

CHAPTER SEVEN

UPDATE 2013 –
THE SANDUSKY COUNTY
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

LAND USE

Summary

Land is a limited resource. The amount and location of various land uses affect the overall quality of life for all Sandusky County residents. This Plan intends to promote a balanced expansion of residential, commercial, and employment opportunities while protecting the County’s rich agricultural land base, sensitive environmental resources, and unique cultural heritage.

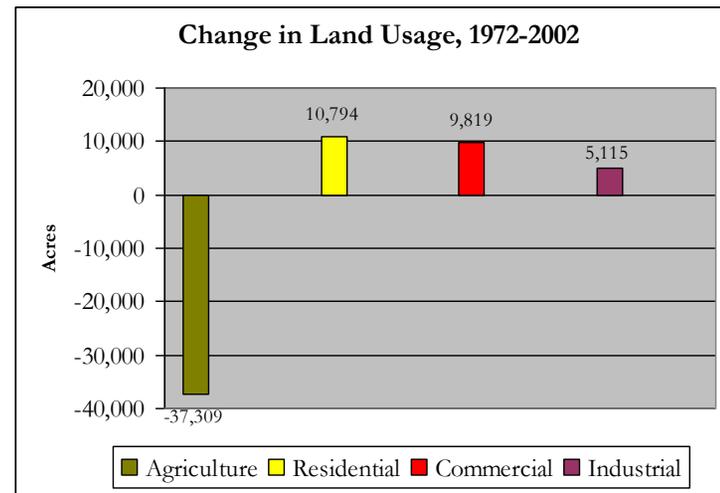
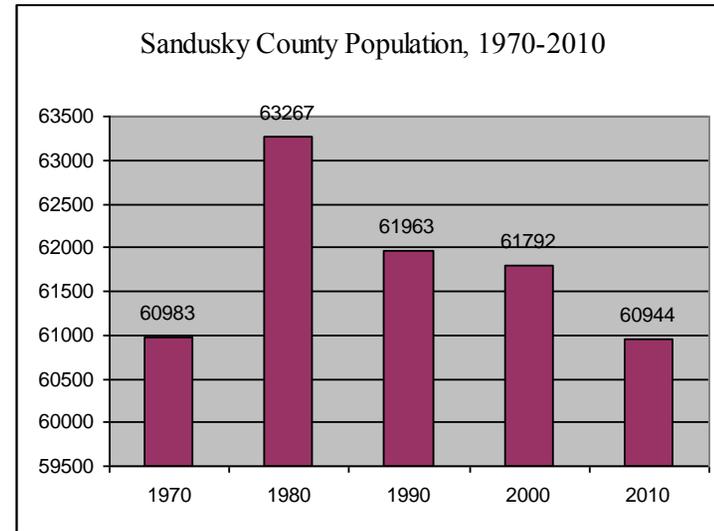
During the course of the Plan’s development, the County’s political subdivisions provided input as to which areas were best to accommodate future growth..

It is very important for Sandusky County to employ appropriate land use mechanisms to ensure future development occurs in an orderly and compact manner. Since 1970, Sandusky County’s population has remained virtually flat, decreasing slightly from 60,983 in 1970 to 60,944 in 2010. Yet, acreage dedicated for land uses such as residential, industrial, and commercial have increased by triple digits.

Planning Issues

Like most counties in the State of Ohio, Sandusky County has the standard mechanisms in place to ensure that the land development process meets the basic elements of health and human safety and property rights. These mechanisms are promoted by the health and sanitary sewer departments, the county engineer, a countywide regional planning commission, and several local planning and zoning boards. All of these departments play a key role in guiding land use and promoting growth and development. One department ensures that new and existing development meets certain environmental standards, while the county engineer’s office sets standards for curb cuts and ensures that traffic generated from new development can be accommodated safely. The regional planning commission, comprised of several member political subdivisions across the county, ensures that all new and existing development “fits” within standards defined by the public.

And lastly, the local planning and zoning boards promote and set development



standards created by their local residents. With all of these agencies involved with the growth and development of Sandusky County, it is very important that additional mechanisms are developed to allow for these agencies and actors to keep each other informed as to how their respective missions promote orderly growth (**Please see Chapter: Planning Tools**).

However, it can be argued that land use in Sandusky County is more the result of a compilation of the actions of individual property owners, rather than the result of the individual or combined actions of government or quasi-government agencies. Over the last 30 to 40 years, the increase in property dedicated for uses other than agricultural has been dramatic and at a much greater consumption rate than normally necessary to accommodate the usual living and consumption patterns of the slight decrease in net new residents since 1970. According to the original 2003 plan, commercial land uses increased 909%; residential uses 104%; and industrial uses 176%.

To ensure that future decades do not mirror the ones immediately past, it is necessary that everyone involved in the growth and development of Sandusky County interact on a higher level than previously warranted. Public concern about the potential negative effects of rapid growth on the quality of life was repeatedly expressed during the original series of meetings with community officials held during the summer and fall of 2002. Strong support was voiced for concepts related to growth management and the preservation of the County's rural atmosphere. To ensure the public's concerns are addressed, it is mandatory that planning, as it pertains to the County's built environment, receives more attention and resources for any substantial and continued results to be achieved.

Goals and Objectives

Land Use Goal: To promote the coexistence of all land uses, with sensitivity to the needs and impacts of each.

Objectives:

1. Guide growth patterns to promote efficiency of travel and offer the best return on public investment, placing special emphasis on areas currently experiencing growth or designated for future growth by local officials: areas identified by municipal and township officials; the Sandusky County Airport as a site for future industrial development; and the US 20 corridor , from Fremont to Bellevue and west of Woodville; SR 53 north from Fremont, SR 51 from the Turnpike at Elmore south, as well as other growth areas identified in the accompanying map.
2. Encourage neighborhood commercial and mixed-use business areas, especially outside larger municipalities.
3. Encourage the creation of zoning in unzoned political subdivisions.

4. Encourage the use of planned unit developments to mix housing densities and offer incentives for open space.
5. Protect areas that are sensitive to change: wetlands, riparian corridors, other environmentally sensitive areas and habitats including the Sandusky River and other significant streams, historic artifacts and cultural facilities, prime farmland.
6. Utilize methods that preserve prime farmland and special resource areas.
7. Encourage the development and use of innovative tools that promote community history and community revitalization, such as the Fremont downtown historic overlay district.
8. Encourage the use of tools that assist coordination between adjoining and nearby jurisdictions, with the emphasis on minimizing land use conflicts and promoting revenue sharing arrangements.
9. Continue to incorporate broad public involvement within land use planning processes.

