

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following document is the Knox County Comprehensive Plan Update, formally adopted by the Board of Commissioners on _____, 2018 (the “Plan Update”). This document provides a snapshot of Knox County, Ohio, in early 2018, and sets forth a blueprint for a realistic vision for Knox County’s future development, health and environment during the next five to ten years.

A thorough analysis of aspects of Knox County’s existing conditions appear on the following pages, including land use and population growth maps, development “hot spots,” and transportation and bike path corridors, among others. The existing conditions in each chapter then inform the respective goals, strategies, and target outcomes set forth to guide Knox County decision-makers. The following is a summary of key plan considerations.

Key Plan Considerations

- **Manufacturing** represents a significant portion of Knox County’s economy; this sector of the economy generally pays good wages and benefits, but future technologies are expected to impact this sector, among others.
- For its population and location, Knox County has remarkably strong assets in its primary, secondary, and post-secondary **educational institutions**; these resources will be integral in assisting employees and businesses with coming changes in the workforce.
- Knox County’s **workforce is less resilient** to fast-paced economic changes; more than 40 percent of the county’s residents have only a high school education, limiting their ability to adapt to a highly technological workplace.
- With more than half of the County classified as prime farmland, **agriculture** will continue to be a major economic sector in the County.
- As **development pressures increase within the Columbus Region**, a part of which Knox County is considered, we should be mindful of the fiscal impacts of different types of development and how they impact our rural character and environment.
- With single-family homes the predominant housing type in Knox County, we should consider **diversifying our community’s housing stock** in the face of changing population demographics or financial burdens.
- A very popular amenity in Knox County are its **parks and trails**, which should continue to be expanded upon to improve quality of life throughout the County as well as bolster an inclusive and strategic approach to **tourism**.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 The Knox County Regional Planning Commission and Planning, Generally
- 1.1.2 Why does Knox County Plan for Different Land Uses, and Where they are Located?
- 1.1.3 What is a Comprehensive Plan, Why is it updated, and Why does it matter?
- 1.2 Knox County's Comprehensive Plan – 1998
- 1.3 Knox County's Comprehensive Plan Updates – 2006 and 2012

CHAPTER 2: PLAN FRAMEWORK AND PRINCIPLES

- 2.1. Planning Process
- 2.2 Plan Framework
- 2.3 Planning Principles

CHAPTER 3: ENSURE RESPONSIBLE GROWTH

- 3.1. VISION STATEMENT
- 3.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS
 - 3.2.1 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats ("SWOT") Analysis
- 3.3 GOALS AND STRATEGIES
 - 3.3.1 GOAL: Help Create *Good Jobs*
 - 3.3.1 STRATEGY: Avoid Offering Financial Incentives to Projects Unless They Commit to *Good Jobs*
 - 3.3.2 GOAL: Improve the County's Economic Diversity
 - 3.3.2 STRATEGY: Seed and Cultivate Innovation and Entrepreneurship
 - 3.3.3 GOAL: Control the Scale and Scope of Development
 - 3.3.3A STRATEGY: Encourage Development in *Areas Already on the Grid*
 - 3.3.3B STRATEGY: Create an Inventory of Shovel Ready Sites
 - 3.3.4 GOAL: Continue to promote tourism
 - 3.3.4 STRATEGY: Develop an Inclusive Tourism Strategy Featuring a Shared Services Approach
 - 3.3.5 GOAL: Link Transportation Planning to Economic Development
 - 3.3.5 STRATEGY: Participate fully in the Columbus Region's CORPO Process

