

Goals (Section 5) Ashland County Comprehensive Plan

Goals are defined to help provide more specific and clear direction for Ashland County. While the preceding chapter articulated an overall general vision for Ashland County in 2020, considerably more detail is necessary to provide community leaders with a more meaningful road map to the future.

Members of each of the three task forces were asked to develop goals that Ashland County should strive to achieve in the next 20 years. In most cases, there was considerable discussion on each goal as each group tried to articulate a meaningful statement that provided some clear direction for Ashland County. After all three task forces met together, goals were refined and slightly reorganized to provide continuity and to avoid overlapping subject matter.

Land Use Goals

A total of six land use goals were defined for Ashland County. These goals included the following:

1. To Conserve Agricultural Land And Rural Atmosphere For Future Generations Through The Management of Growth And Development.

Considerable discussion took place regarding this particular goal. Specifically, it was thought that this goal should not reflect a pro- or anti-growth message but rather should be neutral on the issue of growth. Among all goals brought up by the Land Use Task Force, this first goal received the most attention as people discussed the need to control urban sprawl and preserve the agriculture and rural character, while respecting basic property rights. The concept of implementing incentives so that development can occur in a more desirable manner was a major issue.

2. To Support And Enhance Tourism Activities In Southern Ashland County By Maintaining Rural Character And Scenery.

The southern part of Ashland County is an especially beautiful place, attracting tourists and vacationers from great distances. From both an economic and aesthetic perspective, it is in Ashland County's best interest to pay close attention to how development occurs in this area. Strip commercial and residential development along roadways and hillsides, if properly planned, would not detract from a desirable, tourism environment.

3. To Maintain Viable Locations For Industrial Development To Help Ensure A Full Range Of Economic Opportunities For Current And Future Residents.

Several areas in Ashland County represent logical places for expanded industrial activity. These areas are a result of existing land use, access to major thoroughfares, and other related considerations. One particular site is on the north side of the City of Ashland, and another is located in the Village of Loudonville's industrial park. Other industrial areas could also be identified with additional effort in and around the villages. This becomes essential if the number of jobs increases with population growth over the next 20 years. These identified sites will need to be protected from incompatible land uses, such as residential development.

4. To Develop In-House Capabilities To Manage Land Resource Information In A Geographic Information System (GIS).

A great deal of land resource data was gathered as a result of preparing this plan. Much of this data is computerized and can form the basis for a local geographic information system (GIS) in Ashland County. Many Ohio counties are moving toward the development of in-house capabilities

to store, manage, and manipulate data on the natural environment, property ownership, current agricultural use values, and other similar variables. This is clearly a national trend among local governments as the costs of computer technology drops and the need for up-to-date information increases. The development of a local GIS system can pay big dividends in cost savings to a local government from the efficiency of having geographic data computerized and accessible.

5. To Protect The Environmental Health Of The Ashland County Landscape And Preserve Natural Corridors.

There is a growing recognition of the interrelationships between the way that land is developed and the environmental health of an area. Communities that have ignored important environmental considerations as development occurs have experienced many problems. For example, groundwater has become polluted in some areas as a result of discharges from inappropriate land uses located above groundwater supplies. In other areas surface water quality has declined. This decline was a result of development encroaching into riparian corridors causing the transformation of natural waterways into sterile drainage ditches. These ditches flood more frequently due to increasing volumes of runoff and the speed of water moving across hard surfaces.

Ashland County has several corridors, such as the Mohican River and the Black Fork River, that traverse the area and provide scenic watercourses and natural habitats. It is the goal of the County to protect as many of these corridors as possible and to provide public access to them for passive recreational use if and when feasible. Besides providing space for recreational activities such as walking or bicycling, cross country skiing, and boating, corridors can provide environmental benefits. Habitats for wildlife often flourish, and natural areas along the corridors can prevent erosion and reduce the amount of runoff from farming or development that enters the streams, thus protecting our surface water quality.

