

Planning for Growth and Development: How Should Ohio and Its Communities Respond?

A Guide for Citizen Discussion





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The purpose of this guide is not to be a stand-alone publication nor a scholarly document but rather to accompany citizen forums. The forums themselves are not intended to advocate or espouse a position but rather to assist citizens to: 1) understand this complex issue; 2) examine some approaches to address the issue; and 3) become engaged in the ongoing public dialogue about the issue.

For more information or to schedule a moderated forum on the topic of this guide, contact an educator at your county office of Ohio State University Extension, or:

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A Guide for Citizen Discussion

Citizens across Ohio view their communities in vastly different ways. What is your community like? What is it like to live there? Are you satisfied with the direction it is taking?

What are the strengths and challenges facing your community? Does your community match up with one of these common profiles in Ohio?

- Is yours one of the growing communities on the fringes of a larger city that faces the growing pains of providing services and infrastructure for a quickly growing population?
- Is yours a rural community with a changing population of citizens?
- Is yours a community near an urbanized area with a growing population that is driving up property values and making it difficult for agriculture to be profitable?
- Is your community a central-city neighborhood or inner-ring suburb with abandoned or deteriorating homes and commercial properties, left behind by businesses and individuals who have moved outward?

The economic and social health of communities across Ohio is the subject of this discussion guide. A few realities bring home the picture:

Trends in Ohio

Details and Examples

Despite the fact that Ohio's population is growing slowly, we continue to develop large amounts of open land.

- ▶ In the 1990s, Ohio ranked 8th in the nation in the amount of land converted to urban uses, but only 22nd in total population growth.

When Ohioans move, it tends to be to a home of greater value and one farther from the center of the metro area.

- ▶ The Cincinnati metro area was typical of other Ohio urban areas, with 80.3 percent of those who moved between 1960 and 1990 choosing a more expensive home and 80.6 percent choosing one farther out from the central city.

There are tensions at the rural-urban interface as farmland disappears in the face of outward development.

- ▶ 92 percent of Ohioans think it is important to preserve farmland, but only 13 percent of Ohioans indicate a preference for living in the city.

The result of the development patterns in Ohio is that many Ohioans are separated from their jobs by long commutes.

- ▶ Typical of many residents near Ohio's large urban areas, 54 percent of Delaware County workers travel into Franklin County to work, with an average commute time of 27.5 minutes.

As citizens, we have the opportunity to reflect and ask ourselves:

- What approach should we take to ensure that Ohio continues to develop in a way that is sustainable generation after generation?
- What can be done to assist economically disadvantaged communities—rural, urban, and suburban?
- What actions should individual citizens, businesses and organizations, local communities, and the state take?

This guide presents a framework for citizen discussion based on three broad approaches that have been proposed to make Ohio's growth and development more sustainable. Each has benefits and drawbacks that citizens can discuss together.

During the forum, the facilitator will help the group look at each approach, one at a time, and discuss the strengths and any drawbacks or tradeoffs involved in the approach. At the end of the forum, participants will consider any individual or joint action they might want to undertake to promote specific initiatives they determine to be important for Ohio's future.

The three approaches are:

Approach #1: Redevelop cities and suburbs to make them more desirable places to live and to work. One goal of this approach is to make existing cities and suburbs more desirable places to live and thereby reduce sprawling development into the countryside.

Approach #2: Preserve land for natural and agricultural uses. One goal of this approach is to increase awareness of the value of "undeveloped" land on the outskirts of our metropolitan areas, thereby reducing the pressure to build on these lands.

Approach #3: Foster a regional approach to growth and development. The goal of this approach is to implement region-wide comprehensive planning that directs development to where it will be most beneficial for the region and least costly to the public sector.