CHAPTER 4: PRIORITIZE EDUCATION

4.1 VISION STATEMENT

4.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

4.3 GOALS AND STRATEGIES

4.3.1 GOAL: Break Down Silos

4.3.1 STRATEGY: Who's on the Bus?

4.3.2 GOAL: Implement the WorkDev Mission

4.3.2 STRATEGY: Help Businesses and Job-seekers

4.3.3 GOAL: Instill Worker Pride

4.3.3 STRATEGY: There is Pride and Dignity in Full-time Employment

4.3.4 GOAL: Make Well-informed Local Workforce Development Policies

4.3.4 STRATEGY: Data Drives WorkDev Actions

CHAPTER 5: STRENGTHENING QUALITY OF LIFE

5.1. VISION STATEMENT

5.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

5.3 GOALS AND STRATEGIES

5.3.1 GOAL: Diversify the County's Housing Stock

5.3.1 STRATEGY: Study the possible implementation of Residential Building Codes for Knox County

5.3.2 GOAL: Improve Health Outcomes Related to Opioid Use and Abuse

5.3.2 STRATEGY: Support Ongoing KSAAT Efforts

5.3.3 GOAL: County Parks and Trails to Meet the Needs of Knox County Residents and Visitors

5.3.3 STRATEGY: Prioritize Capital Improvement Projects for Parks and Trails

Chapter 6: Preserve Environmental Character

6.1 Vision Statement

6.2 Existing Conditions

6.3 Goals and Strategies

6.3.1 GOAL: Seek to Understand the Fiscal Impacts of Land Uses

- 6.3.1 STRATEGY: Update the *Cost of Community Services Study*
- 6.3.2 GOAL: Educate Knox County Residents about Land Use and Development Issues
- 6.3.2 STRATEGY: Mitigate Conflicts and Educate Stakeholders as to Realities of Living in an Agricultural Community
- 6.3.3 GOAL: Conduct a Comprehensive Review and Update of County Land Use Regulations
- 6.3.3A STRATEGY: Incorporate Viewshed Analyses into Local Subdivision Rules
- 6.3.3B STRATEGY: Update Subdivision Design Standards and Employ Incentives Promoting Conservation of Open Space and Agricultural Land
- 6.3.3C STRATEGY: Review Township Zoning Codes and Encourage Rural Development and Design Options
- 6.3.3D STRATEGY: Develop Templates and Encourage Township-level Regulatory Farmland Preservation Efforts
- 6.3.3E STRATEGY: Develop a *Plan of Future Land Use Map* and Encourage Residential Development Accordingly
- 6.3.3F STRATEGY: Develop a County Farmland Preservation Plan

<u>Exhibits:</u>	<u>Page</u>
Figure 2:1 Map of Knox County, Ohio	8
Figure 2:2 - Knox County's relative location and inclusion in the 11-county Columbus Region	10
Table 2:1 - 2017 Plan Update Steering Committee Members	11
Table 2:2 - 2017 Plan Update Steering Committee Meetings	12
Table 2:3 – Plan Principles, Goals, and Strategies	14-15
Figure 3:1 – Land uses in Knox County, Ohio	21
Figure 3:2 – Change in Population by Age Cohort in Knox County 2010-2015	22
Figure 3:3 – Knox County/Ohio Racial Makeup 2010-2015	23
Table 3:1- Knox County Housing Tenure	24
Figure 3:4 – Where Knox County Workers Daily Commute <i>From</i>	25
Figure 3:5 – Where Knox County Workers Daily Commute <i>To</i>	26
Figure 3:6 – Compare Poverty Level with Wages Paid in Knox County	28
Table 3:2 – Top 20 Most Common Job Types in Knox County	29
Table 3:3 – Top Job Gains, Ranked by Growth, in Knox County (2010 – 2017)	31
Table 3:4 - Top 25 Employers in Knox County (2017)	33

Table 3:5 – Top Economic Base Occupations in Knox County	34
Table 3:6 – Economic Base Job Losses, Ranked by Decline, in Knox County (2010 – 2017)	35
Table 3:7 - Siemens Energy, Inc. lay-off demographics	36
Table 3:8 – Education level of Knox County residents 25 years and over, 2016 (39,473 pop.)	36
Figure 3:7 – think[box] Fab Lab makerspace, Case Western Reserve University	46
Figure 3:8 – Columbus Idea Foundry	47
Figure 3:9- Challenges, Opportunities, Pressure to Change	51
Figure 3:10- Population Growth 2015-2040	54
Figure 3:11- Job Growth 2015-2040	54
Table 3:9 – Water and Sewer Services, Knox County	55
Figure 3:12 – Ariel-Foundation Park	63
Figure 3:13 – Example: planning concept for retail space flanking alley, Blake Street, Denver	65
Figure 3:14 – Ohio’s Rural Transportation Planning Organizations	67
Table 3:10 – Top Five Priority Infrastructure Projects (2017 – 2022)	69
Figure 4:1 – Local School District Map, Knox County	75
Table 4:1 – School District Data, 2016-2017	76
Table 4:2 – Student Data by School District, 2016-2017	76
Figure 4:2: Knox Technical Center Adult Enrollment for Career Training Programs, 2017	78
Figure 4:3 – Automation Potential by Type of Work	88
Table 4:3 – Trucking Jobs in Knox County, 2010 and 2017	88
Figure 5:1 Housing and Transportation Costs, based on Income, Knox County, 2017	96
Table 5:1 – Housing Type, Knox County (2016)	97
Table 5:2 – Knox County, Number of Unintentional Drug Overdose Deaths	100
Figure 5:2 – Unintentional Drug Overdose Death Rate by County, 2011-2016	101
Figure 5:3- 2015 Annual Use of Illicit Substances Reported by Students	102
Figure 5:4- 2015 Percentage of Students reporting NOT using Illicit Substances	102
Table 5:3 – Knox County Park District – Park locations	103
Figure 5:5- Mount Vernon Designated Bicycle Routes	106
Figure 5:6 – Existing Knox County Bikeways	107
Figure 5:7 – Knox County’s Connections to Regional Bikeways	108
Figure 6:1 – Existing Land Use	112
Figure 6:2 – Prime and Important Farmland, 2016	114