Trends and Characteristics

Development Trends

Recent development trends throughout Sandusky County appear to be following the pattern of growth typical of most counties across Ohio, with most residential growth occurring outside of incorporated cities and villages, yet in areas that are still in close proximity to the adjoining city or village (**See Map 8 - Current Land Use**).

Farmland is often “split” and sold off in smaller parcels along roadways to developers. This situation can lead to problems regarding potable water service and sanitary sewage service. If a parcel is developed, yet too small for the soil conditions present, failing septic and leach field systems can lead to the contamination of both groundwater and surface waters. Usually, because these small developed areas are isolated, providing water and/or sanitary sewerage services is not economically feasible. Unless changes in County subdivision regulations and Township zoning occur, this type of development pattern will continue. The fundamental enabling legislation at the state level encourages this practice. The Ohio Revised Code has been amended to address these issues, but there are still weaknesses that affect all counties in Ohio.

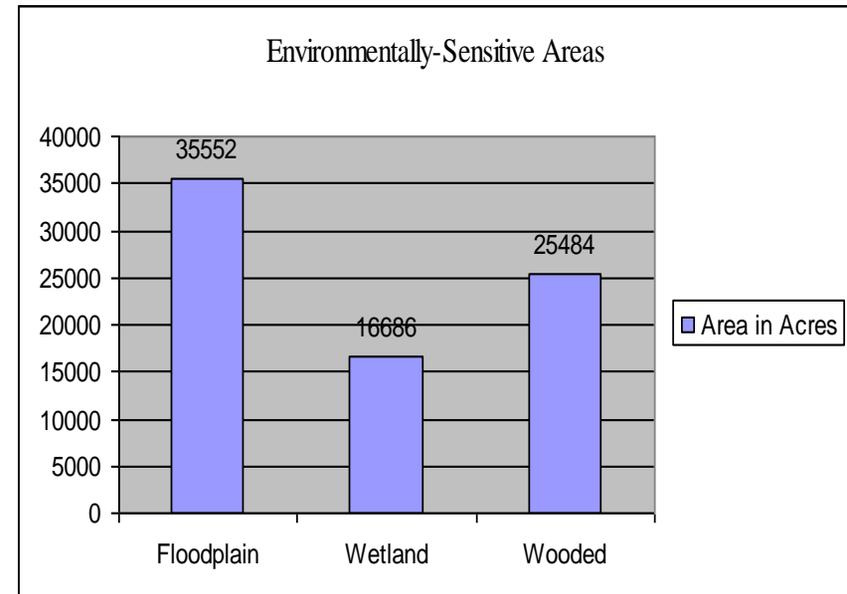
Other areas of potential and desired future development can be found in several unique locations throughout Sandusky County. These areas, highlighted and discussed in the Future Land Use section of this chapter, were selected primarily due to their preferable location on key thoroughfare routes, or their position contiguous to or near existing development and infrastructure. The areas were identified by public and private officials in

local municipalities and townships during meetings with the planning consultants over the course of the planning process. These areas, further denoted as “growth areas” are highlighted on the Future Land Use map.

Environmentally-Sensitive Areas

Currently, Sandusky County contains 35,552 acres (13.54% of total acres) of floodplains, 25,483 acres (9.70%) of wooded areas, and 16,686 acres of wetlands (6.35%).

There are some areas in the County that will not be developed due to environmental or land management constraints. There are six natural areas delineated in Sandusky County. The Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area and the adjacent Blue Heron Reserve is the largest consisting of approximately four square miles. These sensitive areas are located in the northeastern part of the County with U.S. Route 6 on the south, the Sandusky Bay on the north, and Riley and Townsend Townships to either side. Wolf Creek Park is approximately one square mile and is located between State Route 53 and the Sandusky River in the southern portion of Ballville Township. It consists of approximately 200 acres. The Portage Trail Park is located between South River Road and the Sandusky River in Ballville Township. It is about 1.5 miles southeast of the Fremont corporate limits, consisting of approximately 20 acres.



Another large area where development is constrained is near the mouth of the Sandusky River. The 100-year flood plain covers a great deal of land in both Riley and Rice Townships. The Wightman's Grove Conservancy District is also in this area on the east side of the Sandusky River in Riley Township, and has responsibility for maintaining the floodwall protecting the subdivision. The Ohio EPA has placed this area under findings and orders because of its failing septic systems. The tiny cottage-sized lots are unable to support a replacement system, meaning a broader solution to the problem must be found. Another planning/conservation group with concerns in the County is the Sandusky River Watershed Coalition. This group's main objective is to protect and enhance the Sandusky River by promoting responsible development and land use within the watershed.

Existing Land Use

Of the 260,000+ acres that comprise Sandusky County, approximately 214,000 acres are utilized for agricultural purposes. Of the remaining acreage used for developed purposes, residential uses comprise the largest land use (53%). Land dedicated for public and

commercial uses account for 23% and 14% respectively. Ten percent of developed lands in Sandusky County are used for industrial purposes. for 23% and 14% respectively. Ten percent of developed lands in Sandusky County are used for industrial purposes.

The State of Ohio owns 11% while the county and other units of government control 12%, for a total of 23%. Residential property is further divided with 37% in use for single family homes and 16% accounting for all other residential uses.

Most of the residential development that has occurred since the last comprehensive plan was written has taken place either as a continuation of growth outward from the county's established cities or villages, or along township and county roads in manner widely labeled as "sprawl." Because lot splits are not recorded by any of the county's agencies, it is difficult to ascertain the intensity by which rural residential growth has occurred.

