon Township territory up to the Hoover Reservoir. In response to these regional pressures, the Committee discussed potential agreements with the City of Columbus regarding non-annexation and development frameworks that would help maintain local autonomy while managing growth.

A significant portion of the meeting focused on community input gathered through "soup sessions" conducted throughout the township. These informal gatherings revealed strong resident preferences for preserving Harlem's rural character. Community members expressed concerns about potential over-development and sewer system expansion, while showing clear preference for local businesses over chain establishments. Residents suggested purchasing open spaces for preservation and supported the creation of a township center featuring local shops and amenities. There was also strong support for maintaining larger lot sizes and implementing strict architectural standards to preserve the area's rural aesthetic.



Soup Sessions Meeting Materials

Recognizing the need for better community engagement, the Committee emphasized the importance of educating residents about zoning regulations, development tools, and planning processes. This educational effort would include explaining existing zoning resolutions and overlay districts, clarifying development mechanisms such as JEDD agreements and annexation

processes, and ensuring meaningful community involvement in decision-making.

### Steering Committee Meeting #2

The Harlem Township Steering Committee met in April to discuss ongoing planning initiatives, community engagement efforts, and strategic priorities for the township. The meeting centered around feedback from a recent community-wide session that had focused on annexation concerns and strategic priorities.

The meeting concluded with the identification of several follow-up tasks, including analyzing community meeting attendance patterns, developing new engagement strategies, creating comprehensive communication systems, and providing clear

## Chapter 3: Our Process

information about upcoming trustee elections. The Committee also discussed implementing non-official surveys to gather broader public opinion on key issues before final decisions are made.

### COMMUNITY-WIDE MEETINGS

#### Steering Committee Meeting #3

The Steering Committee convened for its third meeting on May 15, 2025, to review outcomes from the May 10th community-wide meeting and discuss the draft strategic priorities that had emerged from community input. The Committee also planned field trips to neighboring communities to learn firsthand about how these areas have managed growth pressures and development challenges. Additionally, members received an educational document covering various governance and planning tools, including limited home rule, JEDDs (Joint Economic Development Districts), CRAs (Community Reinvestment Areas), zoning overlays, TIFs (Tax Increment Financing), and NCAs (New Community Authorities).

In addition to providing ongoing feedback and support, Steering Committee members conducted site visits determined at the third Steering Committee meeting to communities that had successfully navigated development pressures. These field experiences allowed them to observe best practices firsthand and identify effective tools and strategies for potential implementation in Harlem Township.

The following communities were visited:

- Village of West Clay, Carmel, Indiana
- Beulah Park, Grove City, Ohio
- Pinnacle, Grove City, Ohio
- Aberlin Springs, outside Lebanon, Ohio
- Jerome Township, Union County, Ohio
- Pataskala, Ohio

See Appendix A for the full summaries of these community visits.

The Township hosted a series of community meetings to hear directly from residents about what matters most for the future. The kickoff meeting on February 8, 2025, brought neighbors together for a S.O.A.R. analysis (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results). Through this interactive process, residents explored what makes the Township shine, where there's room to grow, and what their shared vision looks like for building an exceptional place to call home. The strengths, opportunities, and aspirations identified in this process serve as the guiding pillars and lead to the results that align with these values.

#### Strengths

**Rural Charm & Natural Beauty:** Rural charm and natural beauty that people appreciate and want to preserve.

**Community & People-Focused:** A strong sense of community with an emphasis on care, respect, and involvement paired with the ability to shape the community for the future.

**Accessibility & Convenience:** Accessibility to essential services and amenities without having them too close.

**Government & Infrastructure:** Effective local governance and infrastructure that promotes efficient service. Schools, EMS, and fire services are high quality.

**Quality of Life & Town Atmosphere:** A quality of life that balances both modern amenities (like schools and safety) with an appreciation for the land and the environment.

## Opportunities

**Smart Growth and Development:** Focus mostly on low-density, environmentally friendly development with open spaces. Ensure new growth pays for itself and support tax base growth through strategic zoning for industrial and commercial areas.

**Support for Local Economy and Businesses:** Support locally owned businesses and incentivize commerce that aligns with the community's identity and values.

**Community Engagement and Involvement:** Engage residents, especially younger demographics, in governance and planning. Promote transparency, communication, and a sense of belonging, ensuring residents are included.

**Township & Rural Character:** Maintain the environment, large open spaces, and local autonomy in decision-making.

**Family and Multigenerational Focus:** Embrace and support Harlem Township as a family-friendly community with multigenerational leadership and support for clubs, associations, and recreational spaces.

## Aspirations

**Balanced Growth and Development:** Promote low-density development, maintain large lot sizes, and ensure new growth supports infrastructure, respects community values, and funds public services.

**Community Engagement and Collaboration:** Build a community based on trust, collaboration, and clear communication, aligning local and regional goals for a common future.

**Balanced Growth and Development:** Promote low-density development, maintain large lot sizes, and ensure new growth supports infrastructure, respects community values, and funds public services.

**Community Engagement and Collaboration:** Build a community based on trust, collaboration, and clear communication, aligning local and regional goals for a common future.

**Safety and Well-Being:** Ensure safety with continued low crime and strong public services, while creating a family-friendly environment with affordable living and good schools.

**Establishing a Village Center:** Create a centralized place in Harlem Township that fosters community gathering and social events for residents with increased density and additional local businesses.

**Rural Lifestyle and Autonomy:** Preserve the township's rural nature and support property rights and autonomy.

**Preservation and Sustainability:** Protect the environment by preserving open spaces and supporting sustainable practices, while maintaining the agricultural economy.

**Community Identity and Pride:** Foster pride in Harlem Township's rural roots, celebrate its history, and enhance the Township "brand" and historical awareness.

**Vibrancy and Quality of Life:** Create a vibrant community with recreational spaces, a clean environment, diverse commercial development, and a high quality of life.



## Results

These identified strengths, opportunities, and aspirations will inform the planning process moving forward to identify action steps to achieve real results. Building off the SOAR activity, Harlem Township aims to achieve results that make the Township a thriving, rural, and well-connected community where growth is carefully managed, residents feel valued and involved, and open spaces and a high quality of life are preserved.

The second community gathering on March 29, 2025 centered on strengthening connections between Township leadership and residents. Participants shared insights on building stronger relationships, enhancing transparency, and improving information sharing. Their feedback identified six key areas where the Township can advance its communication and collaboration efforts with the residents:

### 1. Modes of Communication

- a. Distribute a monthly update to the community.
- b. Implement the “7 times, 7 different ways” communication strategy to reinforce key messages through diverse channels.
- c. Cater to both active participants and passive receivers by offering varied engagement opportunities.
- d. Provide concise summary documents with QR codes for easy access to detailed information.
- e. Ensure Township leadership actively engages in two-way communication, prioritizing resident feedback.

### 2. Education

- a. Engage subject matter experts to provide in-depth insights, enhancing resident education.
- b. Boost awareness of regional planning efforts in Central Ohio, highlighting key initiatives and potential impacts.
- c. Simplify messaging with clear language to facilitate peer-to-peer information sharing.
- d. Break down risks, impacts, and plans by geographic area to contextualize information for residents.
- e. Educate residents on decision-making processes, clarifying whether actions require Township-wide votes or Trustee approval.
- f. Explain how some development in the Township is inevitable, offering clear rationale and supporting data.

## Chapter 3: Our Process

### 3. Spreading the Word

- a. Partner with the Township Civic Association and community groups to distribute information.
- b. Use community events as platforms for sharing updates.
- c. Improve meeting visibility through website enhancements, yard signs with QR codes, box toppers at Fracasso's, and flyer distribution at local businesses.
- d. Increase engagement with younger residents via TikTok, QR codes, online participation forms, and volunteer outreach at high-traffic locations like soccer fields.
- e. Create a kiosk at the Township park to post information.

### 4. Information Dissemination

- a. Improve the Township website for better accessibility and user experience.
- b. Share zoning maps and key planning documents to increase resident familiarity.
- c. Provide regular updates on development projects.
- d. Post "soup session" details on the Township website for greater transparency and engagement.

### 5. Neighbor-to-Neighbor Strategies

- a. Target small groups for more effective information sharing.
- b. Encourage resident engagement to foster discussions about their future plans.
- c. Utilize volunteers for door-to-door outreach to inform neighbors about upcoming meetings.

### 6. Meetings

- a. Host meetings by Township quadrant or neighborhood to address area-specific impacts.
- b. Use a microphone at meetings and repeat resident questions for clarity.
- c. Offer civic education sessions to address knowledge gaps.
- d. Increase attendance at Township meetings (Zoning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, Trustees) to improve understanding of local developments.



# HARLEM TOWNSHIP'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Following the soup sessions, steering committee meetings, and initial community-wide meetings, a set of strategic priorities emerged from the collective input gathered through these forums and subsequent Trustee discussions. These draft priorities were presented to residents at the third community meeting on March 10, 2025. Following this, the Township Trustees reviewed these priorities and provided feedback at a special meeting on April 30, 2024. Much of the resident feedback on the strategic priorities centered on preserving agriculture within the Township. The Trustees acknowledged that while the agricultural economy is limited—with only a handful of large-scale farming operations—and development pressures are pushing the community toward a more suburban character, many residents still engage in hobby farming and homesteading practices. These residents appreciate having amenities accessible but not immediately adjacent to their properties, prompting the Trustees to coin the term "county suburban" to describe the Township's evolving character that blends rural lifestyle preferences with suburban conveniences.

## Country Suburban Lifestyle and Autonomy

"Create a tranquil, rural aesthetic that balances open space, natural beauty, access to trails with the proximity to schools, services, residential areas and commercial-economic nodes while promoting community connections and providing essential infrastructure. This is accomplished by maintaining local control over land use, development patterns, and community priorities to ensure decisions are responsive, locally driven and rooted in community input."

Regarding this priority, residents emphasized the importance of balancing thoughtful development with preserving community character, ensuring the

Township avoids being overwhelmed by unchecked growth. Residents also expressed a strong desire to preserve their current lifestyle opportunities, including the ability to maintain homesteads, keep livestock, grow crops, and operate hobby farms well into the future. The Steering Committee also voiced concern with the phrase "county suburban" and preferred a term such as "rural aesthetic" or "exurban", which is defined as an area outside the suburbs at the edge of a metropolitan area.

## Intentional Growth and Development

"Shape Harlem Township in a proactive, strategic manner rather than reacting to change as it happens due to internal or external pressures. This is accomplished by establishing policies and regulations that align with an established vision to foster transparency in land use decisions and community investments. The goal is to support a resilient and vibrant community in the long term."

Residents reiterated the importance of maintaining a balanced approach as development pressure increases throughout the Township. Additionally, residents and the Steering Committee expressed interest in Township leadership gaining an understanding of large landowners' future development plans and the ability for future development to manage stormwater.

## Maintain Healthy Internal and External Relationships

"Develop stronger partnerships and networks with residents, businesses and local and regional stakeholders. This is accomplished by building trust now and consistently over time and resolving conflicts in a constructive manner."



## Chapter 3: Our Process

Residents reinforced the need for strategic partnerships to achieve Township goals. They also expressed concerns about limited opportunities for incorporation and emphasized the importance of developing a proactive strategy to maintain Township autonomy while establishing a central Village Center. Additionally, residents discussed the potential benefits of pursuing limited home rule township status.

### Community Identity and Pride

“Identify what makes Harlem Township unique and showcase its history, culture, and traditions to help create a premier community based on our community’s vision and priorities. This can be accomplished by creating a sense of place and connecting the people to their community.”

Regarding this priority, residents discussed strategies for incentivizing and attracting agritourism operations, such as wineries, to the Township. These businesses would help maintain the Township’s rural character while expanding the commercial tax base. Residents also wondered if potential public-private partnerships could assist in promoting and attracting agritourism development.

### Safety and Well-Being

“Ensure that public protection and support services—fire, police, emergency medical, and administrative programs—are fully staffed, properly trained, and equipped with the necessary resources. This can be accomplished by responsibly managing resources to create strong budgets and investing in infrastructure and programs that promote the safety and well-being of township residents.”

Community members expressed interest in understanding how expanded services would be funded and which economic development tools could support these initiatives. Residents also emphasized

that comprehensive planning must extend beyond community services to include Township facilities, office space, staffing needs, maintenance requirements, and cemeteries—all essential components of long-term strategic planning.