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 The Knox County Regional Planning Commission and Planning, Generally

The Knox County Board of Commissioners created the Knox County Regional Planning Commission (“RPC”) in 1971 to plan and coordinate land use and development across Knox County to improve the health, safety and welfare of its citizens. The Planning Commission produces studies, maps, plans and makes recommendations regarding Knox County’s development. The work of the Planning Commission may include setting county-wide goals, analyzing economic and social conditions, identifying natural resources and planning for long-range capital projects. The Commission may provide planning assistance to governmental units within Knox County and help coordinate planning within the larger region (Meck, et al., 2017).

One of the important services performed by the RPC is the platting of subdivided parcels in unincorporated parts of Knox County. In Ohio, land parcels in unincorporated townships may be subdivided so long as they receive the approval of a subdivision plat by the respective RPC.¹ Such approval by the RPC is not required in the following instances: if the subdivision of land within an unincorporated area involves parcels *each more than five acres*; if the parcels are exchanged among adjacent owners and will not create new building sites; if the subdivision of parcels is done for private streets serving industrial end users; or if a parcel was already subdivided and further involves no more than five lots (Riehl, 2017).

Townships choosing to regulate land use within their jurisdictions – using zoning codes – are required to base their regulations *in accordance with comprehensive planning* by the RPC. Although current law in Ohio states that independently prepared comprehensive plans (e.g., this Plan Update) need not be adopted separately by each zoned township, the better approach for partner townships is to each adopt this stand-alone Plan Update, separate from their zoning resolutions (Meck, et al., 2017 p. 127). This will be discussed in more detail below.

It has been the case recently that municipalities in Knox County have completed their own **professionally prepared plans**, outside the scope of this Plan Update. Both the Village of Fredericktown and the City of Mount Vernon undertook such professional planning efforts during the past year.

¹ The procedure for approving platting of subdivided parcels requires the RPC to schedule a meeting once a subdivision plat has been submitted; the RPC meeting to approve or refuse to approve the plat must occur within 30 days. If the RPC refuses to approve a subdivision plat, the individual seeking the subdivision plat appeals the decision in the Knox County Common Pleas Court. Note that the township trustees *cannot* appeal the RPC’s refusal decision in this way (Riehl, 2017).

In early 2017, the Fredericktown Community Development Foundation commissioned a downtown revitalization study for the Village of Fredericktown. Grants from both the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Community Foundation of Mount Vernon & Knox County covered the cost of the planning work. The resulting plan, written by the non-profit, Columbus-based planning firm, Neighborhood Design Center (link: <http://columbusndc.org/>), surveyed the community as to their hopes and desires for downtown Fredericktown. In response, the planning consultant developed a series of scenarios for renovating and rehabilitating the central business district of Fredericktown along North Main Street. At the time of this writing, the community was identifying the best funding sources to pay for the improvements suggested by the revitalization study. The completed study is available online: <http://knoxadf.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Fredericktown-Downtown-Revitalization-Study-2017.pdf>

Soon thereafter, in late 2017, the Mount Vernon Development Company, a non-profit land development organization active in Mount Vernon, received a grant from the Ariel Foundation to complete a Mount Vernon Downtown Plan. The plan, developed by the Columbus office of OHM Advisors (link: <http://www.ohm-advisors.com/>), is intended to guide future development within Mount Vernon's central core, leveraging more than \$38 million in private investment since 2010 along South Main Street. The planning consultant made use of a steering committee of Mount Vernon stakeholders and decision-makers, as well as facilitated public workshops, to collect residents' feedback on the future of downtown Mount Vernon. The plan will be published in early 2018.