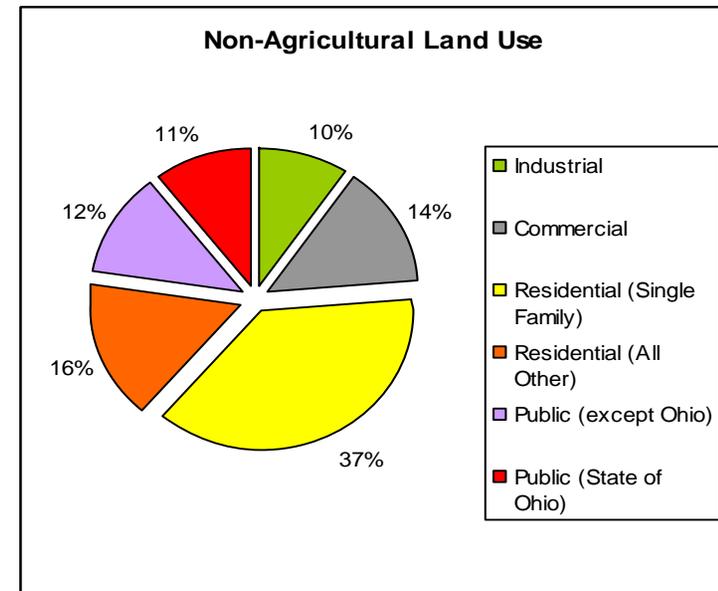
Future Land Use

During the development of the 2003 Comprehensive Plan, and during the subsequent updating of this Plan in 2012-2013, the consultants met with public and private officials in all of the county's townships and municipalities. Maps of the existing land usage within these subdivisions were used to get a better indication of the existing built environment and where future land uses would be best accommodated by the existing infrastructure. Future land uses were selected on the basis of several factors, including:

-] The existing land use of contiguous parcels
-] The ability of the current infrastructure to properly serve new land uses
-] The thoroughfare network
-] The ability of these new land uses in promoting economic growth
-] Physical and other environmental constraints

Because of Sandusky County's rural atmosphere, most of the County's townships noted few or no changes in growth patterns since the last plan.

Due to the proximity of existing cities and villages, the townships of Woodville, Sandusky, Ballville, Green Creek and York expressed a variety of projections or desires on how future land uses would be best accommodated in their communities.



Woodville Township: Woodville Township representatives, encouraged to promote better land uses and increase economic growth within the township, selected a variety of areas off of US 20 as either industrial or general growth areas. Industrial growth areas were designated in areas of the township north and east of Woodville (**see Map: 9 - Future Land Use and Growth Areas**), as well as southeast of the corporation limits south of US 20. General growth areas were also highlighted near the US 90- SR 51 turnpike exit and at the US20/23 junction. The Woodville Township Trustees also selected an area on SR 51, adjacent to Ottawa County as a future growth area. The township is involved with Harris Township in Ottawa County and the Village of Elmore in the creation and development of a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD). This entity will allow the participants to jointly encourage development and collect and share a variety of revenues, including income tax.

The Village of Woodville: Village representatives selected an area south of US 20 and east of Emch Road as a possible residential growth area, in anticipation that future residential development would be a continuation of residential development that's occurred in this area over the past several years.

The Village of Gibsonburg: Several new areas were highlighted by village officials as either future residential growth areas or industrial growth areas. Prominent among them was the village's industrial park located east of downtown on SR 600. The township expects possible residential growth to the south west.

The Village of Lindsey: No large areas of residential development are expected in the near future. The village has an adequate supply of housing at this time, though development along the SR590 corridor is continuously anticipated.

Sandusky Township: Continuing their efforts with the City of Fremont and Ballville Township, the Sandusky Township Trustees identified a growth area along both sides of Hayes Avenue extending from the city limits westward. The two townships and the city are jointly extending water and sewer to serve both existing businesses eager to expand, and create an environment for new economic development.

The township also identified an array of other sites and areas in the township that are suitable for additional growth. One of the most visible and active in recent years is SR 53 at the township and municipal boundary. Much of this development has taken place in territory previously annexed from the township, but recent projects have approached the township side, and further growth is anticipated. The township and city have executed an annexation agreement to facilitate growth in a manner that is beneficial to both parties. With the annexed territory along SR 53 mostly built out, further growth and annexation farther to the north is a certainty.

Another area identified by County, Fremont, and township officials was the general area surrounding the US 80/90 Turnpike and SR 53 junction. This area continues to witness increased commercial and industrial growth, and a small boom in the hospitality industry. The availability of water and

sewer, as well as proximity to major highways is well suited to this. The area west of Port Clinton Road, south of Hawk Road was also selected as an industrial growth area because of its rail access and prime location within the thoroughfare network.

The City of Fremont: City officials continue to embrace programs designed to revitalize and reuse existing properties within the city’s boundaries. Currently, the City of Fremont has over 514,000 square feet of industrial and commercial space for lease or sale and approximately 36 acres for commercial and industrial development.



During the planning process, city officials designated several growth areas in the future land use map. Hayes Avenue from the City west to SR 53 was identified as a growth area by Ballville Township, Sandusky Township and the City of Fremont. Terra State Community College and the area east of campus area also expected to develop in the coming years. The City designated the east side of Stone Street as a growth area, which mirrors Sandusky Township’s selection of the west side of that street. Sandusky Township might experience additional growth in the area surrounding the Fremont Energy Center due to the presence of water and sewer.

On Fremont’s East Side, continued development is anticipated in the BarkCreek Industrial Pak and the surrounding area. A developer has recently purchased a long-unused agricultural property that extends from this location south to SR 20.

Ballville Township: To assist the township in capitalizing on economic growth, Township Trustees highlighted SR 53 from US 6 south to SR 12 as a growth corridor. The area at the intersection of US 6 and SR 53 is also highlighted as a future growth area. As mentioned in the section on Sandusky Township, Ballville is also cooperating on an extension of water and sewer to the west along Hayes Avenue. Cole Road continues to see residential development of both single lots and residential subdivisions.

Green Creek Township: In anticipation of future growth contiguous to the Sandusky County Regional Airport, the Green Creek Township Trustees (as well as the Airport Board, Comprehensive Plan Advisory Board, and County Commissioners) selected an area around the airport as an Airport-related growth area. Denoted as such, it is encouraged that future land uses in this growth area be airport-related and be a “value-added” asset for the regional airport. Such examples of land uses and development “user-friendly” to airport operations are:

- } Fixed Base Operator
- } Air Freight Terminals and Air Cargo Forwarders
- } Aircraft & Parts Manufacturers and Aircraft Repair Shops
- } Aerial Survey Companies

- } Aviation Research & Testing
- } Trucking Terminals and Taxi & Bus Terminals
- } Car Rental Agencies
- } Restaurants and Motels
- } Storage Facilities, Warehouses and Wholesale Distribution Centers
- } Golf Courses

Another area north of Dewey Road to US 20 is also selected as a growth area and is designated as such to encourage airport-related (if possible) development.