6 Approach #1

Redevelop Cities and Suburbs to Make Them More Desirable Places to Live and to Work

One goal of this approach is to make existing cities and suburbs more desirable places to live and thereby reduce sprawling development into the countryside. When urban areas go into decline it creates a downward spiral: as conditions worsen, people move out; as more people move out, conditions worsen further. The logic of focusing public policy on urban redevelopment is two-fold: it improves the conditions that frequently lead to serious social problems, and it is a more efficient form of development because cities and suburbs have the advantage of existing infrastructure. Such redevelopment will reduce land-use practices that consume undeveloped green space and farmland.

Some Ways to Implement This Approach

Examples

Provide grants, low-interest loans, and other incentives to redevelop abandoned and rundown urban properties.

The **Clean Ohio Fund** has awarded \$80 million dollars in the past two years for clean-up and assessment grants for eligible communities through the Clean Ohio Assistance Fund. While \$10 million dollars will be available this year, other projects await additional funds in this and other private, state, and federal programs.

Develop a range of housing options in each urban and suburban community.

Local officials worked with a developer to create affordable home ownership in affluent Aspen, Colo., where the average cost of homes is more than \$2.2 million. **Benedict Commons** is a downtown housing development that serves local employees earning between \$17,000 and \$38,000 per year. The deed restrictions on the units require that the resale price does not rise faster than the rate of inflation.

Refocus more transportation funding away from new highways toward public transit systems and rebuilding urban streetscapes.

Local governments can help to ensure good accessibility to transit by zoning to **cluster** higher-density residential development around transit stops. Research shows that a minimum of 6-8 residential units per acre is needed to support public transit service. The higher population density of cities and inner-ring suburbs makes public transportation an attractive and economical draw.

Enact measures to ensure good-quality public schools across the state.

- ▶ Two state's efforts to increase school effectiveness: In 1994, **Michigan** changed the source of school funding from a local responsibility, based on property tax levies, to primarily a state responsibility, funded through a variety of state revenue sources, including a 50-percent sales tax increase. In 1988, **Minnesota** enacted statewide open enrollment for all students, making all public schools throughout the state open to any kindergarten through 12th-grade student, provided the receiving school has room and the transfer does not harm racial integration efforts.

Some Questions That Have Been Raised About This Approach

- Urban redevelopment is expensive. Is the benefit worth the cost? Shouldn't these decisions be left to the free market?
- Would enough people use public transit even if it were improved?
- Will developers and local officials commit to affordable housing projects in the face of NIMBY ("not in my back yard") opposition?
- If people simply prefer to live in the country regardless of the quality of city living, will redeveloping the cities have any real impact on sprawl?



8 Approach #2

Preserve Land for Natural and Agricultural Uses

One goal of this approach is to increase awareness of the value of “undeveloped” land on the out-skirts of our metropolitan areas, thereby reducing the economic pressure to build on these lands. Metropolitan areas need open space for its scenic value, for parks and nature preserves, for ecological benefits, and for the production of agricultural items for local consumption. While the public generally values open space for scenic and recreational purposes, it has only recently begun to value the ecological benefits. Preserving farm land near urban areas is made easier if the economic viability of farms can be increased by growing products that can be sold locally or to niche markets.

Some Ways to Implement This Approach

Examples

Expand park systems.

- ▶ In Oregon, Portland’s **Parks 2020 Vision** seeks to build on the beauty of Portland with a plan and a commitment to acquiring 1,870 acres of parkland. The vision also seeks to provide 100 new sports fields, build six new full-service community centers, provide 150 additional miles of trails, and complete the 40-Mile Loop Trail and create “green connections” along each designated main street in the city.

Increase support for the preservation of natural places.

- ▶ In northeast Ohio, the **Trust for Public Land** is expanding the vision held by the region’s forefathers by creating the Western Reserve Emerald Necklace of parks and protected lands to extend from the headwaters of the Grand, Cuyahoga, and Chagrin rivers in the east to the Black and Vermilion rivers in the west through the Tuscarawas River valley in the south.

Reduce the cost of farmland ownership.