1.1.2 Why does Knox County Plan for Different Land Uses, and Where They are Located?

This Plan Update is intended to identify a set of goals and strategies to advance the entire Knox County community. This Plan Update should address the tensions that arise among neighbors as to who we are as individuals – “what can I do with my land?” – and what kind of community in which we want to live. Land is intimately connected to peoples' livelihoods, sense of self and community, and health and well-being. It is true that with any land use change, *someone will be affected*. For example, one person may have concerns about ecosystem protection and longer-term impacts like damage to wetlands and water quality, and another person may be frustrated that valuable land sits fallow, not yet having been developed by a job-creating heavy industrial end user (Ferguson, et al., 2013).

Land development has fiscal impacts on townships, cities and taxpayers. It is important to point out, both here and elsewhere in this Plan Update, that residential land uses do not pay for themselves, but commercial and industrial development does. Put another way, new residential developments cost local governments more – in road maintenances expenses, and fire and EMS runs, among others – than the offsetting revenues received from residential development in the form of local property, income and sales taxes. Commercial and industrial development tends to bring in more local government revenue than they cost to provide services. This fact has been

shown time and again in various studies performed by different groups across the country over many years (Ferguson, et al., 2013 p. 54). All things being equal, this Plan Update stands for the notion that large-scale residential development opportunities should, when appropriate, be given lower priority or consideration to quality commercial or industrial development within Knox County. Further, when residential development is proposed, on a sufficiently large scale, this Plan Update urges the impacted local governments to create **public-private partnerships** with the respective developers to share in the extensive costs to install and upgrade the required infrastructure. Such partnership structures are readily available under Ohio law and include mechanisms like *New Community Authorities* (Ohio Revised Code (“**ORC**”) Chapter 349) and *tax increment financing* (ORC Sections 5709.40, 5709.41, 5709.73, and 5709.78).

In addition to fiscal impacts, land development can also have an impact on the health and safety of the residents of Knox County. Natural hazards such as flooding can tremendously impact the community. In 2015, Knox County adopted a Hazard Mitigation Plan following guidance established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (“**FEMA**”) that identified strategies to lessen the impact of these type of events. Several of the strategies identified involve land uses.

Local land use is not uniformly set across Knox County, but rather is determined among a complex and loose-knit group of townships, municipalities and incorporated villages, with each government entity ideally relying on the RPC for uniform guidance. Because land uses are determined by officials within each jurisdiction, it is fair to say the public may fear favoritism, backroom deals and other biases among land use decision-makers at the township, municipal or county-levels (Ferguson, et al., 2013 p. 56). It is also fair to say that many land use conflicts are driven by deeply held and sometimes irreconcilable differences because each of us has strong opinions about what it means to be a community within Knox County. Therefore, this Plan Update attempts to lay-out, in a fully transparent way, the land use priorities and goals Knox County should pursue across all our township and municipal jurisdictions to provide a clear sense of direction to private land owners, developers and others who ask, “What can I do with my land?”

1.1.3 What is a Comprehensive Plan, Why is it Updated, and Why Does it Matter?

A comprehensive plan serves as a vision for the community as to how it expects land use to occur in the future. That is, comprehensive plans should clearly state the goals, objectives and policies, along with maps and charts, to guide public and private development over the long term (Meck, et al., 2017 p. 102). If done correctly, comprehensive plans gather and analyze data and reports regarding land uses, expected population growth, the economy, transportation patterns and other factors that affect communities’ physical development. The resulting plan is a statement of options for future land use and community growth and development over time (Meck, et al., 2017 p. 127).

Comprehensive plans are valuable when they are sufficiently detailed and provide enough vision to **guide a potential purchaser of land on how to use the property**. But a comprehensive plan is *not* a zoning map. What comprehensive plans do is provide the general data and information to guide zoning.

Think of this 2017 Comprehensive Plan Update as looking 20 years into the future, guiding Knox County's growth and development through the use of economic and population data, charts and maps. In this way, this Plan Update stands as Knox County's deliberate, thoughtful statement on what we wish to look like during the next two decades, and how we envision Knox County to be developed and/or preserved (Ohio Supreme Court, 2015).

Interestingly, Ohio law does not actually say what a **comprehensive plan** should include. Without an actual definition, many folks confuse a comprehensive plan with a zoning map. Although unincorporated areas of Knox County can choose to impose zoning through the actions of their respective township trustees, Ohio law does not give townships any formal role in adopting comprehensive plans written by the RPC; townships are only empowered to adopt their own zoning plans. That said, townships' zoning plans under Ohio law must be adopted *in accordance with a comprehensive plan*. As one might expect, the fact Ohio law does not statutorily define "comprehensive plan" but requires townships to zone in accordance with one, has led to confusion across the State, with relevant court cases dating back to the 1950s (Meck, et al., 2017).