The portion of the Fremont-Clyde-Bellevue corridor that runs through Green Creek Township is also a likely candidate for growth. The area between US20 and the parallel railway is ripe for industrial and commercial growth. The township should expect to see the City of Fremont and The City of Clyde expand through this corridor over the long term.

The township is also looking for some growth along SR 19 north of Green Springs, whether for commercial or residential purposes because of the proximity to existing water and sewer.

The City of Clyde: City officials selected a variety of industrial growth areas to be included in the future land use map. These areas, as denoted on the Future Land Use map, are primarily located on the US 20 corridor and are contiguous to the city's boundaries, with utilities and infrastructure readily available. Residential growth areas were selected in areas adjacent to existing residential uses and currently served with public utilities.

The Village of Green Springs: To encourage growth in areas most suitable to the village's existing infrastructure, village officials designated areas at the northern-most boundary limits as future growth areas. Village officials indicated a desire to let the market dictate the appropriateness of the development, providing it is compatible with the village's ability to properly serve it with public utilities.

The City of Bellevue: Like Clyde, the City of Bellevue is also located on the US 20 corridor. A 2005 comprehensive plan for the City outlined five major areas in which development was encouraged to grow, plus the central business district. The six areas include the SR 113/U.S. 20/S.R. 4 triangle, the SR 4/U.S. 20 intersection, the northeast section of the City (centered on the A.D. Wolfe Industrial Park), the U.S. 20 West corridor (including the Bellevue Hospital and nearby developments), the south side including SR 269 and SR 269/Prairie Road, and downtown.

Strategies and Recommendations

7.1 Encourage compatible land uses contiguous to sensitive areas Meets Land Use Objectives: 1,4,8,9

Sensitive areas can range from those with environmental constraints to the Sandusky County Regional Airport, where compatible land uses around the airport are absolutely vital to health and human safety, but also to its overall economic viability. It is recommended that areas sensitive to incompatible land uses receive additional attention in land use or zoning documents prepared by or for the affected political subdivision.

Some areas around the county that may require buffering from incompatible land uses are:

- } Sandusky County Regional Airport
- } Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area
- } Blue Heron Reserve
- } White Star Park
- } Existing Industrial Areas or Designated Industrial Growth Areas

7.2 Utilize tools that promote intergovernmental cooperation. Meets Land Use Objectives: 1,2,3,4,7,8,9

The use and promotion of these tools may allow participating political subdivisions to guide growth and development closest to established areas with suitable infrastructure. The common theme among these tools is that all participating parties, both public and private, benefit from growth. There are several methods that can be used, such as Joint Economic Development Districts¹ (JEDD), Cooperative Economic Development Agreements² (CEDA), Enterprise Zone Agreements³, and Community Reinvestment Areas⁴ (CRA). Since the initial plan was written, a dual-county JEDD has been under development in the vicinity of the SR 51 Turnpike interchange near Elmore in Ottawa County.

In 1999, the Ohio legislature passed legislation which allows political subdivisions to enter into cooperative economic development agreements with each other to address concerns associated with economic development, growth, and annexation.

¹ *Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 715.69*

² *ORC Sections 701.07 and 709.192*

³ *ORC Sections 5709.61-69*

⁴ *ORC Section 3735.671*

In summary, CEDAs allow the cities and villages to annex undeveloped portions of a township in return for sharing income tax (12.5%) with the township on future developments. The township pledges support of the annexations but also must continue to provide specified services. Current single-family residences can access city or village utilities without annexation. Future residences as well as current and future industrial and commercial areas must annex to the city to access utilities. Any of the surrounding townships contiguous to the participating city or village can negotiate similar agreements that would allow for the expansion of the respective municipality while maintaining the integrity of their respective township. These methods of cost and revenue sharing can be “Win/Win” propositions for the various political subdivisions in Sandusky County. Benefits to both jurisdictions may include:

City or Village Benefits

- } Allowance for annexation of future commercial, industrial and residential development
- } Potential of more jobs for the community and increased tax base

Township Benefits

- } Provides current Township residents the ability to obtain utility services without annexing.
- } Provides for sharing of income tax from new commercial and industrial development
- } Maintains the integrity of Township boundaries

As previously mentioned, the City and Township share income tax revenue. Such an arrangement requires that both jurisdictions provide services to the area. The service provisions in a CEDA could be as follows:

City or Village Service Provisions could include: fire Response, EMS Response, rescue services (i.e. confined space, etc.), municipal police coverage, utility maintenance (sanitary and storm sewers), traffic signal maintenance (if not maintained by the county or state), planning and zoning services, building inspections, code enforcement, and street lighting.

Township Service Provisions could include: snow clearance (plowing and salting), roadway maintenance (including sweeping, pothole patching, crack sealing, etc.), pavement replacement (up to 2" resurfacing), right-of-way maintenance (including mowing, trash/litter, retention areas, etc.), and major road reconstruction in the CEDA areas will be split 50/50.

Sandusky County Service Provisions could include: bridge replacement and maintenance, ditch cleaning and watercourse maintenance, road reconstruction of all County roads, and utility maintenance (sanitary sewer and water).

7.3 Encourage the use of new technologies to encourage and guide growth and development

Meets Land Use Objectives: 1,4,8,9

Several new tools exist that may be beneficial in the land use and development arena. Seeing deleterious land-use changes over years and decades helps citizens understand the repercussions of unplanned growth. Impacts of development over time can be significant. By using geographic information system applications and analyzing land-use data collected over time, county residents and private and public officials may be more apt to support quality planned growth and the necessity for holistic and comprehensive planning.

Currently, the Sandusky County Auditor's Tax Map department utilizes GIS technology on their public access systems. Residents can use these systems to access specific information concerning their property, school districts, soil types, and other information. However, data such as environmental constraints (floodplains, wetlands, groundwater pollution potential-DRASTIC Index) and specific soils data (prime soils, soil productivity, septic constraints, etc.) should be available from the Sandusky County Regional Planning Commission. Sandusky County residents should have the necessary tools to understand how development has occurred in the past and how the same patterns may occur in the future.