# CHAPTER 4: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

PLACEHOLDER  
for economic  
development  
introduction



# CHAPTER 5: STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this chapter build upon the public engagement, stakeholder engagement, steering committee input, and existing conditions analysis that resulted in the five strategic priorities. Each recommendation is designed to help the Township achieve these strategic priorities and realize the Township vision.





## Chapter 5: Strategic Recommendations

### COUNTRY SUBURBAN LIFESTYLE AND AUTONOMY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Protect Township Lifestyle:** Integrate provisions for homesteading activities, including hobby farming, beekeeping, and small-scale agricultural operations, within the comprehensive zoning framework to maintain the Township's county-suburban character.

Agriculture and connection to the land is an essential facet of the Harlem Township character. While the Township is undoubtedly experiencing increased development pressure, it is vital for Township leadership to protect residents' ability to develop and maintain hobby farms and homesteading operations including the ability to keep livestock, apiaries, and crops. Provisions that allow for these types of small and medium-sized operations should be built into the zoning text in a majority of the Township's districts to retain the Township's agricultural connection.

Harlem Township adopted two zoning overlays designed to preserve substantial open space—at least 50% of each development tract—within residential projects: the Planned Residential Conservation District (PRCD) and the Clustered Conservation Residential District. The preserved open space in these districts is designated for natural areas, walking paths, passive recreation, community recreation amenities, and park spaces.

An emerging development model presents an opportunity for the Township to honor its agricultural heritage while meeting residential needs: agri-communities. These innovative developments are gaining traction nationwide, with successful examples including Aberlin Springs

in Lebanon, Ohio, and Olivette in Asheville, North Carolina. These communities combine clustered housing with expansive open space and working farms integrated directly into the community design.

Figure 19 depicts the Aberlin Springs agri-community, showcasing the pastures, orchards, and farm markets woven throughout the development. The integrated farm supplies residents with fresh produce, eggs, dairy, and meat while fostering community engagement with agriculture and connecting residents to the land. Harlem Township could modify the standards within its conservation residential overlay districts to promote community farm integration, strengthening the Township's agricultural character while delivering high-quality housing opportunities. The Township should also work to identify additional opportunities to integrate the agri-community model elsewhere in the Township, outside of the two existing overlays, potentially integrating housing options such as townhomes, and aging-in-place style housing.



Figure 19: Aberlin Springs, an Agri-Community in Lebanon, Ohio

## Chapter 5: Strategic Recommendations

### Enhance Regional Recreation Connectivity:

Evaluate opportunities to connect with existing and planned regional trail systems, creating seamless recreational corridors that benefit residents while preserving natural landscapes.



From Ohioerietrail.org

Harlem Township is surrounded by an extensive network of recreational trails and multi-use paths that present significant opportunities for resident connectivity. The Ohio to Erie Trail, which links Lake Erie to the Ohio River via a protected off-road bicycle route, runs through adjacent Trenton Township. New Albany developed comprehensive multi-use path systems integrated throughout their residential and commercial developments, while Rocky Fork Metropark and nearby Bevelhymer Park offer established trail networks just south of the Township. To maximize recreational opportunities for Harlem Township residents, new development projects should be required to construct multi-use paths that create seamless linkages to these surrounding trail systems while increasing recreational opportunities within the Township itself, expanding access to regional recreation while enhancing the Township's connectivity and quality of life.

**Align Zoning with Strategic Vision:** Ensure all zoning overlays and regulations directly support and reinforce the Township's established strategic priorities and long-term development goals.

Following the adoption of the QSG in 2023, the Township implemented several zoning overlays

designed to protect against annexation and manage development along its borders. These overlay regulations require periodic review to ensure they remain responsive to evolving regional conditions and development pressures. The Township should also explore potential non-annexation agreements with neighboring jurisdictions, which could affect the design of the overlay districts within the Township.

Since 2023, the Township has adopted four overlay districts: Mixed Use (MU), Clustered Residential Conservation District (CRCD), Mixed Service Business Residential (MSBR), and County Line Road (CLR). To keep pace with evolving conditions within the Township and the broader region—particularly the planned extension of sewer infrastructure—Harlem Township should systematically update, adopt, and revise overlay districts as needed.

### RECOMMENDED CHANGES BY OVERLAY DISTRICT:

#### *No Changes Recommended*

The MSBR and CLR overlay districts should remain unchanged, as their current regulations continue to effectively serve their intended purposes.

#### *CRCD Modifications*

The CRCD boundaries should be relocated to the northern portion of the Township, as illustrated in Figure 20. This repositioning will provide opportunities for clustered housing development while maintaining regulations that preserve at least 50% of each tract as open space. This approach allows the Township to accommodate future single-family housing demand across larger areas while protecting natural resources, preserving rural view sheds, and ensuring substantial open space for residents.

Additionally, the residential uses permitted within the existing CRCD should be expanded to include condominiums, duplexes, triplexes, and housing options that support aging in place with a maximum density of 3 units per acre. To reflect this broader scope, the district should be renamed the "Clustered



**NEW OVERLAY  
RECOMMENDATIONS AND  
PROVISIONS**

Mixed Residential Conservation District," as shown in Figure 20.

Additionally, provisions for incorporating working farms or micro farms into developments within the clustered districts should be added to support the creation of agri-communities within the Township.

### MU Expansion

The northern boundary of the MU overlay district should be extended approximately 2,000 feet north of Fancher Road to account for the sewer extension that is entering the Township at the intersection of Smothers and Harlem Roads as shown in Figure 20. All five proposed sewer alignment alternatives indicate development extending north of Fancher Road. Expanding the MU overlay boundaries will establish high-quality development regulations that support appropriate density levels consistent with sewer infrastructure availability. These standards will help prevent undesirable development while providing the Township additional control over future growth patterns.

### Center Village Overlay

A Center Village overlay should be adopted with standards that align with the Center Village recommendations detailed in the Community Identity and Pride section (beginning on page 41). This area would serve as the Township's focal point, incorporating institutional uses such as the fire department and Township buildings, enhanced park spaces, and a variety of commercial and residential uses designed to promote walkability and community interaction.

### Cottage Business Provisions

Lastly, it is recommended that cottage businesses be allowed within 1,000 feet of S.R. 605 and along the east side of Center Village Road, as indicated by the blue crosshatched areas in Figure 20. As sewer service extends throughout the Township, these main

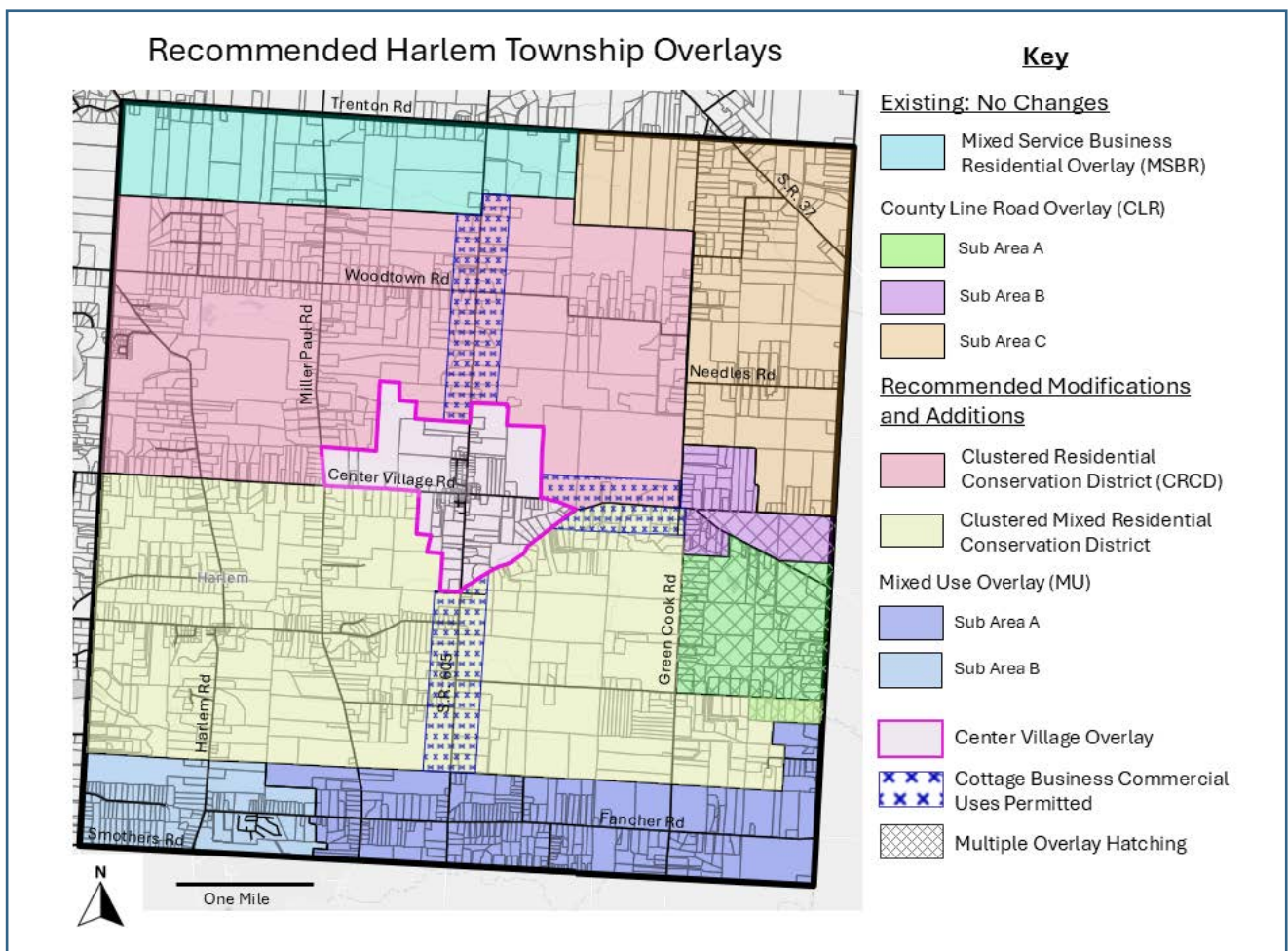


Figure 20: Recommended Overlay Districts



# Chapter 5: Strategic Recommendations

corridors will become prime locations for commercial development. Allowing cottage businesses helps the Township proactively prepare for anticipated commercial growth while establishing standards that support local entrepreneurs.

Cottage businesses should accommodate a variety of uses and typically occupy spaces under 5,000 square feet. The architectural design of these buildings should complement surrounding residential development and avoid negative externalities such as excessive noise, odors, or oversized signage.

## IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Before implementing any changes or additions to the Township's overlay framework, detailed analysis and comprehensive public engagement should be conducted to ensure each overlay serves the Township's best interests and advances the strategic priorities established in this plan. This process should include stakeholder input, impact assessments, and alignment with long-term growth management objectives. Additionally, a comprehensive initiative that examines topography, natural features, soils, and more should be completed. This should include isometric and bird's-eye views of potential development opportunities to understand the best-suited uses for different areas of the Township.

Cottage Business Design



From Gorjana Jewelry



River Road Coffee House



From Bleck & Bleck Architects



Peninsula Hardwoods



Marine Layer From Airbnb



Existing Zoning

If a property owner would like to utilize an overlay district, they must meet the overlay district standards. Once the standards are met, the property owner may "pull down the cloud" and apply the overlay district to their property, removing the previous zoning designation.



Overlay Zoning

## Chapter 5: Strategic Recommendations

**Secure Township Independence:** Negotiate comprehensive non-annexation agreements with neighboring municipalities to safeguard the Township's autonomy.

As outlined in Chapter 2, strategic partnerships are critical in preserving Harlem Township's local control and decision-making authority while effectively managing regional growth pressures and development challenges. The Township should maintain an ongoing dialogue with neighboring municipalities to identify shared objectives and collaborative opportunities that strengthen all parties' positions in addressing common concerns such as infrastructure development, economic growth, and quality of life preservation.

The City of Columbus, given its proximity and significant influence on regional development patterns, may prove to be a particularly valuable partner in crafting innovative agreements that respect Harlem Township's autonomy while creating mutually beneficial frameworks for managed growth. By proactively engaging with Columbus and other regional partners, Harlem Township can help shape growth patterns rather than simply responding to external pressures, ensuring that the Township's values and priorities are reflected in broader planning initiatives that affect the Township's future.

### Explore Expanded Governance Options:

Assess the benefits and feasibility of transitioning to limited home rule township status to enhance local decision-making authority and regulatory flexibility.