One recent court case declared that a countywide comprehensive plan written by the regional planning commission meets the required plan for townships to adopt their own zoning (Ohio Supreme Court, 2009). More recently, the Ohio Supreme Court held that a comprehensive plan, like this Plan Update, may be included in a township's zoning resolution but is not required to be separately adopted by the township trustees (Ohio Supreme Court, 2015). Having said that, planning experts in Ohio believe the *better approach is for townships to separately adopt comprehensive plans and then adopt their zoning resolutions that are consistent with such plans* (Meck, et al., 2017 p. 126). It is the sincere hope of this Plan Update's authors that zoned townships in Knox County not only formally adopt this document but also abide by its suggestions and recommendations for smart growth going forward.

As to municipalities' use of comprehensive plans, cities and incorporated villages are *not* required to adopt zoning in accordance with a comprehensive plan. Although adoption of a comprehensive plan, like this Plan Update, by Knox County's city and villages would support their councils' zoning in the event of a legal challenge, cities and villages need only show their zoning laws are in line with a coherent land use policy based on the community's needs (Meck, et al., 2017 pp. 112-113).

1.2 Knox County's Comprehensive Plan – 1998

The Focus 2100 initiative, led by the Knox County Chamber of Commerce, guided the 1998 update to Knox County's first comprehensive plan written in 1974. At the time of its writing, the 1998 Plan represented a growing awareness that development pressures were increasing, and that undesirable development might occur without good planning.

The 1998 Plan identified four fundamental guiding purposes:

1. To develop a plan that would help direct future development and redevelopment in a way that would enhance the physical, social and economic environment of Knox County;
2. To serve as *the beginning of an ongoing planning process* that would define a long-term community vision (emphasis added);
3. To view the completion of the Comprehensive Plan as the beginning of dedicated implementation efforts; and
4. To define both countywide and local planning perspectives.

More discussion of the 1998 Plan, including how it was informed by substantial public input and community-based feedback, follows in Chapter 2.

1.3 Knox County's Comprehensive Plan Updates – 2006 and 2012

The 2006 Update acknowledged that some of the initiatives and recommendations for action in the 1998 Plan had not been fully achieved. But progress was evident at the time on many fronts: (1) use of the RPC as a more effective and relevant voice in local planning; (2) the creation of a Farmland Preservation Task Force Report in 2000; (3) a Cost of Community Services Study in 2003; and (4) a Comprehensive Study of the Kokosing River Watershed in 2004. Important to note is the RPC engaged a professional firm to assist in the writing of the 2006 Update, but there was (and remains) a general disappointment in the deliverables produced by the firm. In fact, after discarding much of the consultants' initial work, the 2006 Update was largely rewritten by RPC staff and volunteers.

A Steering Committee, composed of RPC members, elected officials and volunteer community leaders, wrote the 2012 Update. The Steering Committee chose to not hire a consultant to help with writing the document. Using several subcommittees, each writing a portion of the Plan to address different subjects, the work ultimately took two (2) years to complete. Although public input was solicited – using directed and internet surveys, personal interviews, and posting the Plan draft online – the Steering Committee acknowledged relatively little involvement by members of the general public. Unsurprisingly, upon its completion and formal adoption, the 2012 Update was promptly filed away, without much reference or any acknowledgement within the county.

Acknowledgements

This Plan Update was supported by the generous financial assistance of the following organizations, without whose contributions this report could neither have been completed nor published on-time and in the manner written:

- AEP Ohio
- Community Foundation of Mount Vernon & Knox County
- United Way of Knox County

Works Cited

Apple Group, Ltd. v. Granger Twp. Bd. of Zoning Appeals [Case] : 144 Ohio St.3d 188 / auth. Ohio Supreme Court. - [s.l.] : Ohio Supreme Court, 2015.

B.J. Alan Co. v. Congress Twp. Bd. of Zoning Appeals [Case] : 124 Ohio St.3d 1 / auth. Ohio Supreme Court. - [s.l.] : Ohio Supreme Court, 2009.

Impact of Land Use Law on Commercial Development [Journal] / auth. Riehl Esq., Charles T. // Advanced Topics in Commercial Real Estate Law. - 2017. - pp. 7.8 - 7.12.

Land in Conflict: Managing and Resolving Land Use Disputes [Book] / auth. Ferguson Ona, Field Pat and Nolon Sean. - Cambridge, Mass. : Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2013.

Ohio Planning and Zoning Law [Book] / auth. Meck Stuart and Pearlman Kenneth. - Columbus : Thomson Reuters, 2017.