- ▶ The **Clean Ohio Fund** has provided state tax money for the purchase of development rights related to quality farmland. Farmers who participate in this program commit their land to remain agricultural and benefit financially without needing to sell their farmland for retirement money or to pay increased property taxes as nearby development increases property values. Some feel an increase in the amount of money dedicated to this fund would further benefit Ohio by reducing sprawl.

Assist farmers seeking to develop direct-market agriculture in metropolitan areas.

- ▶ **Isles, Inc.**, a community development corporation in Trenton, N.J., has aggressively taken on urban agriculture by establishing 65 garden sites throughout the city that produce 120,000 pounds of food annually. This effort is a vehicle to help Isles, Inc., achieve its mission of “fostering more self-sufficient families in sustainable communities.”

Some Questions That Have Been Raised About This Approach

- If market forces drive up the value of undeveloped land near urban areas, doesn't it make economic sense to develop it, not restrict it to less valuable uses?
- Because township governments depend on property taxes, isn't it only logical that township trustees favor development more than parks and farming?
- Isn't locally produced food more expensive, and consequently won't there always be a limited market for it?
- If people like to look at open spaces, shouldn't a way be found so they would pay to keep that land from being developed?



Foster a Regional Approach to Growth and Development

The goal of this approach is to implement region-wide comprehensive planning that directs development to where it will be most beneficial for the region and least costly to the public sector. Current development patterns are creating fiscal hardships for local governments in both growing and declining communities. Growing communities on the fringe need to make large public expenditures for new infrastructure and schools; declining jurisdictions lose the tax base to maintain public services. Since Ohio is a “home-rule” state, this approach would require a change in state policy to either permit, encourage, or require region-wide planning. Extensive public participation in the development of comprehensive plans can make this approach successful.

Some Ways to Implement This Approach

Examples

Enact new state laws requiring region-wide comprehensive planning consistent with state guidelines.

▶ **The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (2004)** coordinates planning activities and establishes statewide planning objectives. A State Plan Policy Map serves as the underlying land-use planning and management framework that directs funding, infrastructure improvements, and preservation for programs throughout New Jersey.

Increase the capacity of local planning and zoning officials through increased training.

▶ **The Maryland Department of Planning (MDP)**, in conjunction with the University of Maryland, offers a two-day planning course for volunteer planning commissioners, zoning-board members, real-estate practitioners, elected and appointed officials, and others responsible for making decisions about future growth and development in localities across Maryland. Upon completion of the course, participants receive a certificate from the University of Maryland and MDP.

Enact state legislation to allow local communities to collect developer impact fees to cover the cost of the increased services required by new developments.

▶ In the 1990s, local studies showed that to meet the infrastructure needs of new development, **Alpharetta, Ga.**, would need to raise \$90 million more than projected total revenues from all sources. Options included raising property taxes on all development, deferring maintenance, diverting general funds, accepting congestion of facilities, or charging impact fees. The city chose impact fees. Fears that impact fees would dampen development demand never materialized.

Reduce competition between local governments for tax base by instituting some form of tax sharing.

▶ In the **Twin Cities** area of Minnesota, local communities share, on a proportional basis, the increased tax benefits that come from development in any of their communities. This approach reduces sprawl because it takes away expensive competition between communities within the region so that all benefit from new development in targeted areas.

Reduce the duplication of government services within a region to lessen the tax burden on individual communities.

▶ **Pennsylvania** provides grant funds to promote more efficient and effective delivery of municipal services on a cooperative basis. Two or more local governments are eligible for these funds for such efforts as combined police records administration, shared personnel activities, joint ownership of equipment, or starting a council of governments.

Some Questions That Have Been Raised About This Approach

- If current development patterns reflect what individuals want, isn't that more important than what planners want?
- Won't planning development create a disruption in the market that will lead to economic decline for a region?
- Shouldn't local planning and zoning officials be responsive to developers who want to invest in their communities?
- Won't mandating planning and tax sharing undermine home rule for local communities and lead to a loss of their unique identities?





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