Townships with at least 2,500 residents in unincorporated areas can adopt limited home rule government through voter approval. This form of government significantly expands township authority beyond standard statutory powers, including the ability to enact legislation in previously restricted areas, adopt and enforce public health and safety regulations, charge impact fees, establish Community Reinvestment Areas (CRAs), regulate traffic and parking on township roads, and access increased debt capacity. Limited home rule enables townships to address local needs with greater

flexibility, making it particularly valuable for growing communities facing development pressures that exceed standard township regulatory capabilities.

Adopting limited home rule status requires townships to provide police services and legal counsel, representing the most significant new obligations. While these services traditionally come from county agencies at no direct cost to the township, the requirement for independent provision can increase operational expenses. However, several Ohio townships have successfully negotiated continued county service provision at existing cost levels, effectively mitigating the financial impact of transition. Given Harlem Township's growth trajectory and regulatory challenges, the Township should continue evaluating limited home rule adoption through ongoing public engagement and cost-benefit analysis.

### What is Limited Home Rule?

A form of government that can be adopted by townships with 2,500+ residents. There are some requirements for additional services to be provided at the township's expense including a township administrator, a law director, police protection and a health department.

### What are some of the powers of Limited Home Rule?

- More flexible financing options for equipment
- Ability to partner with existing or create new water and sewer entities to provide services
- Adopt state building codes
- Create soil, erosion and water standards
- Regulate traffic control and parking on township roads
- Establish Community Reinvestment Areas

### Limited Home Rule does NOT allow a Township:

- To establish or revise subdivision or road construction regulation standards
- To enact an income tax
- To exercise any power in conflict with state laws

### Who determines whether a Township should adopt a Limited Home Rule government?

Since Harlem Township has less than 15,000 residents, limited home rule government must be placed on the ballot and approved by the electors of the unincorporated township.

**Protect and Enhance Open Space:** Develop a comprehensive open space preservation program to identify and protect key parcels from development while expanding recreational opportunities for Harlem Township residents.

One strategy that Harlem Township may wish to pursue is developing an additional revenue stream for purchasing land or easements for preservation purposes. Granville Township in Licking County provides an excellent case study, having operated an Open Space program since 1998 based on Ohio Revised Code 5705.19, which permits townships to pass real estate tax levies for acquiring open space through land purchases or easements.

Granville initially passed a 1-mill levy in 1998, renewed every five years and expanded to 2.5 mills in 2000. The township uses these funds to preserve areas of scenic and natural beauty, as well as sites of historical or geological significance facing development pressure. The program also protects the comprehensive plan's integrity, safeguards agricultural lands, and prevents annexation by other communities or high-density development. Additionally, funds help protect edges and boundaries, village entrances, buffers, open vistas, and view sheds.

A similar program could benefit Harlem Township, particularly since nearly 90% of 2023 survey respondents indicated willingness to explore local tax financing for acquiring land or easements for preservation. Tax financing may not be the only funding option—if the Township creates a JEDD, a portion of those funds could support open space purchases and preservation.

Should Harlem Township pursue an open space program, the first step would be identifying parcels best positioned for purchase. The Township should consider factors such as price, proximity to existing development, and how purchases would mitigate development sprawl. Establishing purchase parameters ensures alignment with community priorities. Granville, for example, requires land to meet at least one of five categories: preservation of scenic/natural beauty or historical significance; comprehensive plan integrity; agricultural land protection; prevention of annexation or high-density development; and protection of edges, boundaries, entrances, buffers, vistas, and view sheds.

Granville's Open Space Program protects land through two methods that Harlem could adopt. The first is outright purchase, transferring legal ownership to the Township with usage limited to approved activities defined by ordinance—such as agriculture, park space, or passive open space. The Township may also impose conservation easements so that future sales maintain preservation in perpetuity, with proceeds returning to the Open Space Fund.

The second method involves conservation easements, where the Township pays landowners for usage rights while property remains privately owned and on tax rolls, eliminating Township maintenance costs. The easement restricts land uses and significantly limits development potential.

Harlem Township could also explore partnerships with Preservation Parks of Delaware County, potentially transferring strategically acquired properties to their management. This collaboration would eliminate Township maintenance responsibilities while providing residents with quality recreational spaces. To advance this opportunity, Township officials should cultivate strong working relationships with Preservation Parks leadership to align goals and establish mutual understanding of recreational priorities.

Additionally, a CIC could play a role in this initiative through purchasing and holding land for park or other open space development.



# INTENTIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

## Leverage Strategic Economic Development

**Tools:** Evaluate and utilize tax increment financing, community reinvestment areas, and other economic incentives to attract development opportunities that align with the Township's vision and character goals.

Beyond non-annexation agreements, the Township should actively pursue economic development partnerships through established mechanisms such as Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDDs), Community Economic Development Agreements (CEDAs), Tax Increment Financing Districts (TIFs), and New Community Authorities (NCAs). These tools enable the Township to direct development patterns, generate additional revenue streams, and ensure that new development contributes to its own infrastructure and service costs without imposing financial burdens on existing residents.

### Joint Economic Development District (JEDD)

#### What is a JEDD?

A Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) is a tool that enables a township and a municipality to work cooperatively to generate revenue by levying an income tax on commercial, industrial, and mixed-use development within a specifically defined area of the unincorporated portion of the Township.

#### How does a JEDD generate revenue?

The JEDD can levy an income tax on businesses (and residents in mixed-use areas) in an amount that does not exceed the tax rate of the partnering municipality. The JEDD agreement outlines the terms of revenue generation and sharing between the entities and can function as a non-annexation strategy, allowing the township to retain its autonomy

while benefiting from shared economic growth, as defined in the terms of the contract.

#### Who approves the creation of a JEDD?

The Township Trustees and the municipality's Council vote to create the JEDD.

## New Community Authority (NCA)

### What is an NCA?

An NCA is created by local government through a public-private partnership between a developer and the local jurisdiction to generate revenue for the development. For more information and legal requirements regarding NCAs, visit ORC 349.

### How is an NCA formed?

A petition is initiated by the property owners of the real property to be included within the boundaries of the proposed NCA.

### How does an NCA generate revenue?

The NCA enacts a fee(s) to residents that live in or utilize the services within the development. These additional charges appear as an additional tax and can be put toward development. This "tax" would only affect residents or consumers within the New Community Authority, therefore not burdening current residents with additional taxes or shifting existing taxes.

### How is the revenue used?

The revenue can be used to pay for infrastructure or amenities to the district, such as roads, water, sewer, parks, clubhouses, snow removal, landscaping, decorations, or additional services/maintenance.

### Who is the approving authority for establishing an NCA?

The County Commissioners are the approving authority for establishing the NCA. The Ohio Revised Code allows a Township to create a NCA when it has a population of at least 5,000 and meets certain criteria.

taxes collected based upon the post development valuation are utilized to pay for public infrastructure that benefits the TIF District.

### Do TIFs raise my taxes?

No. A TIF does not affect the tax rates that are applied to a property. Tax rates may fluctuate for all properties based upon the passage or non-renewal of tax levies.

### Do TIFs raise my property values?

No. The County Auditor sets property valuations within TIFs the same as a non-TIF property. Auditor valuations are based on the appraisal by the County Auditor, which typically depends on recent sales prices.

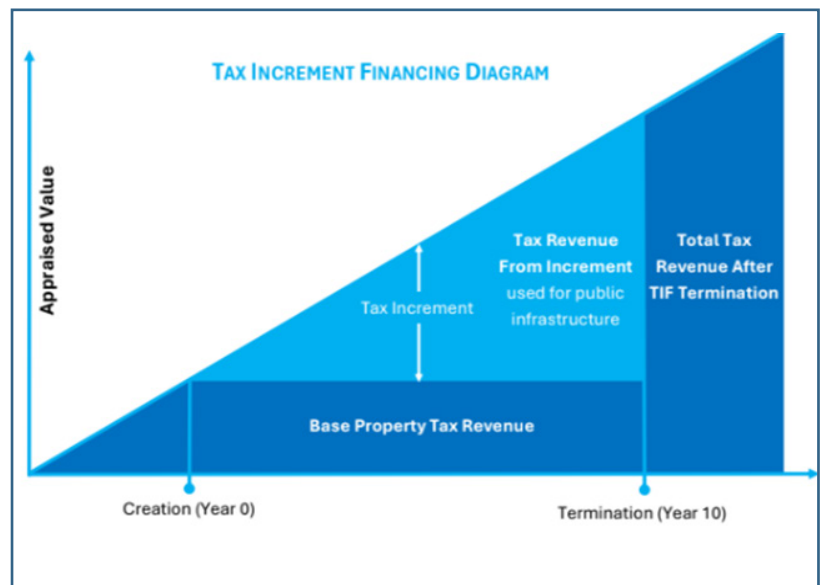
## Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District

### What is a TIF?

A TIF is a tool authorized under the Ohio Revised Code that allows communities, such as a township, to redirect taxes from future development to a special fund that is restricted to being utilized for public improvements that support the TIF district. This tool helps communities pay as they grow.

### How does a TIF work?

When a TIF is enacted, a snapshot of the property's current assessed value is taken ("baseline valuation"). When future development occurs on a property, the new buildings and other improvements cause the property's assessed value to rise ("post development valuation"). The difference ("increment") between the taxes collected based upon the predevelopment valuation and the



**Proactively Guide Development:** Channel growth toward areas with planned infrastructure capacity through targeted zoning overlays and incentive programs.

As the Township anticipates significant growth, preserving its distinctive country-suburban character and thriving hobby farm and homesteading culture remains paramount. The Township should strategically direct new development toward areas planned for infrastructure improvements, particularly central water and sewer expansion, building upon existing overlay districts to ensure concentrated, well-served growth rather than scattered development that could compromise the Township's character.

## Chapter 5: Strategic Recommendations

The Township should conduct a comprehensive review and update of current zoning overlays to maintain competitive positioning while attracting high-quality development that offers resident benefits comparable to neighboring communities, thereby reducing annexation pressures. This balanced approach protects rural-residential areas while creating attractive development opportunities in designated growth zones.

Economic development tools such as Tax Increment Financing (TIFs) and Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDDs) provide powerful mechanisms to achieve these goals simultaneously. These instruments can direct quality development to strategic locations, prevent unwanted sprawl across the Township's landscape, ensure high design and construction standards, and generate revenue to fund community-enhancing projects. By leveraging these tools strategically, Harlem Township can grow thoughtfully while preserving the country-suburban amenities and lifestyle that defines its identity and attracts residents seeking an alternative to more urbanized or typical suburban communities.

**Expand Housing Diversity:** Create zoning provisions for varied housing types, including accessory dwelling units, age-in-place options, and multigenerational housing to serve residents throughout all life stages.

Harlem Township should develop as a multigenerational community that supports residents throughout their entire life cycle, offering diverse housing options that enable people to remain in the community from childhood through their senior years. This approach ensures that residents are not forced to relocate due to changing housing needs, whether seeking starter homes as young adults, family-sized housing during child-rearing years, or accessible senior housing as they age.

The agri-community model offers significant potential for fostering multi-generational living by creating diverse interest points and activities that appeal to residents across all age groups. Children

and teenagers can participate in hands-on farming activities, learning about food production, animal care, and environmental stewardship through direct engagement with community gardens, livestock areas, and seasonal harvesting programs. Adults can find fulfillment through community-supported agriculture initiatives, farm-to-table cooking classes, and volunteer opportunities in maintaining the agricultural operations. Seniors benefit from gentle outdoor activities such as herb gardening, farm stand volunteering, and intergenerational mentoring programs that allow them to share knowledge and experience with younger community members.

The integrated recreation infrastructure enhances this multi-generational appeal through thoughtfully designed walking paths that connect residential areas to farm spaces, community centers that host educational workshops and social events, and shared gathering spaces where residents can interact naturally across age groups. These amenities create organic opportunities for community building while supporting the agricultural theme that defines the development.

To maximize the multi-generational potential of agri-communities, Harlem Township could expand allowable housing types within these developments to include townhomes, duplexes, and cottage-style units alongside traditional single-family homes. This diversified housing stock would accommodate young families seeking affordable entry-level homeownership, empty nesters looking to downsize while remaining in the community, and seniors who prefer lower-maintenance living arrangements. By incorporating varied housing options, these developments can attract a broader demographic range while maintaining the rural character and agricultural focus that reflects Harlem Township's heritage and values.

This approach addresses housing needs across the lifecycle while preserving the community's distinctive identity and fostering the social connections that make multi-generational neighborhoods thrive.