7.4 Encourage local political subdivisions to pursue sound land use mechanisms Meets Land Use Objectives:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8

To ensure that Sandusky County develops in a planned and orderly manner, all local political subdivisions (especially the non-zoned townships of Madison, York, and Townsend) are encouraged to begin implementing creative tools that guide future growth and development. For most of Sandusky County's localities, this may mean one or more of the following:

- | Developing comprehensive land use plans at the local level, designating future areas for specific land uses;
- | Working with contiguous townships and municipalities in developing joint economic development zone agreements or cost-sharing agreements to promote economic development in selected areas closest to public infrastructure and populated areas;
- | Becoming more proactive in residential development by land purchases and increased marketing efforts;
- | Revising/updating zoning regulations to facilitate flexibility and permitting developers to be innovative during the zoning and development process;
- | Working more closely with the Sandusky County Regional Planning Commission and other development oriented agencies for professional advice and technical assistance.

Encouraging the townships of Madison, York, and Townsend to develop zoning resolutions and maps.

Attempting to promote any of these planning concepts will require a good line of communication among all parties involved. One method in building the bonds and relationships necessary to promote these concepts is to establish an annual planning and development forum facilitated by the Sandusky County Regional Planning Commission or by an outside facilitator. This forum would provide a platform by which all political subdivisions can voice their unique problems and concerns, and allow those concerns to be handled in a timely manner with professional advice.

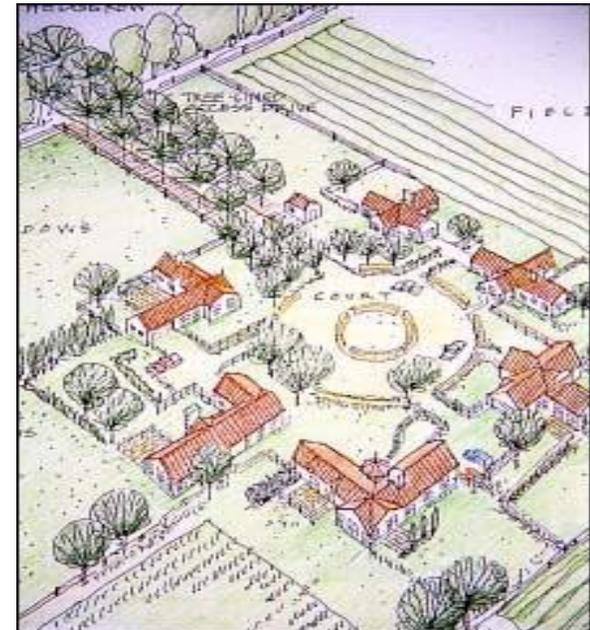
In becoming more aware of the planning and zoning tools available, all officials will understand that planning is essential for their community's future. These tools are flexible, provide local land use management, and do not require private property rights to be usurped or infringed upon. Both the public and private sector's interests can be accommodated in the planning process, but the channels of communication must be clear and accurate. This annual forum will work to solidify planning in Sandusky County.

7.5 Develop Incentives and Innovative Tools for Clustered and Non-Sprawl Residential Growth Meets Land Use Objectives: 1,2,3,4,5,7

Over the next several decades, Sandusky County will surely continue to grow. The development mechanisms currently available to the county and its political subdivisions will shape the county's landscape in the future. With over 55.5% of Sandusky County soils having a productivity index of 80⁵ or higher, coupled with the fact that over 95.8% of the county's soils have severe septic limitations, it is clear that additional mechanisms are needed to offer developers and individual property owners an alternative to the "one-size- fits-all" development standards.

Create a Rural Residential District: One method to promote proper land use across Sandusky County and provide for residential development is to create a new rural residential zoning district. This district would be flexible and could be recommended in areas that are suitable to accommodate it.

To promote this concept, a political subdivision (primarily a township) would amend its zoning ordinance or resolution to require all new platted subdivisions within these newly zoned areas to be developed in accordance with clustered and conservation design principles. Minimum lot sizes could be reduced (especially if public water and sewer is available) as needed in these rural



⁵Please see the Natural Resources Chapter for more information of Sandusky County's soils and their productivity.

residential areas to allow the developer and owner to capitalize on larger profit margins if such conservation and clustering design principles developed by the jurisdiction are met.

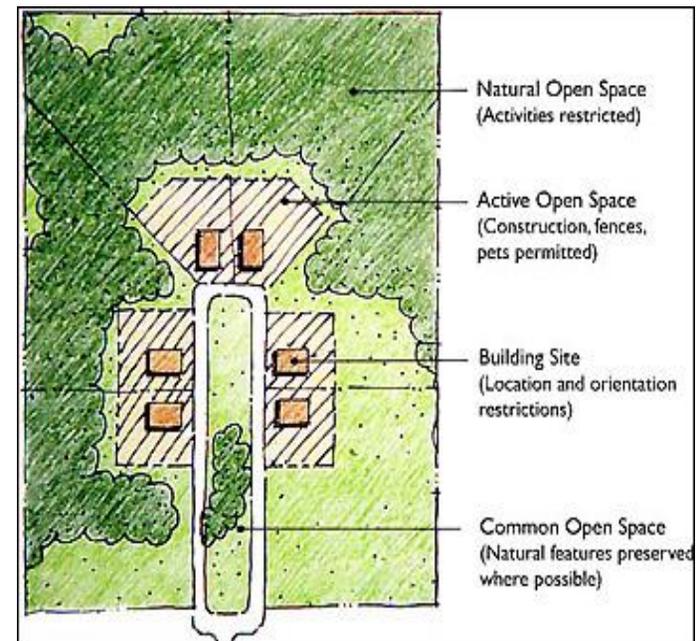
The new zoning district boundaries could be determined by the township or by land owners who could voluntarily pursue rezoning of their property (subject to the limitations on subdivision/plat requirements). This method will allow political subdivisions to provide for residential growth in areas that have the greatest potential to be served with public utilities and other health and human services, including fire and EMS. However, this method should not be applied to areas that are primarily agricultural in nature, and in those areas of the county that are lacking the greatest potential to be served with public service and support amenities.

Promote Cluster Development Zoning: If growth is allowed to continue under historical patterns, it will consume several thousand acres of highly productive farmland in the County. Through the formulation and promotion of cluster development design standards, the county can witness a reduction of unnecessary land consumption from new development, and will allow residents to enjoy a balanced relationship between preserving rural character and permitting growth.

The cost and benefits of cluster development vary depending upon location and land preparation and engineering costs. The biggest benefit from clustered development is a savings in development costs (see table below concerning development costs⁶) and a more efficient use of land. While cost estimations may vary from location to location, this comparison shows that clustering residential units can reduce site development costs by up to 50 percent, allowing the developer to attain higher profit margins, while promoting housing availability and preserving agricultural lands.