6. To Achieve Orderly Commercial Land Use Expansion And Redevelopment Of Existing Commercial Areas.

A growing local population requires additional goods and services which creates a demand for additional commercial space. It is highly desirable that there be some restraint in the outward expansion of commercial areas, especially in the vicinity of the City of Ashland. Extensive creation of new commercial property through rezoning may lead toward an oversupply of commercial land. This oversupply may result in diminished value of existing commercial land, particularly land that is somewhat deteriorated. An oversupply of commercial property may also affect the viability of downtown Ashland if commercial entities choose to relocate in lieu of remodeling existing space.

Transportation Goals

The Transportation Task Force was comprised of people interested in improving transportation in Ashland County. Members included ODOT retirees, the Assistant County Engineer, and representatives from the County's private sector. After identifying and evaluating the major challenges facing Ashland County, the Transportation Task Force identified four major goals. These goals will require open communication and cooperation among various local and State agencies as well as the general public.

1. To Maximize The Capacity And Function Of Existing Roadways And Provide For The Safe And Efficient Movement Of Traffic Between Local And Regional Destinations.

Ashland County residents are fortunate to have a quality transportation system. As funding allowed, local officials have endeavored to see that the needs of various safety and traffic improvements have been accomplished. For example, most bridges within Ashland County have

been maintained to standards by the County Engineer's Office. However, several major concerns were also addressed by the task force. Various locations within the County were identified as needing one or more of the following improvements: signalization, widening, intersection improvements, center or left turn lanes, and a proposed connector road. Planning and implementing these improvements will help to increase the capacity of the current road system, improve site distances at intersections, reduce the number of accidents at key locations, and provide increased mobility and better access to various areas throughout the County and the region.

Another way to increase the capacity and function of existing roads is to develop access management standards for County-maintained roads, similar to ODOT's standards. ODOT recently published *State Highway Access Management Manual* which regulates the level of access allowed on a state-maintained roadway based on the function of the road. Access management standards are set for each road classification. These standards manage the frequency, location, and design of driveways, intersections, signals, medians, and turn lanes.

Access management standards are adjusted based on the classification level of the roadway. For example, the higher the class of roadway, the more restrictive the access. When access management standards are utilized, motorists experience fewer accidents, less congestion, and improved travel time. Over time, studies have shown that access management can reduce the overall number of accidents by as much as 50 percent, while safely increasing travel speeds by as much as 40 percent. Less congestion results in the reduction of transportation costs to businesses while remaining accessible and attractive to customers.

2. To Effectively Plan For New Road Connections.

In addition to maintaining the capacity of existing roadways, the need for limited new road construction is recognized in order to aid overall traffic circulation. As funding for new road construction is scarce and actual construction takes many years, effective planning is thought to be critical so that potential road alignments are not lost due to development activity.

3. To Enhance And Protect The Positive Experience Of Traveling Within Ashland County.

For the most part, people experience the largest parts of Ashland County by driving along major and minor roadways. To a tourist or other visitor, impressions are formed by viewing the natural landscape and physical character of the area. Today, there are few formal efforts to define a sense of arrival into Ashland County or into the Mohican Country in southern Ashland County. With a new governmental emphasis on the enhancement of transportation facilities and the growing recognition that roadways do more than allow people to move from place to place, certain actions seem appropriate. For example, the development of signed and landscaped entrances at certain locations and measures to take control of the placement of billboards along scenic routes are some approaches toward enhancing the traveling experience in Ashland County.

4. To Develop Alternative Forms Of Transportation.

Progressive communities are looking for ways to develop alternative forms of transportation. While additional discussion on the subject of developing trails for recreation purposes will be discussed under the subject of quality of life, the Transportation Task Force recognized the benefits of creating pedestrian linkages between residential areas and community facilities, parks, shopping areas and similar destinations for purely transportation purposes. Sidewalks, walking trails and similar connections can provide an alternative to automobile trips, although they would be limited in terms of usage. The task force also recognized an opportunity with the potential development of the proposed high speed rail. This would provide Ashland County residents with another alternative form of transportation that could ultimately provide connections to other transportation modes, such as airports and buses.

Quality of Life Goals

Quality of life goals established for Ashland County are defined to help point the direction toward a more livable County in the future. A total of seven such goals were established:

1. To Significantly Increase Outdoor Recreation And Open Space And Achieve Better Distribution Of Opportunities And Spaces Throughout Ashland County.