## Chapter 5: Strategic Recommendations

Additionally, permitting accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in strategic zoning districts throughout the Township can address diverse housing needs while supporting multi-generational living arrangements. ADUs provide flexible housing solutions for aging parents who wish to maintain independence while living close to adult children, offering the benefits of proximity and support without sacrificing privacy for either generation. These units also serve young professionals, recent graduates, and essential workers who need affordable housing options while saving for homeownership or establishing themselves in the community.



Accessory Dwelling Unit from Titus Contracting

The Township can establish comprehensive design and placement standards to ensure ADUs enhance rather than detract from neighborhood character. Key considerations should include whether ADUs are permitted as attached units (such as garage apartments or basement conversions) or detached structures (like carriage houses or cottage-style buildings), with specific guidelines for each type. Design standards should address architectural compatibility, requiring ADUs to complement the primary residence and surrounding neighborhood through consistent materials, roof lines, and design elements that reflect Harlem Township's aesthetic character.

Additional regulatory frameworks should address practical concerns such as minimum lot sizes to accommodate ADUs without overcrowding, parking requirements to prevent street congestion, and

setback requirements to protect neighbor privacy and maintain appropriate spacing between structures. The Township might also consider occupancy restrictions, such as requiring the property owner to reside on-site in either the primary dwelling or the ADU, to maintain the residential character of neighborhoods and prevent conversion to commercial rental properties.

By implementing thoughtful ADU policies, Harlem Township can expand housing diversity while preserving community character, supporting aging-in-place initiatives, and providing pathways to homeownership for younger residents—all while maintaining the township's distinctive rural and suburban qualities.

### Foster the Local Economic Ecosystem:

Support small-scale entrepreneurship, agritourism ventures, and homestead-based businesses.

Connection to agriculture and rural heritage is important for Harlem Township. There are steps the Township can take to support these small-scale entrepreneurship, agritourism ventures, and homestead-based businesses in the Township. Namely, the Township can permit agritourism uses within the Township. These sorts of operations mix commercial uses, agriculture, and tourism to create a unique visitor experience and build upon traditional farming operations. Agritourism is a diverse industry and spans many uses including U-pick operations, wineries, petting/feeding farms, Christmas tree or flower farms, demonstration farms, cider mills, on-farm bakeries or restaurants, and more.

Harlem Township's deep agricultural roots form the foundation of its community identity and represent valuable assets that should be actively preserved and celebrated as the region continues to grow. The working farms, open landscapes, and agricultural traditions that shaped the Township for generations face increasing pressure from development, making it essential to find innovative ways to support existing agricultural operations while creating new opportunities for farm-based enterprises. Rather than

viewing agriculture and development as competing forces, the Township can embrace strategies that strengthen farming operations through diversification and entrepreneurship.

Permitting agritourism uses throughout appropriate areas of the Township would create opportunities for innovative agricultural enterprises that blend farming, commerce, and visitor experiences. These operations build upon traditional farming foundations while diversifying revenue streams and connecting visitors with agricultural practices. Agritourism encompasses a broad spectrum of activities that can accommodate different scales of operation and investment levels, from seasonal u-pick operations, flower farms, and Christmas tree farms to more intensive ventures like wineries, cider mills, and on-farm restaurants or bakeries.



A winery in northeast Ohio from Geneva on the Lake

Operations such as petting farms, demonstration farms, and agricultural education centers serve both tourism and community education purposes, helping residents of all ages maintain connections to farming practices and food production. By establishing clear guidelines for agritourism development, such as compatibility with residential areas, Harlem Township can support agricultural innovation while ensuring these enterprises enhance rather than conflict with the Township's character and quality of life.

If Harlem Township adopts limited home rule status, it would gain expanded authority to directly support small businesses within its boundaries. This enhanced capacity would enable the Township to implement targeted economic development initiatives, such as establishing a grant program for business façade improvements. Such a

program could provide financial assistance to local businesses for exterior upgrades that align with Township branding standards, including signage modifications, architectural enhancements, and other visual improvements that contribute to a cohesive community identity.

These business support initiatives could be administered directly by the Township or facilitated through a Community Improvement Corporation (CIC), as discussed further on page 38. The CIC structure offers additional flexibility in program design and funding mechanisms, potentially allowing for more comprehensive business assistance beyond façade improvements.

Harlem Township can strengthen its local economy by actively connecting small businesses with available grants, financing programs, educational services, and technical assistance. Township officials should integrate knowledge of these resources into economic development planning while directly sharing relevant opportunities with local entrepreneurs. This proactive approach supports business growth and retention, positioning Harlem Township as an effective facilitator between business owners and external support programs that foster a vibrant local economy.

#### *ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE (ECDI)*

The Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI) serves as a comprehensive resource center for Ohio entrepreneurs, offering a variety of financing options and business development services.

ECDI provides several targeted funding programs that could benefit Township businesses, including Community Advantage loans for startups and businesses with limited credit history, the Community Development Financial Institution Loan Participation Program for small businesses throughout Ohio, and the USDA Loan Program, specifically designed for rural areas. Additional specialized programs support refugee entrepreneurs, startup businesses, and veteran-owned enterprises. Beyond financing, ECDI's Business Resource Center

## Chapter 5: Strategic Recommendations

offers mentoring and educational services that support businesses at every stage of development. Their business incubation programs include Women's Business Centers, Veterans Business Outreach Center, and the Contractor Resource Center, all providing specialized expertise and networking opportunities that could benefit Township entrepreneurs seeking to establish or expand their businesses.

### OHIO DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT (ODOD)

The Ohio Department of Development offers several key programs that could benefit Harlem Township businesses:

**Ohio Small Business Development Centers (SBDC)** provide personalized business consulting through Certified Business Advisors who help entrepreneurs with business assessments, marketing strategies, and capital acquisition.

**The Ohio Capital Access Program (OCAP)** functions as loan portfolio insurance that helps small businesses secure credit for growth and expansion. Participating lenders contribute 3-6% of loan amounts to a reserve fund, which is matched by state contributions to mitigate potential losses. Similarly, the Collateral Enhancement Program 2.0 (CEP) assists small, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses in securing loans that might otherwise be unavailable due to insufficient collateral.

**Minority Business Assistance Centers** provide specialized support including accounting assistance and help with certification applications for minority-owned and disadvantaged businesses.

**The Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program** offers tax credits to owners who rehabilitate historically designated buildings for commercial use, making it particularly relevant for small businesses operating in or considering historic structures within the Township.

Lastly, the InvestOhio Program provides tax incentives to investors who fund small Ohio-based businesses, encouraging capital investment in local enterprises.

### SERVICE CORPS OF RETIRED EXECUTIVES (SCORE)

SCORE is a business mentoring and education resource organization for small business owners. SCORE also provides a virtual Small Business Resource Hub with topics such as transitioning from employee to entrepreneur, starting a business, and managing and growing a business.

### HERITAGE OHIO

Heritage Ohio offers assessment and consulting services to build a framework for village and community cores. Programs and services they offer include:

**Downtown Assessments:** This assessment introduces the basic building blocks of a comprehensive long-term program.

**Ohio Main Street Program:** A strategy to be adopted through Heritage Ohio to implement 4 methodology points and 8 core approach principles to build a community downtown area.

**Save Ohio's Treasures:** A below market-rate, responsive revolving loan fund (RLF) to support historic preservation projects. This can be used toward upgrading mechanical systems, roofs, and other structural issues to make buildings safer and more functional.

The Township should also consider establishing a targeted Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) to stimulate local economic development. A CRA is a designated geographic area where property owners can receive tax exemptions for renovating existing structures or constructing new buildings that meet specific criteria. This incentive program can



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effectively encourage redevelopment of underutilized properties and attract new business investment to strategic areas within the Township.

A well-designed CRA program would provide measurable financial incentives that make development projects more feasible, particularly for small businesses and property owners who might otherwise lack the resources for significant improvements. The tax exemptions can be structured to reward developments that align with Township goals, such as preserving historic character, improving building facades, or creating jobs.

To establish a CRA, the Township must meet certain eligibility requirements, including having a population of at least 5,000 residents, and must work collaboratively with the Delaware County Planning Commission throughout the designation process. The Township would need to demonstrate that the proposed CRA area meets state criteria for economic development need and would benefit from targeted reinvestment incentives.

### Community Reinvestment Area (CRA)

#### What is a CRA?

A designated district that allows for property tax exemptions for development as an economic development tool for revitalization on the improved value after reinvestment. The requested tax exemption would need a majority vote of its governing body.

#### How is a CRA established?

A community identifies an area in need of revitalization. Once determined, the community establishes boundaries and terms. The process includes a Housing Survey, adopting local legislation, public notices and an Ohio CRA Petition.

#### How is a CRA structured?

The terms of the CRA are established in the legislation and can vary. Residential CRAs can have up to a 100% abatement for up to 10 years. New Construction, Multifamily, Commercial and Industrial CRAs can have up to a 100% abatement for up to 15 years.

#### Does a Township lose tax revenue on a CRA?

No. The real property tax exemption is the difference of improved value. The township will collect the same amount of taxes they collect when the development starts. After the term expires, the township will receive the entirety of the taxes. The CRA incentives development that may not be able to transpire without the CRA in place.

#### Who is the approving authority for establishing a CRA?

A county or a limited home rule township can create a CRA. In the case of a county, the Board of Commissioners are the approving authority. In the case of the limited home rule township, the Township Trustees are the approving authority.

### Target Strategic Employment Sectors:

Identify high-quality employers and compatible industries for locations along major transportation corridors, particularly State Route 37.

Regional growth is anticipated in support industries serving major developments like Intel, with Harlem Township's strategic location along S.R. 37 and County Line Road positioning it as an attractive destination for these businesses. To proactively manage this growth, the Township should conduct comprehensive public engagement to identify which types of large-scale businesses and industries align

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with community values and long-term vision, while clearly defining those that do not.

This strategic planning effort should build upon the Township's existing County Line Road overlay districts, which already establish high-quality development and design standards. By taking a proactive rather than reactive approach, the Township can craft targeted regulations and incentives to attract desirable industries while creating robust barriers to prevent incompatible development. This forward-thinking strategy acknowledges that while residents may have concerns about large-scale commercial and industrial growth, establishing clear preferences and standards now will provide the Township with greater control over its economic future and ensure that any development enhances rather than detracts from the community's character and quality of life.

### Establish a Development Partnership

**Entity:** Explore creating a Harlem Township Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) to strategically acquire and develop key properties.

A Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) is a non-profit, quasi-governmental organization established to advance and promote economic and civic development within a community. CICs have the authority to acquire and hold properties while providing assistance to governmental entities and nonprofit or for-profit organizations in property development initiatives.

The development of a CIC could allow the Township to acquire and develop key parcels with a focus on Center Village and other priority areas. This would be a Township-led initiative, working with private investors to build financial capacity to strategically purchase land in keys areas of preservation and development.

A CIC could facilitate partnerships with the County to secure funding for projects that align with both

County and Township objectives. The organization would also provide a mechanism for residents to contribute funds toward the acquisition of strategic parcels within the community. Jersey Township has successfully established a CIC and allocates a portion of its general funds to support the CIC's strategic project initiatives, demonstrating a proven model for

## MAINTAIN HEALTHY INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS RECOMMENDATIONS

**Expand Resident Engagement:** Build upon the two-way communication foundation established through this strategic planning process by implementing ongoing community dialogue initiatives and incorporating resident-driven feedback mechanisms into Township operations.

Building upon the strong foundation of two-way communication established through this strategic planning process, Harlem Township should implement a comprehensive resident engagement framework that transforms community dialogue from a reactive process into an ongoing operational priority. This expanded engagement strategy recognizes that effective governance requires continuous input from residents and that meaningful participation must accommodate diverse communication preferences, schedules, and levels of civic involvement. The township should establish multiple touch points throughout the year, moving beyond traditional public meetings to create a dynamic communication ecosystem that keeps residents informed, engaged, and empowered to shape their community's future.

The engagement framework should center on a multi-modal communication approach that delivers consistent messaging through diverse channels while accommodating both active participants who

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seek detailed involvement and passive receivers who prefer streamlined updates. Monthly community updates should serve as the backbone of regular communication, supplemented by the “7 times, 7 different ways” strategy that reinforces key messages through various platforms including the Township website, social media channels, community event announcements, local business partnerships, and targeted outreach efforts. This approach should incorporate modern engagement tools such as QR codes linking to detailed information, geographic-specific updates that contextualize impacts for different areas of the Township, and simplified messaging designed to facilitate peer-to-peer information sharing among neighbors.