In an effort to promote this pattern of development in selected areas, clustered development should be placed on equal footing with conventional development by allowing the developer to submit two plans (conventional and cluster), from which the respective planning or zoning commission may choose and approve, and by allowing clustered development to occur in selected zoning classifications.

For this type of clustered approach to be utilized in the unincorporated areas of the county, certain regulatory devices, such as the Sandusky County Subdivision



⁶Development costs assume general site conditions and may vary depending upon the site, infrastructure costs, and any other exigent circumstances costs.

Regulations, may need to be updated. The Sandusky County Regional Planning Commission, Engineer, Sanitary Engineer, Health Department, Prosecutor, Board of County Commissioners, and respective township officials should also begin a discussion on how such compact land development alternatives can occur and under what circumstances across Sandusky County.

7.6 Establish Preferred Development Zones and Growth Areas

Meets Land Use Objectives: 1,4,5,7

Some areas within Sandusky County are better suited for development of certain land uses than others (see maps in Natural Resources chapter highlighting development constraints). This is generally true because these areas are accessible to key transportation networks and public utilities, are in close proximity to established population centers, and/or contain better soil types or a lack of soil constraints. With this principle in mind, the Sandusky County Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, in conjunction with the Sandusky County Regional Planning Commission and public input, initially established, and have subsequently updated, “Concept” and “Growth” areas across the county that are best suited for selected types of development. The criteria that were used in defining Sandusky County’s concept and growth areas consisted of the following factors:

| Cost Variable | Conventional Subdivision | Clustered Subdivision |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Site Preparation | 16 acres \$939,000 | 7 acres \$411,000 |
| Street Development | 2,625 linear ft. \$328,000 | 1,125 linear ft. \$141,000 |
| Sewage Disposal | 24 On-Site Septic \$181,000 | 1 Clustered Separated \$124,000 |
| % of Unplatted Residential Lots | \$1,448,000 | \$676,000 |
| Cost Per Unit | \$60,333 | \$28,167 |

-] Proximity to developed areas, preferably incorporated areas, with similar land use types
-] Proximity to county or municipal utilities
-] Location on or near key transportation routes with good accessibility
-] Lack of documented or potential health and safety issues⁷
-] Lack of environmental constraints (floodplains, wetlands, other significant natural or “pristine” areas)
-] Documented growth trends or growth potential within the area

These criteria were developed taking a holistic approach to the development, and do not override any specific methodology for development currently in place by any of the county’s political subdivisions.

⁷The issues include ground water quality and supply, increased on-site sewage disposal systems, and increased curb cuts onto low capacity roads.

7.7 Utilize established criteria in assessing development proposals Meets Land Use Objective: 1

By establishing ascertainable criteria in rating development proposals, those involved with planning and development in Sandusky County will be able to identify the most promising development projects, while adhering to several principles under which this plan has been developed. In addition, these criteria should be used in developing new zoning ordinances and resolutions, or amending existing ones, in order to promote flexible development options within areas having the most development potential. The criteria should be as objective as possible, and are optimally utilized in a worksheet format.

7.8 Encourage residential development guidelines. Meets Land Use Objectives: 1,3,4,5

Residential land use in rural non-farm residential lots is the second largest land use in Sandusky County after agriculture. The dominant housing type in the rural portion of the unincorporated areas is a single family detached house on large, rural lots. The result of this trend is that more land (much of which was formerly farmland) is being used to accommodate residential growth outside of the urban service boundary.

In the rural areas of Townships, home sites have been growing mainly in the form of rural non-farm lots scattered sporadically along the townships' existing roads, some of which may be heavier thoroughfare routes than others. If this trend continues, more and more farmland will be used for non-farm purposes and more traffic related injuries are likely to occur.

The purpose for such residential guidelines is to establish clear policies for the creation of rural non-farm residential lots to further the efforts of farmland preservation within Sandusky County. There is a need for Sandusky County to develop a rational rural non-farm residential lot policy to protect the current agricultural areas of the County.

Rural residential developments can be expected to occur within some areas currently used for agricultural purposes. Almost all of these areas will be outside municipal boundaries. Recently, there has been a trend toward rural residential development along corridors where public water distribution systems are available. With the provision of this public utility, a modest increase in densities can be allowed.

The location of rural residential developments within the County should be considered on an individual basis by the affected local political subdivisions. Specifically, each case should include consideration of the physical capability of the site to accommodate the proposed density and the existing patterns of the surrounding land uses. Rural residential development should be located in areas that are not productive, to act as a buffer between the agricultural lands and denser residential development, and should be discouraged (if possible) within an active agricultural area. The intrusion of rural residential development into these areas can be considered a direct conflict with the countywide goal of preserving prime

agricultural land. In addition, rural residential development building sites, together with all residential development-building sites, should not be permitted within any area where building sites are subject to periodic flooding and/or within the regulatory flood plain.

Due to the non-agricultural orientation of most rural residential developments, residents require locations with accessibility to employment centers and shopping facilities. In order to maintain the efficiency of the road network, strip-type development and low density sprawl of rural residents, requiring driveway access to existing roadways, should be discouraged.

With On-Site Well and Wastewater Disposal- The lot size of new rural residential developments should range between one and five acres per dwelling unit. However, since utility services may not be expected outside of the projected urban area, the density of each individual development should be guided by the overall capability of the entire site to accommodate on-site water supply and wastewater disposal for an extended period of time. Prior to approval of any rural residential development, the Sandusky County Health District requires a soil evaluation be completed to determine if the property can support a Home Sewage Treatment System (HSTS). This evaluation must be completed by an approved soil scientist or soil evaluator, and is reviewed by SCHD staff and then used by an approved designer or determine the design of the HSTS. The SCHD also requires a site evaluation prior to the installation of water well. The evaluation determines the location of the well. In cases where no utility services are projected within the planning period, it is encouraged that the average density of proposed developments should not exceed **one dwelling unit per three acres** (gross density) with the smallest lot not being less than one acre (or as specifically-determined by the Sandusky County Health Department or local zoning inspector).