CHAPTER 2: PLAN FRAMEWORK AND PRINCIPLES

2.1. Planning Process

This document is a strategic plan that builds upon Knox County’s 1998 Comprehensive Plan and subsequent updates. As discussed in Chapter 1, comprehensive plans are general in nature and set forth a number of planning recommendations guiding the County’s townships, city, and villages in areas such as land use, development, transportation, infrastructure, safety services, education, parks and recreation, and cultural resources. **Comprehensive** means this Plan Update encompasses all geographic parts of Knox County, and it is **long range** in the sense we look beyond the pressing issues of the immediate day to the perspective of issues and opportunities as far out as twenty years (Meck, et al., 2017).

This Plan Update will be different from several of the most recent updates in that it addresses a smaller number of *specific challenges* and *particular needs* facing Knox County within the next several years. To that point, this Plan Update is *not* intended as the final, end-all, be-all statement on development in Knox County. Due to the rather unique drafting process employed in this Plan Update (addressed below), the Steering Committee fully acknowledges and expects another planning and revision process to occur within the next five years. Unlike previous updates to the County’s Comprehensive Plan, this document does not provide as in-depth a discussion of land use. Instead, this version intentionally sets forth key stances and announces clear calls-to-action in the areas of economic and workforce development, healthy communities, and preservation of our rural character.

The Focus 2100 initiative involved a wide segment of the Knox County community to create the 1998 update to the county’s first comprehensive plan written in 1974. Led by the Knox County Chamber of Commerce, the effort was noteworthy for convening a number of public discussions in response to the first whiffs of development pressure coming out of Columbus. Focus 2100’s leaders wisely acknowledged their plan’s successful implementation would depend on public buy-in and consensus built throughout the planning process (Focus 2100, 1998). Three appointed task forces were formed around the subjects of land use, transportation/utilities, and quality of life. Upon completion of the draft plan, 300 copies were distributed to elected officials and stakeholders throughout Knox County, and a summary of the draft plan was published in the Mount Vernon News. In response, more than 25 pages of comments were received from individuals (Focus 2100, 1998).

The effort surrounding the 1998 Comprehensive Plan was largely successful. Historical files show a robust level of public discourse helped produce the Plan’s vision for Knox County’s future. Several elements of the Comprehensive Plan were successfully implemented and remain firmly in place, including strengthening the RPC and developing a “local foods” movement (manifesting itself in the farmers’ markets that occur during the summer months in Knox County).

Several updates have been published since 1998 to guide local zoning decisions. With this Plan Update, our community again recognizes it is time to update the Comprehensive Plan in the context of current conditions and the regional climate.

Figure 2:1 Map of Knox County, Ohio



The study area for this comprehensive plan is the land contained within the geographic boundaries of Knox County (see Figure 2:1). This is an area of approximately 532 square miles, located at the geographic center of Ohio. Knox County is comprised of one city (the City of Mount Vernon), several incorporated villages (Centerburg, Danville, Fredericktown, Gambier, Gann/Brinkhaven and Martinsburg), and 22 townships.

For economic development, transportation and regional planning purposes, Knox County is part of the 11-county Columbus Region (see Figure 2:2) (Columbus2020). Culturally, Knox County is more deeply tied to the Columbus metro than neighboring northeast Ohio or Appalachian regions, despite the fact it is slightly more than a one-hour drive (assuming good weather and little traffic congestion) from downtown Mount Vernon to the downtown Columbus intersection of Broad and High Streets. Our residents regularly commute to jobs in Franklin County and its neighboring counties, travel in and out of John Glenn International Airport, drive to Easton Town