To ensure broad community reach and meaningful participation, the Township should leverage existing community networks through partnerships with Township civic organizations, while simultaneously exploring expanded engagement with younger residents through digital platforms and volunteer outreach at high-traffic locations. Regular civic education sessions should help residents understand decision-making processes, development impacts, and regional planning initiatives, while neighborhood-specific meetings should address area-specific concerns and opportunities.

The Township should build upon the excellent work of the existing communications committee and implement the resident-driven suggestions gathered during the second community meeting to improve communication accessibility and effectiveness for all residents, creating a comprehensive communication network that reflects community input and keeps residents informed and engaged in shaping Harlem Township's future.



**Foster Regional Collaboration:** Cultivate strategic partnerships with neighboring municipalities and townships to monitor development trends, share best practices, and coordinate on regional issues affecting shared interests.

The entire Central Ohio region is experiencing similar development pressures that Harlem Township currently faces, making regional coordination and awareness essential for effective planning and community preservation. As growth radiates outward from Columbus and surrounding employment centers, neighboring townships and municipalities are grappling with comparable challenges including infrastructure capacity, housing demand, agricultural land preservation, and maintaining community character amid rapid change. Understanding how adjacent communities are responding to these pressures provides valuable insights into successful strategies, potential pitfalls, and emerging trends that could impact Harlem Township's future.

Maintaining awareness of neighboring communities' planning initiatives, zoning changes, and development patterns allows Harlem Township to anticipate spillover effects and coordinate complementary approaches where beneficial. For example, if adjacent townships implement restrictive development policies, Harlem Township may experience increased development pressure as projects seek alternative locations. Conversely, if neighboring communities pursue aggressive commercial development, Harlem Township might focus on preserving its residential and agricultural character as a regional differentiator.

These relationships also facilitate information sharing about development trends, successful policy approaches, and lessons learned from various planning initiatives. Regular participation in regional planning organizations, informal networking among township officials, and collaborative discussions about shared challenges can strengthen Harlem Township's position while contributing to more thoughtful regional growth management that benefits all communities in the area.



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### Engage Strategic Landowner-

**Stakeholders:** Proactively communicate with major landowners to understand their long-term development intentions and explore opportunities for mutually beneficial outcomes that support township objectives.

Harlem Township made significant strides in enhancing communication with residents, establishing a foundation of transparency and engagement that strengthens community trust and participation in local governance. As the Township continues to evolve and face development pressures, it will be crucial to expand and deepen these community-level relationships, particularly with large landowners who hold substantial influence over the township's future growth patterns and character.

Proactive engagement with major property owners serves multiple strategic purposes for the Township. By maintaining regular dialogue with these stakeholders, Township officials can stay informed about potential development plans, land use changes, and investment decisions that could significantly impact infrastructure needs, service demands, and community character. This early awareness allows the township to plan proactively rather than react to development proposals, enabling more thoughtful integration of new projects with existing community goals and resources.

Effective communication with large landowners also creates opportunities for collaborative planning that benefits both private interests and community objectives. When property owners understand the township's vision, zoning preferences, and infrastructure capabilities, they can align their development plans accordingly, potentially reducing conflicts and expediting approval processes. This collaborative approach can lead to innovative solutions such as the agri-community developments discussed earlier, where private development supports broader community goals while meeting market demands.

The Township must carefully balance this engagement while respecting fundamental property and privacy rights of individual landowners. Communication efforts should be voluntary, respectful, and focused on mutual benefit rather than intrusive oversight. Successful relationship building might include regular landowner forums or informal coffee meetings with Township officials. Fostering these open and genuine relationships ultimately serves the broader community interest by ensuring that growth and development occur in ways that enhance rather than compromise Harlem Township's distinctive character and quality of life for all residents.

### Strengthen Infrastructure and County-Level Coordination:

Maintain active communication with Delaware County agencies, including Del-Co Water, the Regional Sewer District, County Engineer's Office, the Board of Commissioners, and Preservation Parks to ensure alignment on infrastructure planning and community development initiatives.

The Township should continue holding open communication channels with these organizations and agencies to access current planning information, coordinate project timelines, and develop consistent community messaging. Residents should be kept informed about all infrastructure projects through regular updates that provide clear, coordinated information from both Township and County sources, ensuring transparency and avoiding conflicting communications about ongoing and planned improvements.

# COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND PRIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

**Establish a Vibrant Village Center:** Establish clear geographical boundaries for Center Village and develop a comprehensive Center Village master plan that guides future development, public improvements, and community investment priorities.

The Township should launch a comprehensive Center Village initiative to establish this area as Harlem Township's premier walkable community hub. This effort should begin with extensive community engagement to capture resident input on desired land uses, landscaping standards, connectivity improvements, programming opportunities, and overall vision for the space. The Township should then develop a detailed Center Village Master Plan that defines clear boundaries, establishes design guidelines, outlines implementation strategies, and integrates with broader Township branding efforts.

Figure 21 visualizes potential planning boundaries for the Center Village area. Traditional zoning regulations cannot adequately address the design or desired development pattern for Center Village. Ultimately, this area would be complemented by a Center Village overlay district to implement high-quality standards to achieve the village look, with key features relating to building scale, walkability, and design.

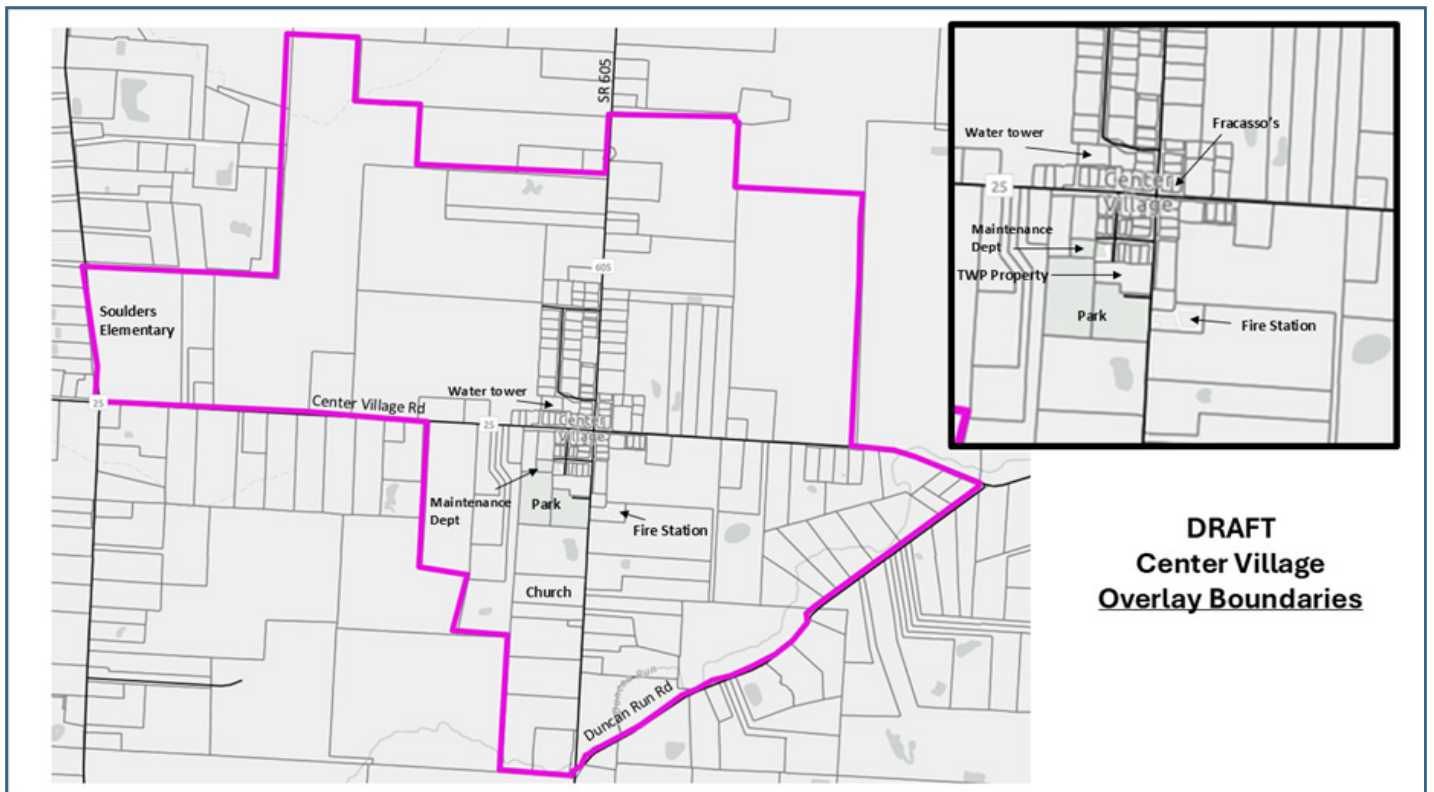


Figure 21: Draft Center Village Boundaries

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One of the most important aspects of planning for Center Village is establishing a cohesive design framework that reflects Harlem Township's character and fosters an attractive, community-oriented space where residents can gather and connect. A design plan should consider the following elements.

### *Scale and Setback*

As the focal point of the Township, development in Center Village should be conducted at the human scale, with a maximum of 3 stories, responding to the scale of existing buildings and creating a comfortable environment for pedestrians.

Building setbacks should also be reduced to enhance perceived walkability and increase pedestrian connections to local businesses in Center Village. A reduced setback is more aligned with traditional village design, assisting in creating a unique Harlem Township feel.



Human scale and small setbacks aid in downtown place making in Hudson, Ohio

### *Connectivity and Walkability*

Development proposals within Center Village should be required to submit a comprehensive development plan that illustrates how the proposed development coordinates with existing and planned surrounding uses, including pedestrian and vehicular circulation patterns, building placement and orientation, complementary land uses, and design elements that contribute to a cohesive streetscape.

Developments should also be designed to enhance the pedestrian experience, providing the highest standard of uninterrupted pedestrian connections including substantial sidewalks, multi-use path

connections, and pedestrian friendly infrastructure such as benches and outdoor seating.



Downtown Granville from HER Realtors

### *Architecture and Color*

Developments in Center Village should incorporate architectural styles that are both distinctive and complementary to the character of Harlem Township. Design should emphasize traditional rural and historic village typologies as foundational elements.

Buildings should feature four-sided architecture with equal attention to design quality on all facades, recognizing that structures may be viewed from multiple angles. High-quality materials such as wood, brick, and stone are encouraged, while vinyl siding should be avoided.

The Township should establish guidelines for building colors and roof lines to ensure visual cohesion throughout Center Village. A coordinated color palette—incorporating appropriate blues, greens, reds, and whites—should align with the Township's vision for a unified village character. Similarly, roof line standards should address whether flat roofs are appropriate and, if permitted, should require decorative elements or enhanced detailing to maintain visual interest.



Architectural elements from Never Too Old to Travel & American Post and Beam



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### *Open Space and Greenery*

The Harlem Township Community Park, centrally located within Center Village, should remain a primary focal point for the area. The park's existing walking path provides a foundation for expanded pedestrian connectivity and should be enhanced to link with future sidewalk networks and multi-use trail systems throughout Center Village.

Future development should integrate additional green spaces that enhance quality of life while providing venues for recreation and community gatherings. These spaces should complement the existing park and create a network of interconnected open areas.

Comprehensive landscaping standards should emphasize native plantings and canopy tree coverage to create a lush, environmentally appropriate setting. These standards should ensure that development contributes rather than detracts from the area's natural beauty and environmental quality.



Community Park from Gates & Associates



From City Park Conservancy

### *Signs*

Signage within Center Village should complement the architectural design standards and integrate seamlessly with Township branding through coordinated colors, typography, and materials. Sign design should reinforce the overall visual character established by building standards and contribute to a cohesive village identity.

The Township should establish preferred signage types for the area, considering both functional needs and aesthetic impact. Standards should address appropriate materials, mounting methods, and design elements that align with the traditional village character while maintaining clear wayfinding and business identification.



Community Green space from First & Main Development



Community Green space in Hudson, Ohio



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Signage examples: Cloverdale sign from Phillips Metal Works, Willowsford Farm sign from Angie the Freckled Rose Blog

### Local Market

Central to this vision is creating a year-round community destination featuring seasonal festivals, a year-round farm market, heritage celebrations, and signature events that reflect the Township's character and bring neighbors together. The Master Plan should prioritize pedestrian-friendly design, multi-use pathways, and strategic programming spaces that can accommodate diverse community activities while maintaining the area's unique identity. This focused approach will transform Center Village into the heart of Harlem Township—a place where residents naturally gather, local businesses thrive, and community connections flourish.