With Public Water and On-Site Wastewater Disposal - The lot size of new rural residential developments with a public water supply should range between one and five acres per dwelling unit. Since public water is available, the density of each individual development should be guided by the capability of the site to accommodate on-site wastewater disposal and to maintain the rural character of the area. The Sandusky County Health District, prior to the approval of any rural residential development, should complete a soil evaluation for septic tanks and leach fields in order to insure the public health and safety. In cases where public water is available or will be provided, the average density of proposed developments should not exceed one dwelling unit per two and a half acres (gross density) with the smallest lot not being less than one acre.

An option for rural residential development could be the cluster/open space concept as illustrated on page 13-14 of this section. Cluster development is a design technique that concentrates development on a portion of the site to allow the remaining land to be used for recreation, common open space, and preservation of environmentally sensitive features. Clustering permits a rural atmosphere to be preserved for the residents of both the development and the surrounding community. Open space areas can be preserved in one or more of these scenarios:

1. Along public roadways bordering the development, so that views from the roads are largely of open space, rather than ones of conventional acreage house lots lining the road;
2. Along rivers, streams, and creeks and their associated flood plains and wetlands, to protect the natural functions of these water bodies;
3. To protect agricultural land by clustering development of agricultural land in the forested/wooded areas of the farm or on the marginal farming areas of the site, thus allowing agricultural practices to continue in the open spaces;
4. To protect woodlands by locating development in non-wooded fields or along opens areas.

Cluster development can be used for a wide variety of open space preservation priorities. These priorities can vary according to the type of resources that are valued most highly by an individual community. Cluster development also has benefits for the developer. By clustering the development, the cost of infrastructure improvements, site clearing, and environmental mitigation are generally decreased.

Urban Residential Requirements

For the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan, urban residential development has been divided into three density types: Low Density, Medium Density, and High Density. Residential uses include single family; multi-family (two, three and four family dwellings); condominiums; townhouses; and apartments. Gross density, which accounts for all of the land within the development, is used to define the residential densities described in this section. This list of criteria will help guide the decision making process to determine the appropriate density of a specific parcel on a case-by-case basis. The density to be assigned to a specific site should be determined by:

1. The density range provided by urban density classification (and the current zoning ordinances of each municipality);
2. Surrounding adjacent densities and land uses;
3. Capacity of existing and proposed utilities;
4. Capacity of the existing/affected thoroughfares;
5. Consistency with community goals; and
6. Characteristics of the site: topography and natural buffers, flood plains and wetlands, unique geologic features and groundwater sensitivity, and unique/threatened/endangered plant and animal species.

Low Density - Low Density Urban Residential development is encouraged to occur at densities greater than one and three dwelling units per acre. The dominant dwelling type should be the single-family unit with occasional two-family development at appropriate locations. Cluster development maintaining an overall density of 1-3 dwelling units per acre is encouraged. Both public water supply and sanitary sewer must be available to the site.

Medium Density - Medium Density Urban Residential development describes areas allowing from three to six dwelling units per acre. The dominant dwelling type is encouraged to be the single-family unit and two-family, with multi-family development at the greater densities of this range. Cluster development maintaining an overall density of 3-6 dwelling units per acre is encouraged. Public water supply and sanitary sewer service shall be required for areas designated as Medium Density Urban Residential in the future.

High Density - The High Density Urban Residential category designates areas that are encouraged to develop at densities greater than six dwelling units per acre. The dominant dwelling types should be two-family and multiple-family structures; however, single family zero lot line structures are acceptable. Both public water supply and sanitary sewer service shall be required for areas designated as High Density Urban Residential.

Recommended Development Standards for Various Types of Residential Development in the Unincorporated Areas of Sandusky County

| Land Use Type | Gross Density | Utility Services | Dominant Type of Dwelling Units |
|--|---|---|---|
| Rural Residential Development | 1-5 acres per dwelling unit with average lot size of three (3) acres (depending on septic systems requirements) | On-site well and soil conditions necessary for on-site wastewater disposal | Single Family (detached) |
| Rural Residential Development (with public water) | 1-5 acres per dwelling unit with average lot size of 2.5 acres (depending on septic systems requirements) | Public water supply is required and soil conditions necessary for on-site wastewater disposal | Single Family (detached) |
| Low Density Urban | 1-3 dwelling units per acre | Public water supply and sanitary sewer are required | Single family (detached) Two family |
| Medium Density Urban | 3-6 dwelling units per acre | Public water supply and sanitary sewer are required | Single family and two family. Multiple family at the greater densities of this range. |
| High Density | 6 or more dwelling units per acre | Public water supply and sanitary sewer are required | Zero lot line single family, two family and multiple family |

General Requirements - Urban residential development should be located on sites offering a diversity of man-made and natural physical features. Public utility services must be provided for urban residential areas prior to development or as a function of the development.

These services should possess adequate capacity, flow, and pressure for the type and density of the potential urban residential development.

Urban residential land uses should be adequately buffered from incompatible land uses such as industry, commercial centers, agricultural areas, or other potentially incompatible activities. Incompatibility should be determined by differences in the intensity of each use, the physical relationships among each use, and the external effects generated by each use.

Urban residential areas of substantially different densities should also be adequately buffered by open space or transitional urban residential uses of an intermediate density. Urban residential development should preserve or create a completely unified neighborhood, having safe, convenient access to schools, churches, park sites, and other community activity centers, and encourage pedestrian and bike access. Small local shopping facilities oriented to the everyday needs of neighborhood residents may be encouraged at appropriate locations.

7.9 Promote Agricultural Easements to Conserve Prime Agricultural Resources. Meets Land Use Objectives: 4,5

An agricultural easement is the single most powerful legal tool for the permanent protection of farmland, allowing the owner to permanently protect the land from non-farm development without giving up ownership. Under federal tax law, an agricultural easement is treated the same as a conservation easement. It is a flexible agreement between a landowner and a government entity. It is filed with the County Recorder and its terms are binding on future landowners as well as current ones. When a landowner donates an agricultural easement, he or she still owns the land, manages the land for farming, pays taxes on the property, and retains the right to sell it or pass it on to heirs.

If implemented according to IRS requirements, donated agricultural easements can also be treated as charitable gifts and can be deducted from income tax. The amount of the gift is the difference between the appraised value of the land before the easement, and the appraised value of the land after the easement is in place. Additionally, a permanently donated agricultural easement reduces the appraised value of a farm and can result in lower or zero estate taxes. There is also an added benefit of a second estate tax reduction of up to 40 percent, or a maximum of \$500,000.