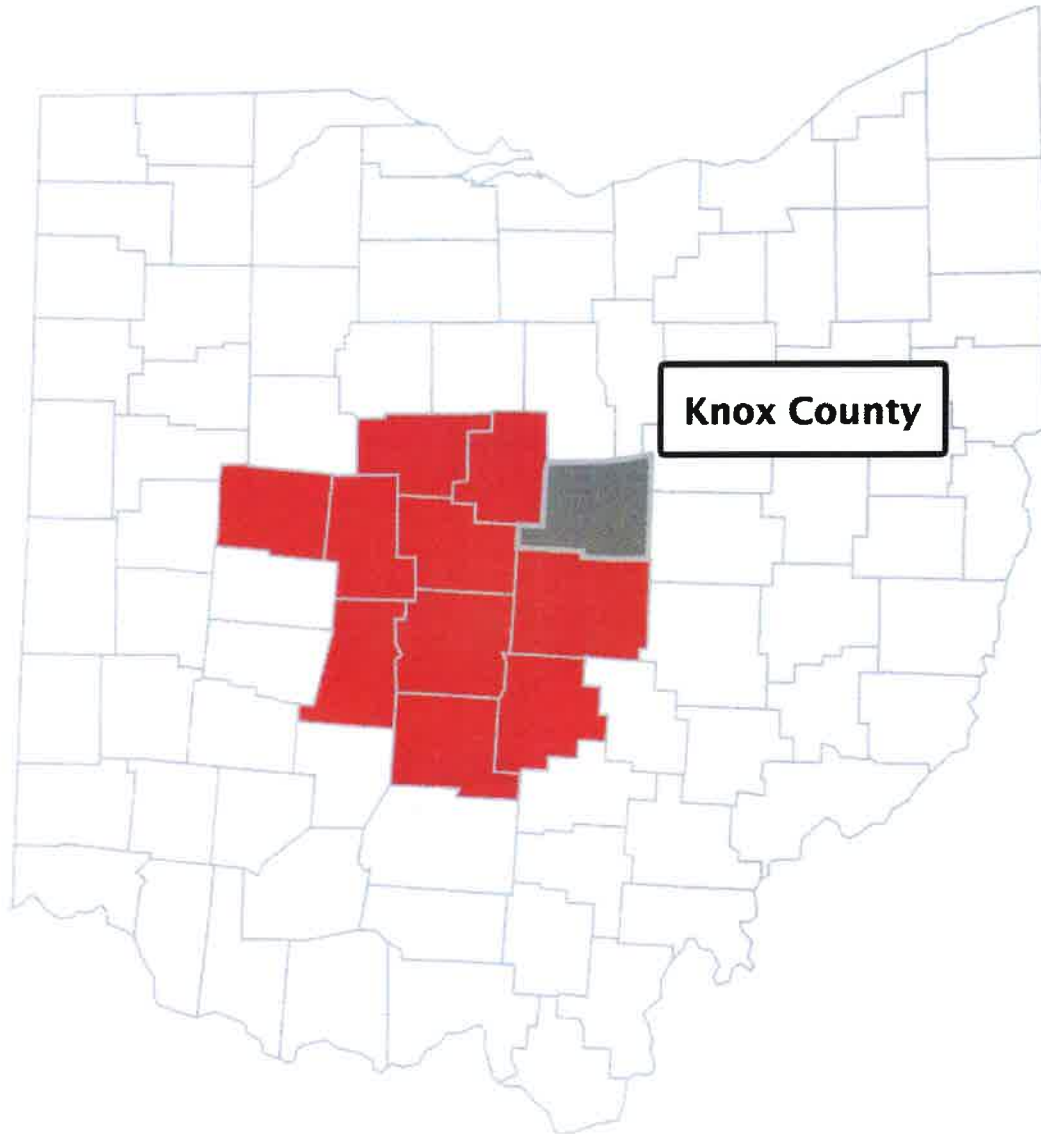
Center or Polaris Fashion Place for occasional shopping and dining, view Columbus' local television affiliates, and listen to Columbus' local radio stations.

This connection to Columbus is critically important for our community's health and growth prospects. Clearly, there is no other metro in Ohio, if not the Midwest, which we would want to be in its orbit. Columbus is the fastest growing metropolitan area in the Midwest; since 2010, the Columbus Region, which includes Knox County, has led the Midwest's largest metros in the growth of jobs and population. The Columbus metro's gross domestic product ("GDP") — the value of goods and services produced in the region — grew at a 2.5 percent rate in 2016. This was one of the fastest rates of growth in Ohio, and served to push the size of Columbus' economy past that of Cleveland's for the first time (Columbus2020). By population, Columbus now is the second biggest in the Midwest, after Chicago (Newpoff, 2017). And during the past decade or so, Columbus consistently scored in the top one-third among its 34 peer metro areas (i.e., those with populations of 1 to 3 million) (Williams, 2017).

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, planners estimate the Columbus Region will grow by *at least* 500,000 new residents by 2050 (MORPC; Columbus2020; ULI-Columbus; Calthorpe Associates, 2015). It is highly likely that some proportion of these new residents to the region will desire to live in an intact rural community offering a cheaper cost of living and a quieter lifestyle; that is, a home in Knox County.