The creation of a market house was a recommendation established during the Quick Strategy Guide planning process that has been validated through this planning effort and aligns with the creation of a vibrant Center Village. This market would provide for the sale of locally grown foods and handmade crafts and could also serve as a location for community programming around food or craft making. This market would ideally also provide outdoor seating and space for outdoor vendors. The development of such a market could be supported through the development of a Community Improvement Corporation, or CIC, to channel funds toward community benefiting projects. See more information about CICs on page 38.



Potential Center Village Market House rendering

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**Develop Cohesive Township Branding:** Create comprehensive branding guidelines and implement strategic wayfinding systems throughout the township to strengthen visual identity and enhance community recognition.

Develop comprehensive Township branding and wayfinding systems that clearly communicate Harlem Township's unique identity and character to residents and visitors. This branding initiative should create immediate visual recognition at Township entry points and throughout the community, helping distinguish Harlem Township from neighboring jurisdictions while reinforcing its distinct sense of place. A cohesive branding strategy will prevent the Township from blending into generic suburban development patterns and instead establish a memorable community identity that residents can take pride in.

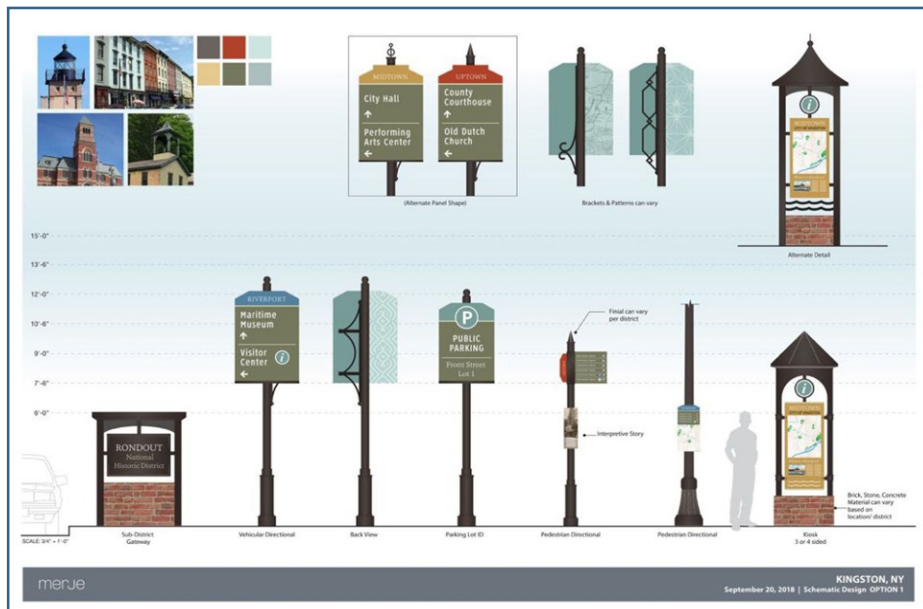


Figure 22: Community wayfinding/branding examples from Kingston, NY

**Partner with Heritage Organizations:** Collaborate with the Harlem Township Heritage Association and other community groups to develop authentic branding initiatives, support Center Village improvement efforts, and preserve local historical narratives.

Harlem Township's established civic organizations and community networks provide a strong foundation for branding efforts and Center Village development. The Township should actively engage these existing resources in creating its identity while positioning Center Village as the community's focal point. This collaborative approach will honor the Township's history, respect ongoing community efforts, and foster partnerships that can revitalize Center Village as a vibrant mixed-use destination combining residential, commercial, and civic functions.

### Implement Heritage-Inspired Design Standards:

**Standards:** Collaborate with the Harlem Township Heritage Association and other community groups to develop authentic branding initiatives, support Center Village improvement efforts, and preserve local historical narratives.

The Township should continue implementing and expanding design standards, building upon requirements established in existing overlay districts, to ensure new developments reflect Harlem Township's distinctive character and agricultural heritage. These standards should promote high-quality architecture that draws from traditional rural and agricultural building forms while allowing for contemporary interpretations that create visual cohesion without uniformity. Rather than producing generic suburban development, design standards should establish a recognizable Harlem Township aesthetic that distinguishes the community from neighboring jurisdictions and reinforces its unique identity rooted in agricultural traditions.



# SAFETY AND WELLBEING RECOMMENDATIONS

**Scale Public Safety Services:** Align fire and EMS staffing levels and facilities with projected population growth and development patterns to maintain optimal emergency response times within the Township.

The Township Trustees should collaborate with fire department leadership to identify and address evolving needs related to population growth and development density, including investments in advanced training programs, modern equipment, and expanded emergency response capabilities to strengthen emergency services.

As the demand for fire and EMS services continues to increase, developing a comprehensive facility and operations plan will be crucial to ensure adequate emergency response capabilities for the Township's growing needs. There are several resources the Township can utilize to develop this plan. The Ohio Fire Chiefs Association (OFCA) provides facilitation and consulting resources. The Township can request an OFCA representative to attend a planning meeting to provide guidance and assist in outlining the process through a one-day course. The Township could also utilize an outside consultant to assist in writing this plan.

Increasing service demands may necessitate additional equipment, vehicles, and personnel. Securing grants or utilizing potential JEDD funds may be an option if funding gaps arise as growth occurs.

Additionally, the text for overlay districts should include provisions requiring developers to enter into economic development agreements with the Township prior to utilizing overlay zoning benefits. This language should be incorporated into existing overlay districts through revisions and included in all

future overlay district provisions. These agreements would provide the Township flexibility to negotiate terms that identify necessary public improvements, such as public safety infrastructure, and determine appropriate economic development tools to fund those improvements.

## **Create Safe Multimodal Infrastructure:**

Develop comprehensive transportation infrastructure that safely accommodates pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles, with particular emphasis on walkability and bicycle connectivity between residential areas and community destinations.



Multi-use path network

Harlem Township should establish development standards that require new residential and commercial projects to incorporate multimodal transportation infrastructure as part of their site design and construction. Developers should be required to provide sidewalks, pedestrian connections, and bicycle infrastructure that link their developments to existing community destinations such as Center Village, parks, and adjacent neighborhoods to enhance connectivity and safety. Development regulations should mandate safe pedestrian crossings, adequate lighting, and bicycle facilities as standard infrastructure requirements rather than optional amenities.

The Township should create specific design standards and connectivity requirements that

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developers must meet during the site plan review process. These standards should require developers to demonstrate how their projects enhance the overall multimodal network, contribute to regional connectivity, and provide safe access for residents of all ages and mobility levels. Developers should also be responsible for ensuring their infrastructure integrates seamlessly with existing and planned transportation improvements.

If Harlem Township proceeds with establishing a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD), a strategic portion of the generated revenue could be allocated toward developing comprehensive multi-use path networks that connect and expand upon privately funded trail systems. This approach would address one of the most common challenges in suburban development: the creation of fragmented recreational infrastructure that lacks meaningful connectivity between neighborhoods, commercial areas, and community amenities.

Developer-funded paths, while valuable, are typically limited to individual project boundaries and may not align with broader township-wide connectivity goals. JEDD funding could bridge these gaps by financing critical linkage segments that connect existing neighborhood trails to schools, parks, commercial districts, and employment centers. This creates a cohesive recreational and transportation network that serves both current residents and supports the township's growth management objectives.

A central focus of this path network should be creating convergent routes that lead to Center Village, where residents can gather, shop, dine, and participate in civic activities. This hub-and-spoke approach to path connectivity would reinforce Center Village as the Township's focal point while ensuring access from residential areas. The convergence of paths at the center village would create natural gathering spaces and support local businesses by increasing foot traffic and creating additional opportunities for community events and local businesses.

JEDD-funded path infrastructure could incorporate design elements that reflect Harlem Township's character, such as native landscaping, agricultural-themed way-points, and interpretive features that celebrate the Township's rural heritage. This strategic investment in connectivity would enhance community recreation opportunities and preserve the qualities that make Harlem Township distinctive.

**Plan to Expand Facilities:** Develop comprehensive transportation infrastructure that safely accommodates pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles, with particular emphasis on walkability and bicycle connectivity between residential areas and community destinations.

Harlem Township should conduct a comprehensive facility assessment to evaluate current administrative buildings, storage facilities, and cemetery infrastructure against projected growth and service expansion needs over the next 10-15 years. This assessment should identify deficiencies in office space, meeting areas, equipment storage, and staffing capacity to ensure facilities can accommodate both current operations and anticipated community demands.

Based on the assessment findings, the Township should develop a phased expansion plan that prioritizes critical needs while maintaining fiscal responsibility. This plan should consider renovation, new construction, or property acquisition options, incorporating modern workplace standards, accessibility compliance, and energy efficiency. The Township should establish a capital improvement timeline with dedicated funding mechanisms and conduct regular five-year facility assessments to ensure the infrastructure keeps pace with community growth and service delivery requirements.

The Township should evaluate timelines and staffing needs for potential new positions, such as a Township Administrator and additional zoning personnel. Figure 23 provides salary comparisons

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for administrative and zoning staff across other central Ohio townships to inform hiring decisions and compensation planning. This data can serve as a benchmark for establishing competitive salary ranges that attract qualified candidates. Additionally, both nearby Berlin and Berkshire Townships have recently hired Township Administrators, demonstrating the growing trend toward professional administration in similar communities and providing potential models for implementation.

Prairie Township, Franklin County		Population: 17,415
Township Administrator		\$165,239
Assistant Township Administrator		\$140,719
Administrative Assistant		\$70,000
Zoning Assistant		\$68,162
Zoning Inspector		\$90,615
Salary Data from MORPC Salary Survey 2024. Population data from 2020 Census.		
Orange Township, Delaware County		Population: 37,452
Township Administrator		\$127,435
Administrative Manager		\$82,750
Administrative Assistant		\$57,948
Development and Zoning Director		\$84,460
Zoning Compliance Officer		\$49,004
Senior Zoning Officer		\$59,737
Assistant Fiscal Officer		\$65,915
Fiscal Support Coordinator		\$68,535
Administrative Manager		\$82,750
Salary Data from MORPC Salary Survey 2024. Population data from 2020 Census.		
Madison Township, Franklin County		Population: 25,945
Administrator		\$142,000
Office Manager		\$46,612-56,326
Salary Data from MORPC Salary Survey 2024. Population data from 2020 Census.		
Jerome Township, Union County		Population: 9,504
Township Administrator		\$114,941
Administrative Assistant		\$49,733
Zoning Insect/Planning Coordinator		\$78,665
Assistant Zoning Inspector		\$57,470
Zoning Clerk		\$44,013
Salary Data from MORPC Salary Survey 2024. Population data from 2020 Census.		
Violet Township, Fairfield County		Population: 45,785
Township Administrator		\$104-\$156,000
Finance Assistant		\$62,400-87,360
Executive Administrative Assistant		\$56,160-79,040
Zoning Officer		\$70,720-99,840
Salary Data from MORPC Salary Survey 2023. Population data from 2020 Census.		



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Liberty Township, Delaware County		Population: 33,252
Township Administrator		\$99,807
Assistant to the Fiscal Officer		\$60,000
Administrative Assistant		\$41,600
Code Compliance Officer		\$48,500
Zoning Inspector		\$77,043
Salary Data from MORPC Salary Survey 2021. Population data from 2020 Census.		
Jersey Township, Licking County		Population: 2557
Township Administrator		\$120,000
Salary Data from Newark Advocate, April 25, 2022. Population data from 2020 Census.		

## IMPLEMENTATION MATRICES

This strategic implementation matrix outlines key recommendations and corresponding action items designed to guide Harlem Township's thoughtful development over the coming years. Organized around the five strategic priorities, these initiatives balance the community's desire to maintain its distinctive country suburban lifestyle with the need for intentional growth, strong relationships, clear identity, and resident safety. Each recommendation includes specific action items, identifies responsible parties, and provides a framework for measuring progress toward the Township's vision.

### Implementation Timeframes

**Short-term (0-1 years):** Immediate priorities that can be initiated quickly with existing resources or minimal additional investment.

**Medium-term (1-3 years):** Strategic initiatives requiring more extensive planning, coordination, or resource development.

**Long-term (3+ years):** Comprehensive programs and major infrastructure projects that require sustained commitment and significant investment over multiple years.

While timeframes are assigned for each goal, many of the recommendations in this plan require continuous implementation and ongoing efforts.