Ashland County is fortunate to have significantly more outdoor recreation space per capita than the state average. This is because of large holdings of State forest land, other large outdoor recreation areas, and the fact that Ashland County serves as a major statewide destination for outdoor recreation activities. Despite this abundance of existing outdoor recreation space, a goal to aggressively pursue additional acquisition and development of open space and parkland is established. Additional outdoor recreation space is needed to continue to maintain a high standard as population growth occurs and to build upon Ashland County's position as a tourist destination. The task force also thinks an effort should be made to assure that the parkland is distributed evenly throughout the County, and that each township has a least one park facility.

2. To Increase Cultural Opportunities And Opportunities In The Arts.

There is a belief that Ashland County residents are forced to rely heavily on neighboring cities and counties for most of the cultural activities and art programs. Some positive steps have been taken recently by certain entities and individuals to increase the opportunities for the arts and other cultural activities. The most notable accomplishment is the establishment of the Ashland Community Arts Center. This volunteer organization is striving to make the arts and cultural activities as available to residents of Ashland County as football and baseball.

3. To Provide A High Level Of Support For The School Districts.

Most people feel that the quality of education received by the children of Ashland County will determine the future success and accomplishments of the County. Education is a key factor in all areas of the country, especially in the State of Ohio, as we compare ourselves to the successes of school systems in other countries. Employers are taking a much stronger position regarding the quality of education because today's students are tomorrow's employees. New attention is being placed on training programs as well as on cooperative efforts between schools and industries to help ensure recent graduates are not ill-equipped for life in the workplace.

Because of these considerations, Ashland County has set a goal to work with its school districts to enhance the quality of education being provided. Maintaining closer working relationships among education providers within the County, addressing growth issues, and sharing facilities to reduce operational costs are some ideas being suggested to achieve this goal. Capitalizing upon the resources available at Ashland University through a variety of partnerships is encouraged. Involving school districts in economic development activities (especially as they relate to tax abatement), supporting opportunities for children through programs developed at the State level, and meeting the needs of the companies of the future are considered to be important elements of this goal.

4. To Provide Adequate Police, Fire, And Emergency Medical Services To All County Residents.

There are numerous service providers at present, but as the County continues to grow, additional services will be required to meet the new demands. This can be challenging when many of the services within many townships are provided by volunteer departments. The Quality of Life Task Force agreed that all residents of the County should be assured of proper services to meet their needs, regardless of where within the County they might live. Continually assessing and addressing these services is a goal established by the task force.

5. To Provide Adequate Medical Services To All County Residents.

Ashland County has taken some positive steps in the past decade to better address the medical needs of its residents. Additional educational and awareness programs, recruitment of physicians, and improvements at the hospital and clinics have all enhanced the available medical services. Ashland County's goal for the planning period is to continue to support medical programs and efforts county-wide, especially those programs that provide mental health and children's health services.

6. To Identify, Protect, And Enhance Historic Resources.

Ashland County is rich with historic assets, from battle sites to cemeteries and opera houses. Some of these resources are protected at this time and others are not. Proper identification of these historic resources is paramount as a first step in any serious efforts to accomplish meaningful preservation. There are several historical societies within the County, all of which are performing some level of historic preservation. Coordinating efforts among these historic preservation groups, especially since funds for these types of activities are limited, is a goal set by the Quality of Life Task Force. Working with State and federal preservation agencies is also important to the success of preservation efforts within Ashland County.

Combining these historic preservation activities with existing and proposed tourism efforts in a manner which is sensitive to the environment and the rural character of the County is an important aspect of this goal.

7. To Provide A Variety Of Housing Types For Residents And To Maintain The Quality Of Existing Residential Areas.

Ashland County's population is continuing to change. According to projections, the area will see an increase in older households, which are considered to be "empty-nesters." As empty-nesters' lives change, so too may be their specific needs in housing, especially for smaller, lower maintenance units. This becomes an area that Ashland County will have to address. Despite a shifting demand for new housing types, however, there is sometimes resistance to developments that include multifamily housing units due to concern for neighborhood property values. It is a goal of Ashland County to encourage a variety of housing types to be constructed to provide all family types with a range of housing options.