The Ohio Department of Agriculture is enabled under Ohio law to receive donations of agricultural easements. This allows donors to be eligible for federal tax benefits, depending on compliance with applicable tax laws, and with regard to individual circumstances. Among the organizations in Northwest Ohio that can accept conservation easements to ensure land remains in agricultural use is the Black Swamp Conservancy. The Conservancy has been successful in facilitating the protection of several farms in Sandusky County and is available to farm landowners intending to preserve farming on their premises. Black Swamp is a land trust dedicated to protecting agricultural land and natural areas through land conservation agreements. A draft preservation plan from late 2011 indicated the Conservancy had 10,250 protected acres plus another 3,500 “in the queue”, of which a majority were farmland. Farmland Preservation mechanisms listed by the Conservancy include agricultural conservation easements, Agricultural Security Areas (which protect farmland for ten years), transfer of development rights, agricultural zoning, and Current Agricultural Use Valuation. However, the primary conservation tool is the conservation easement.

An important target area for the Conservancy, which reaches into much of northwest Ohio, is the “Fremont-Sandusky Bay Corridor” running along the Sandusky River directly to the north of the City of Fremont. Agricultural preservation in this area seeks to protect lands lying between the Peninsular Farms conservation easement’s protected properties, and the Sandusky County Park District’s Blue Heron Reserve at the southern basin of the Sandusky Bay. It was noted that this focus area is consistent with the 2003 land use plan for Sandusky County. It was noted that this priority area contains productive farmland soils, builds upon existing preservation sites, and encompasses the main stem of the Sandusky State Scenic River, with a goal of protecting water resources.

Another target area within Sandusky County is the “Gibsonburg-Lindsey Corridor”, a relatively new agricultural land preservation corridor for the Conservancy, containing 1,597 acres of agricultural land protected or in progress, along with three county parks totaling 1,467 acres. Again, this focus area is noted to be consistent with the county land use plan. The focus area contains productive farmland soils, and boundaries were drawn to exclude areas of very stony soils that are not suitable for farmland preservation. This identified priority area, in addition to containing productive farmland soils, builds upon existing preservation sites, contains land used for both grain and vegetable production as well as some small livestock operations, and is situated along the primary roadway corridor between Perrysburg and Fremont (U.S. 20). The Conservancy and the property upon which they are focused are expected to see increased development pressure, and the Conservancy seeks to create a mosaic of preserved farmland and parkland that embodies northwest Ohio’s rural heritage.

7.10 Implement Best Local Land Use Practices from Ohio’s Balanced Growth Program

In addition to the above mentioned Cluster Development tools, there are many additional practices that could be considered by local public officials. The State of Ohio supports a program called the Ohio Balanced Growth Program. This program publishes a collection of Best Local Land Use Practices, most recently updated in 2012. Several of the recommendations in this document are already discussed in this plan, or have already been adopted in some manner in Sandusky County. These Best Practices include model ordinances and regulations to aid in adoption by local communities, and they include:

1. Comprehensive Plans
2. Compact Development
3. Conservation Development
4. Storm Water Management
5. Stream, Floodplain, and Wetland Protection
6. Source Water Protection
7. Natural Areas Management
8. Brownfields Redevelopment

9. Tree and Woodland Protection
10. Steep Slope Protection
11. Agricultural Lands Protection
12. Transfer of Development Rights
13. Historic Preservation
14. Scenic Protection
15. Access Management

Not all are applicable to Sandusky County, while some are already in place and others are worthy of consideration.

Comprehensive Plans

While this goal may seem self-referential considering the goal of this document, we could look further into this goal and encourage smaller communities to pursue their own planning processes, whether through WSOS's Good Start program, or the Ohio Balanced Growth Program's Small Communities Planning Program.

Conservation Development

Many of the practices are already described in this chapter, though there are some significant additions. One item worth discussing is the allowance of shared access drives for residential developments. Typical subdivision regulations require a minimum frontage to discourage so-called flagpole lots. These configurations consist of a large lot located in the middle of another parcel, connected to the nearest road only by a long, narrow strip of land that serves as a driveway. They are called flag lots because they resemble a large flag at the end of a narrow flagpole. Traditional planning practices have railed against these lots due to the number of long term problems including failing access drives, the increased cost of serving the lots with public utilities, and other issues. The Balanced Growth Program discusses ways to make this mode of development work as a tool to use less valuable land for residential purposes while sparing valuable farmland, with the added benefit of preserving the scenic views associated with a rural landscape. Washington Township has recently worked with Regional Planning to adopt a zoning amendment allowing flag lots as conditional uses with several restrictions meant to minimize the inherent problems. The community should watch closely the results of this experiment.

Storm Water Management

Sandusky County is blessed with abundant water resources. . However, storm water issues have plagued the residents of the county since the 19th century, and many factors have contributed to a worsening of this situation in recent years. An increase in the amount of impervious surfaces draining runoff into our waterways, along with additional water added to these streams from additional forms of development and improved field tiling, are straining the drainage systems of the county. Several specific problems, including erosion in the Hill Drive area north of Fremont, have raised awareness of the problem. Sandusky County does not have a coherent means of addressing these issues.

Outside of the dated Subdivision Regulations, there is little on the books to address this issue. With increased awareness of the results of non-point source pollution draining into our rivers and Lake Erie, this issue will be of critical concern in the coming years.

Stream, Floodplain, and Wetland Protection

Sandusky County and most of its constituent municipalities have active and current floodplain development regulations. While improvement is always possible, the county has made progress towards this goal.

Source Water Protection

The City of Fremont has a current and approved Source Water Protection Plan.

Brownfield Redevelopment

The Sandusky County Economic Development Corporation, the City of Fremont and the City of Bellevue have all engaged in Brownfield redevelopment. The City of Fremont has successfully completed an extensive remediation project at the site of a closed cutlery plant located in a residential neighborhood.

Agricultural Lands Protection

Black Swamp Conservancy, the Sandusky County Parks District and other groups and individuals have taken an active role in protecting agricultural land from development, both protecting the farming community and surface and groundwater resources.

Access Management

One hazard often overlooked when discussing rural development is the additional traffic and congestion as local roads experience use that was never anticipated. Additional driveways and culverts create more opportunities for accidents and additional restrictions for stormwater. Sandusky County could address these issues through zoning, subdivision regulations, or a comprehensive Access Management program.