## Country Suburban Lifestyle and Autonomy

Recommendation	Action Items	Responsible Party	Timeframe
Support hobby farming and homesteading activities.	Amend the zoning code across most Township districts to explicitly allow hobby farms and homesteading operations, including livestock keeping, beekeeping, and agricultural activities.	Zoning Commission, Township Trustees	Short-term
Implement an agri-community development model.	Create provisions in residential overlay districts allowing preserved open space to be used for integrated community farming operations.	Zoning Commission, Township Trustees, Consultant	Medium-term
Enhance recreational connectivity.	Mandate multi-use path construction in new developments to create continuous recreational linkages throughout the Township.	Zoning Commission, Township Trustees	Medium-term
Update overlay districts to align with evolving conditions.	Add additional residential uses to the existing CRCDD, relocate CRCDD boundaries northward, and establish a new Center Village Overlay District.	Zoning Commission, Township Trustees, Consultant	Short-term
Manage commercial development pressure strategically.	Permit small-scale cottage businesses within 1,000 feet of State Route 605 and eastern Center Village Road, with high-quality design standards in overlay districts.	Zoning Commission, Township Trustees, Consultant	Short-term
Conduct a comprehensive overlay district analysis.	Host public input sessions, perform impact assessments, and evaluate natural features and topography to determine optimal land use designations.	Harlem Township Trustees, Consultant	Short-term
Preserve Township independence through partnerships.	Establish ongoing dialogue with neighboring municipalities to identify shared goals and collaborative opportunities, including potential non-annexation agreements.	Township Trustees	Short-term
Explore expanded local governance authority.	Research benefits of limited home rule status through discussions with county agencies, public engagement, and comprehensive cost-benefit analysis.	Township Trustees	Medium-term
Develop comprehensive open space protection.	Create and implement a Township-wide open space preservation program with clear policies and procedures.	Township Trustees, Consultant	Medium-term

## Intentional Growth and Development

Recommendation	Action Items	Responsible Party	Timeframe
Leverage economic development tools to guide growth.	Evaluate and implement JEDDs, TIFs, CEDAs, and NCAs.	Township Trustees, Consultant, Municipal Partner	Medium-term
Direct growth to infrastructure-ready areas.	Use overlay districts and incentive programs to concentrate development in areas with planned sewer infrastructure, preventing sprawl.	Zoning Commission, Township Trustees, Consultant	Medium-term
Diversify housing options.	Permit housing types that support a multigenerational community, including accessory dwelling units and aging-in-place options.	Zoning Commission, Township Trustees	Medium-term
Enable agritourism development.	Update the zoning code to explicitly permit agritourism activities in appropriate districts.	Zoning Commission, Township Trustees	Short-term
Foster small business growth.	Connect local entrepreneurs with business development resources and support services.	Township Trustees	Medium-term
Consider the creation of a CRA.	Upon reaching 5,000 residents, evaluate implementing a CRA to incentivize local business development.	Township Trustees, Consultant	Long-term
Attract compatible businesses and industries.	Identify and target industries aligned with the Township's vision while creating appropriate zoning regulations and development standards.	Zoning Commission, Township Trustees, Consultant	Long-term
Establish a development partnership entity.	Establish a CIC to strategically acquire key parcels within the Township.	Township Trustees	Long-term



## Maintain Healthy Internal and External Relationships

Recommendation	Action Items	Responsible Party	Timeframe
Enhance resident participation and communication.	Implement diverse communication strategies, including methods suggested by residents during community meetings.	Township Trustees	Short-term
Foster regional collaboration.	Monitor surrounding communities' planning initiatives, zoning changes, and development patterns to identify trends and collaborative opportunities.	Township Trustees, Consultant	Short-term
Build relationships with major landowners.	Increase direct outreach to large property owners to understand their development intentions and plans.	Township Trustees	Medium-term
Coordinate infrastructure planning and communication.	Continue regular meetings with Delaware County Regional Sewer District, Del-Co, County Engineers, and other agencies while providing transparent updates to residents.	Township Trustees, Consultant	Short-term

## Safety and Wellbeing

Recommendation	Action Items	Responsible Party	Timeframe
Expand public safety services with community growth.	Partner with the fire department to assess and address evolving needs in equipment, staffing, facilities, and service delivery.	Township Trustees, Township Fire Department, Consultant	Medium-term
Develop a safe multimodal transportation network.	Require multimodal infrastructure in all new developments, create connectivity requirements, and link mixed-use paths to Center Village.	Zoning Commission, Township Trustees, Consultant	Medium-term
Plan for Township facility expansion.	Assess future staffing requirements, including a potential Township administrator position, and evaluate current administrative buildings, storage facilities, and cemetery infrastructure needs.	Township Trustees, Consultant	Medium-term

## Community Identity and Pride

Recommendation	Action Items	Responsible Party	Timeframe
Establish a vibrant Village Center.	Launch a comprehensive Center Village initiative, including boundary definition, design guidelines, resident engagement, and phased implementation strategy.	Township Trustees, Consultant	Short-term
Establish distinctive Township branding.	Develop updated Township brand identity and implement a coordinated wayfinding signage system to enhance community recognition.	Township Trustees, Consultant	Short-term
Partner with heritage organizations.	Partner with Harlem Township Heritage Association and community organizations to develop authentic branding, support Village Center improvements, and preserve local history.	Township Trustees, Community Groups	Short-term
Implement heritage-inspired design standards.	Establish and implement design guidelines that create a distinctive Harlem Township aesthetic, differentiating the community from neighboring areas while reinforcing its unique local character.	Zoning Commission, Township Trustees, Consultant	Medium-term

# APPENDIX A

## Aberlin Springs, Warren County, Ohio

Aberlin Springs represents an innovative "Farm to Table Living" development concept that successfully integrates agricultural operations with residential community planning. The project transforms a family farm into a working agricultural community while preserving the land's productive capacity and creating a unique living experience for residents.

The development originated from the retirement home of Leslie Aberlin's parents, who maintained sheep on the property and constructed a large chalet-style residence along with smaller family residences. When only Ms. Aberlin's mother remained on the property, the vision emerged to relocate Pendragon Homes, Ms. Aberlin's custom building company of 20 years, to the site and develop a residential community centered around active farming operations. This approach represents a creative solution for maintaining agricultural land use while addressing housing needs.

The farm operations utilize regenerative agricultural practices developed and promoted by Joel Salatin, ensuring sustainable land management that benefits both the environment and the community.



From Aberlin Springs

The working farm is managed by three dedicated farmers, with one residing in the original farm residence. The agricultural infrastructure includes two high-wall hoop houses that extend the growing season, supporting year-round production

capabilities. The farm maintains a diverse livestock population including pigs and piglets, a donkey, sheep, goats, and chickens, creating a comprehensive agricultural ecosystem.

All residents participate in the farm's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program through a mandatory annual membership costing \$850. This arrangement ensures consistent support for the agricultural operations while providing residents with fresh, locally-grown produce. The Farm Market serves as the distribution point for CSA members and is also open to the public during scheduled seasonal events. Additional farm products including meat, eggs, and milk are available for purchase beyond the basic CSA membership.

The development's design philosophy prioritizes the agricultural landscape, with roads configured as single-sided streets ensuring that all homes face the active farmland. This design choice maintains visual connection between residents and the working farm while preserving the rural character of the community. Courtyard-style homes are positioned on smaller lots that face each other and back up to preserved wooded areas, creating intimate neighborhood spaces while maintaining the overall farm setting.

Community amenities include a fishing pond, basketball court, and swimming pool, providing recreational opportunities that complement the rural lifestyle. The development operates under a homeowners association structure with associated fees for maintenance of common areas and amenities.

All homes in Aberlin Springs are custom-built by Pendragon Homes, ensuring quality construction while allowing for individual customization. The development does not impose strict architectural guidelines for building materials or styles, permitting residents to create homes that reflect their personal





Aberlin Springs - From Bayer Becker - Professional Design Consultants

preferences while maintaining overall community cohesion through the custom building process. Residents have the option to participate directly in farm work if they choose, fostering deeper connection with the agricultural operations. Additionally, those who prefer not to have crop plants on their individual lots can rent space within the farm for personal growing projects, accommodating varying levels of agricultural interest among residents.

Despite its rural character and secluded feeling among rolling meadows and surrounding woodlands, Aberlin Springs maintains convenient access to urban amenities. The development is located within a couple of miles of major retail establishments like Target and provides easy access to entertainment venues such as Kings Island and Interstate 71, offering residents the benefits of rural living without sacrificing urban conveniences.

The Aberlin Springs concept presents a replicable model for agricultural land preservation and rural community development. This approach may be particularly suitable for small farms under 150 acres where current owners no longer actively farm but wish to maintain the land's agricultural function. The model demonstrates how residential development can support rather than replace agricultural operations, creating sustainable communities that preserve working landscapes while meeting housing demand.

The success of this project in Warren County suggests that similar developments could be viable in other agricultural areas where local government officials are supportive of innovative land use approaches that balance development needs with agricultural preservation goals.

## Pinnacle, Grove City, Ohio

Pinnacle is a mixed-use community development in Grove City designed as a planned unit development built around a golf course and adjacent to existing shopping areas. The project represents a strategic approach to community growth that creates a distinct neighborhood separate from the original city. The intention behind this development was to grow a new community in an expanding city while leveraging the appeal of recreational amenities and convenient commercial access.

The city adopted a flexible architectural philosophy for the development, allowing each area within Pinnacle to develop with its own unique character rather than enforcing a uniform design standard across the entire project. This approach has proven successful, resulting in a diverse housing mix that includes apartments, condominiums, senior housing, and single-family homes. Grove City officials expressed satisfaction with both the concept and the final result, noting how the varied housing types serve different demographic needs within the community.

## Appendix A: Community Site Visits

The development features comprehensive infrastructure that was jointly developed by the city and private developers. This includes roads, walking paths, parks, and recreational facilities all centered around the golf course that serves as the community's focal point. A notable infrastructure requirement was that developers purchase new fire apparatus to serve the area, which was funded through Tax Increment Financing, though this does redirect some tax revenue away from other safety services.

**Economic Development Tools:** The project utilized multiple financing and development mechanisms:

- Planned Unit Development (PUD)
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
- New Community Authority (NCA)
- Community Reinvestment Area (CRA)
- Architectural Review Board (ARB) oversight



Home in Pinnacle & a section of the Pinnacle development from 3 Pillar Homes

The Pinnacle development has successfully expanded Grove City's tax base while addressing housing demand across multiple demographics and age groups. The project demonstrates effective public-private collaboration, where developer vision was guided by municipal planning to benefit both parties while maintaining the development's distinct identity separate from the original city character. The key lesson from this project is the value of using developer ideas with city guidance to create mutually beneficial outcomes that address critical housing needs. By positioning the project as separate from the original Grove City, it was able to establish its own unique look and feel while contributing to the broader community's growth and economic stability.

### Beulah Park, Grove City, Ohio

Beulah Park represents a strategic redevelopment project in Grove City designed to repurpose a historic property into a walkable community that connects with the original downtown area of Grove City. The project's primary intention was to create a bridge between new development and the city's historic core, fostering economic growth while preserving the community's heritage and character.

Similar to other Grove City developments, the city adopted a flexible architectural approach that allows each area to develop with its own unique character through planned unit development. This philosophy has proven successful at Beulah Park, resulting in a diverse mix of housing types including apartments, condominiums, and single-family homes. City officials have expressed satisfaction with both the development concept and its execution, particularly noting how the project has created its own park and walking path system that seamlessly connects to Grove City's downtown area.

The infrastructure development involved a collaborative approach between the city and private developers. While roads were constructed by the developer, the walking paths were strategically integrated into the city's existing pedestrian network to ensure connectivity with the historic downtown. As with other major developments in Grove City,



## Appendix A: Community Site Visits

the city required developers to purchase new fire apparatus for the area, funded through Tax Increment Financing, though this does redirect some tax revenue from other safety services.

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The Beulah Park development demonstrates how historic preservation can be successfully integrated with modern community planning. By connecting the new residential community directly to the original downtown, the project has increased foot traffic and population density that supports local businesses and contributes to downtown economic vitality. The key lesson from this project is the importance of leveraging a property's historical significance in the design process to create a development that residents find appealing and culturally meaningful. The successful integration of new development with existing community assets shows how thoughtful planning can honor the past while meeting contemporary housing needs and economic development goals.