[The Remainder of This Page Intentionally Left Blank]

Figure 2:2 - Knox County's relative location and inclusion in the 11-county Columbus Region



(Columbus2020)

Knox County must confront directly its place in this growing region. This Plan Update is intended to clearly state how Knox County wishes to grow as the surrounding Columbus Region grows. We seek to identify steps to maintain our intact rural character, celebrate and enhance our unique qualities, and preserve our generally pleasant way of life. This Plan Update is a schematic document meant to inspire the community, guide public policy, and encourage wise development decisions; the following chapters examine specific improvement opportunities and resource allocations to accommodate smart growth and maintain Knox County's high quality of life.

Steering Committee Process

For this Plan Update, a Steering Committee was again employed to manage the drafting process. As was the case with previous updates, this Steering Committee was composed of RPC members, elected officials, and volunteer community leaders representing a broad spectrum of community services, business, and industry (see Table 2:1, below).

Table 2:1 - 2017 Plan Update Steering Committee Members

Name	Position
Vic Turner <i>(Chair)</i>	Zoning Inspector, Brown Township
Jeffry Harris <i>(Vice-Chair, Editor & Lead Author, Ch's 1, 2, 3 & 4)</i>	President, Area Development Foundation, Inc.
Brian Ball	City Engineer, City of Mount Vernon
Honorable Teresa Bemiller	Knox County Commissioner
Rob Clendening <i>(Lead Author, Ch. 6)</i>	Program Administrator, Knox County Soil & Water Conservation District
Cameron Keaton	County Engineer, Knox County
Mark Maxwell	Director, Knox County Emergency Management Agency
Honorable Richard Mavis	Mayor, City of Mount Vernon
Julie Miller	Knox County Health Commissioner
John Owens	Resident, City of Mount Vernon
Jeff Pickrell	Superintendent, Knox County Water/Wastewater
Mark Ramser	Resident, Village of Gambier
Tami Ruhl	Creating Healthy Communities Coordinator, Knox County Health Department
Darrel Severns	Secretary, Knox County RPC
Lori Totman	Director, Knox County Park District
Honorable Nancy Vail	Council Member, City of Mount Vernon

There was general agreement among Steering Committee members that the 2012 Plan Update was well-written, but neither stood for any particular notions nor set forth clear development goals and objectives. By way of example, the 2012 Plan Update devoted less than one-page discussing the county's economic development strategy and focus.

The Steering Committee debated and eventually chose to hire planning professionals to better identify and emphasize a set of goals, strategies, and objectives for this Plan Update. After releasing a Request for Proposals, the Columbus office of OHM Advisors (link: <http://www.ohm-advisors.com/>) was selected to assist the Steering Committee. Due to budgetary constraints, the firm was not hired to write the entire Plan Update. Rather, the consultants were engaged to both

jump-start the writing process early on (by facilitating mapping and goal-setting exercises), and to help complete discrete parts and elements during the Plan Update’s finalization in early 2018. Specific appreciation is shown by the authors to Jason Sudy, Conor Willis and Alyssa Sexton at OHM Advisors who provided invaluable assistance during the final drafting process. In addition, John McFarlane, a Kenyon College student with a deep interest in urban and regional planning, provided substantial help with research and editing tasks.

Public Engagement

The following is a record of the various public meetings and writing sessions convened for this Plan Update.

Table 2:2 - 2017 Plan Update Steering Committee Meetings

Date	Meeting Type	Location*
October 2016	Steering Committee Mtg. No. 1	Knox County Commissioners office, 117 East High Street
November 2016	Steering Committee Mtg. No. 2	
January 2017	Steering Committee Mtg. No. 3	
February 2017	Steering Committee Mtg. No. 4	
March 2017	Steering Committee Mtg. No. 5	
April 2017	Steering Committee Mtg. No. 6	
May 2017	Mapping session w/ OHM Advisors	
June 2017	Goals & Objectives session w/ OHM Advisors	
July 2017	Chapter writing team meetings	Various
August 2017	Chapter writing team meetings	Various
September 2017	Chapter writing team meetings	Various
October 2017	Chapter writing team meetings	Various
November 2017	Steering Committee Mtg. No. 7	
February 2018	County Commissioners’ public hearing & Plan Update adoption	

*Unless otherwise indicated, all Steering Committee meetings were held in the Knox County Commissioners’ office at 117 East High Street, Mount Vernon.

Table 2:2 details the Steering Committee’s many public meetings regularly held during a 15-month period. And it is true the Steering Committee was composed of members who served in their capacities as elected officials; arguably representing the needs and desires of their community constituencies. But this Plan Update suffers from a lack of public input, community discourse, and widespread consensus. Put simply, the only public-facing effort made for this 2017 Plan Update was in the form of the Steering Committee’s public meetings, held as they were