### Jerome Village, Jerome Township, Union County, Ohio

Jerome Village represents a large-scale mixed-use development project originally proposed by Nationwide Realty Investors and Highland Management Group in 2006. The project has undergone substantial planning and development phases over nearly two decades, establishing itself as a major community development initiative in Jerome Township. The original approved plan encompassed a comprehensive mixed-use development spanning 1,350 acres with residential, commercial, and public facilities designed to create a complete community environment.

The initial development program included 1,500 single-family housing units and 700 condominium and townhouse units, providing housing for approximately 2,200 households. The plan allocated 544 acres for open space preservation, ensuring that nearly 40 percent of the total development area would remain undeveloped to maintain community character and provide recreational opportunities.

Commercial development included 720,000 square feet of retail and commercial space and 500,000 square feet of office space. Public facilities were designated 77,000 square feet to accommodate community services, with 37 acres designated for school facilities across two sites to serve the anticipated residential population.

The transition from planning to implementation began in 2010 when Phase 1 development commenced following a crucial infrastructure agreement. Marysville City Council authorized a service agreement to provide water and sewer services to the Jerome Village Community Authority, establishing the essential utility infrastructure necessary for development to proceed. At this stage, the project scope had expanded to encompass 1,585 acres, representing an increase of 235 acres from the original 2006 plan. The project's evolution from 1,350 to 1,585 acres illustrates the dynamic nature of large-scale planning and the importance of flexibility in accommodating changing market conditions over extended timeframes.

Jerome Village provides essential community amenities, including a restaurant located within the development and a community center that serves as a focal point for resident activities and gatherings. While the development maintains a primarily residential character, these amenities create gathering spaces that foster community interaction and provide convenient services for residents.

The development benefits significantly from its proximity to Dublin, which provides residents with easy access to additional shopping, dining,



## Appendix A: Community Site Visits

entertainment, and professional services. This strategic location allows Jerome Village to maintain its residential community focus while ensuring that residents have convenient access to the broader range of amenities and conveniences available in the Dublin area.

Jerome Village features a variety of neighborhoods that collectively create a cohesive yet diverse community environment. All neighborhoods within the development embrace high-quality architecture principles and actively encourage “front porch living”, fostering neighborly interactions and community engagement. The design philosophy emphasizes walkability throughout the development, connecting residential areas with commercial and recreational amenities through pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and pathways.

To ensure community diversity while maintaining overall cohesion, each neighborhood incorporates distinct features that differentiate it from others within the development. This differentiation is achieved through variations in lot sizes, partnerships with different builders, and diverse price ranges

that accommodate various income levels and housing preferences. This approach creates distinct neighborhood identities while supporting the broader community vision of inclusive, mixed-income residential development.

Jerome Village exemplifies modern large-scale community development emphasizing mixed-use planning and comprehensive services. The nearly two-decade development timeline demonstrates the complexity of major projects and the importance of sustained commitment from developers, local government, and community stakeholders.

The project represents significant investment in Jerome Township's growth, with potential to substantially increase local population and economic activity. The mixed-use design supports sustainable development by reducing transportation needs and creating walkable environments where residents can live, work, and access services within a single development.

Based on their experience with large-scale developments like Jerome Village, Jerome Township



Jerome Village Community Center – from Jerome Village

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representatives offer the following guidance for other communities considering similar projects:

Jerome Township emphasizes the critical importance of maintaining both a well-thought-out Comprehensive Plan and Strategic Plan. The township adopted an updated Comprehensive Plan on June 17, 2025, replacing their previous plan from 2008, demonstrating their commitment to keeping planning documents current and relevant to changing conditions.

Building strong partnerships with other entities is essential for successful development management. Jerome Township recommends establishing collaborative relationships with cities, regional planning organizations, school districts, and county governments to ensure coordinated development approaches and shared resource utilization.

Township representatives stress that sewer infrastructure locations significantly dictate development patterns and should be strategically planned to support desired growth outcomes. Effective meeting management requires strict adherence to agendas, with off-topic questions and comments directed to appropriate forums and times. This approach protects all participants and ensures productive discussions. The Township recommends formalizing meetings through proper address protocols, using last names and titles, and maintaining attorney presence at all trustee meetings.

As development accelerates, having a dedicated Zoning Inspector with regular office hours and a dedicated workspace becomes crucial. Full-time staffing is preferable to handle increased development activity and ensure consistent code enforcement and application review.

Jerome Township recommends making zoning changes incrementally through amendments rather than comprehensive overhauls of entire zoning resolutions. This approach allows for careful consideration of impacts and maintains regulatory

stability. They caution that enforcement of building materials specifications or business hours can become difficult and should be limited in zoning resolutions. Requirements that can be placed on site maps, such as landscaping specifications, are easier to control and enforce.

### Pataskala, Ohio

Pataskala prominently displays signage at city borders identifying itself as a "Right to Farm Community," reflecting an agricultural protection policy implemented by the current mayor. This designation protects local farmers from nuisance lawsuits that could arise from normal agricultural operations, such as manure spreading adjacent to residential subdivisions.

The protection mechanism requires farmers to apply every four years for agricultural protection district status, which must then be approved by city council. Once approved, this designation allows farmers to continue their agricultural operations without fear of legal challenges from neighboring residential developments. This proactive approach demonstrates Pataskala's commitment to preserving agricultural land use and supporting farming operations within an increasingly developed urban environment.

Clustered Residential Conservation Districts, where at least 50% percent of the land area is preserved as open space were also discussed. Pataskala recognizes this approach as beneficial because it limits impacts on natural resources by preserving existing woods, wetlands, and other environmental features. Additionally, clustering provides significant maintenance advantages through reduced infrastructure requirements. When homes are positioned closer together, developments require fewer roads, fewer water lines, and fewer sewer lines, resulting in lower construction costs and reduced ongoing maintenance expenses for the community.

However, Pataskala acknowledges a significant challenge when applying clustering to former agricultural land. If the development site was

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previously a farm field, there will likely be very few existing trees or natural features to preserve. This creates a situation where the required open space lacks ecological value and may simply become areas that require regular mowing without providing meaningful environmental or community benefits.

A potential solution to this challenge is the implementation of agri-communities, such as the Aberlin Springs community. By integrating farming operations into conservation developments, communities can ensure that preserved areas contribute to food production while maintaining the rural residential character that makes these developments attractive to residents. This approach transforms potentially vacant open space into productive agricultural land that provides both environmental and economic benefits to the community. Additionally, where trees and wetlands do exist, strict provisions should be followed to protect these features.

Pataskala has implemented requirements for pedestrian infrastructure in commercial developments, requiring businesses such as those on Broad Street to install eight-foot paths in front of their buildings. However, this piecemeal approach can result in disconnected path segments that do not provide meaningful connectivity for pedestrians.

To address this challenge, the city has established a "fee in lieu" program that allows developers to make financial contributions instead of installing paths when the paths would not connect to existing pedestrian networks. For example, if installing a path costs a developer \$1,000 but the path would not connect to other walkways, the developer can instead contribute \$1,000 to a city fund dedicated to filling gaps in the pedestrian network.

This fund allows the city to strategically invest in pedestrian infrastructure improvements that create meaningful connections, such as eliminating gaps where people currently must walk on streets or enhancing connectivity to parks and other community amenities. The city has recently

conducted a resident survey to gather input on pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure priorities, indicating ongoing commitment to improving walkability and cycling opportunities throughout the community.

City representatives acknowledge a common issue found in many comprehensive plans where communities express a desire to maintain "rural architecture" without clearly defining what that means in practical terms. The city points to a gas station on Broad Street that was designed to look like a barn as an example of attempting to maintain rural character, but questions whether requiring all buildings to adopt barn-like architecture is appropriate or desirable.

The challenge lies in translating the general desire for rural character into specific, actionable guidelines that can be used by decision-making bodies. Without clear criteria, these boards lack the tools necessary to evaluate development proposals against community character goals. City representatives emphasize the need for detailed guidelines that function as a checklist, allowing zoning officials to consistently apply rural character standards while providing developers with clear expectations for design requirements.

This experience highlights the importance of moving beyond vague aspirational language in comprehensive plans to develop specific architectural and design standards that can be practically implemented and enforced in a growing community.

### West Clay, Carmel, Indiana

The Village of West Clay in Carmel, Indiana, offers a compelling model for rural communities grappling with growth pressures. This 25-year-old planned community demonstrates how thoughtful, comprehensive development can accommodate significant growth while maintaining community character and property values.

West Clay represents a unique governance model as a Planned Urban Development (PUD) within the City



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of Carmel. Home to approximately 5,000 residents living in nearly 2,000 homes across 780 acres, the community spans the economic spectrum from apartments to \$3 million residences. Created through city ordinance as essentially a "city within a city," West Clay operates with Carmel maintaining major infrastructure like streets, sewers, and water systems, while the community manages everything else through a homeowners association structure.



Outdoor Community Space from the Village of West Clay

The community's development began in 1999, representing the first Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) in Indiana. This comprehensive planning approach integrated all aspects of community life from the outset, creating a walkable environment where residents can access parks, pools, restaurants, professional services, and retail within a 10-minute walk from any home. The commercial center houses everything from doctors and restaurants to banks and an award-winning independent bookstore.

West Clay's success stems largely from its unwavering commitment to architectural integrity and design standards. Every home must conform to historical architectural styles from the 1820s to the 1920s, including Italianate, Gothic, Georgian, and Craftsman designs. These standards extend beyond mere facades to require 360-degree architectural consistency, with approximately half the homes featuring rear-loading garages accessed by alleys to maintain the community's pedestrian-friendly character.

The community maintains these standards through a detailed architectural review process where residents must obtain approval for any exterior modifications. This rigorous oversight has occasionally required legal action to enforce compliance, but maintaining these standards preserves property values and community character. The commercial buildings follow similar design principles, featuring quaint architecture positioned close to the curb with employee parking relegated to rear areas.

The community's infrastructure represents a significant investment in long-term sustainability. West Clay maintains over 6,000 trees, 21 ponds, 20 miles of sidewalks, 7 miles of walking trails, and comprehensive recreational amenities including multiple pool complexes and sports courts. The stormwater management system is entirely self-contained, with all drainage flowing into community ponds before eventual discharge.

West Clay's financial model demonstrates how planned communities can achieve sustainability without relying on special tax districts or government subsidies. The community operates entirely through homeowner association fees and has invested approximately \$10 million in maintenance over the past five years. A comprehensive reserve study conducted every five years tracks the lifecycle of all community assets, valued at approximately \$100 million. This proactive approach ensures that homes consistently sell for higher prices per square foot than new construction elsewhere in the area, even after 25 years.

The development faced significant opposition from existing residents who preferred the area's rural character. The developers addressed these concerns through an extensive public engagement process that included 10-12 community meetings during the planning phase, plus individual meetings with concerned residents. This process took 12-18 months and required obtaining over 50 variances from county regulations.

The key to overcoming resistance proved to be consistent communication and repeatedly

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demonstrating the vision through detailed plans. By the time the city granted final approval, more supporters than opponents typically attended public meetings. The strategy focused on building majority support while addressing legitimate concerns through comprehensive planning solutions.



West Clay's experience offers several critical insights for communities facing development pressure. First, comprehensive planning from the outset proves far more effective than reactive approaches. The community's success stems from having a complete vision and maintaining discipline in plan implementation, even when builders suggest modifications to accelerate sales or reduce costs. Second, the community demonstrates the importance of establishing strong architectural and design standards before development pressure intensifies. These standards must be detailed, specific, and enforceable. Third, West Clay illustrates how mixed-use development can create economic benefits extending beyond the immediate community, with the commercial center serving residents throughout the broader region and generating economic activity that enhances the area's attractiveness.

West Clay's experience suggests several key strategies. Early engagement with planning authorities proves essential for establishing the legal framework for comprehensive planned development. The community's leaders emphasize selecting developers committed to long-term vision rather than quick profits and realistic assessment of long-term maintenance costs.

West Clay's regional economic impact extends well beyond its borders, serving as the largest single taxpayer in Hamilton County while requiring minimal additional infrastructure investment from the city. The community's success in maintaining and increasing property values creates positive spillover effects for surrounding areas, demonstrating how thoughtful planning can create economic benefits that extend far beyond the immediate development site.



Homes in West Clay from Realtor.com

West Clay's model offers a pathway to accommodate growth while preserving community character and creating long-term economic benefits. The key principles include comprehensive upfront planning, establishment of strong design standards, investment in quality infrastructure, creation of mixed-use centers serving regional needs, and extensive community engagement throughout the development process.