

Chapter One

UPDATE 2013 - THE
SANDUSKY COUNTY
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

I. Sandusky County: An Overview

Sandusky County's population and economic centers are primarily aligned along the U.S. 20 corridor running from east to west. This primarily four-lane route passes through Woodville, Fremont, Clyde, and Bellevue, from west to east. Another community, Gibsonburg, is just three miles south of Route 20, west of Fremont. All municipalities, with the exception of Burgoon and Helena, and most of the county's twelve townships are zoned. Zoning, floodplain, and subdivision issues are addressed by the county's full-time Regional Planning Commission.

Land uses have evolved over the past twenty years. As older, obsolete industrial plants toward city centers have been abandoned, new industrial growth has been directed to targeted growth areas. In Fremont, growth has radiated north between the US 20/SR 53 intersection and the Ohio Turnpike, and a large mixed-use growth center is emerging within this area. Commercial growth has included a Wal-Mart (following the establishment of a Super K Mart one interchange to the west), Lowe's home center, Staples office supply store, Aldi's grocery store, a U.S. Post Office, and Bob Evans, McDonalds, Burger King, and Applebee's restaurants, among others, with further strip commercial development penetrating northward. Industrial growth has followed in planned industrial parks to the east of commercial frontage along SR 53. One major employer, a plastics manufacturer, located in the Fremont North Industrial Park. Railroad service is a key factor contributing to industrial growth in this area. The widening and improvement of SR 53 from US 20 north to the US 80/90 Turnpike has greatly increased the marketability and growth in this area.



Although new growth has been targeted to these areas, several other industrial and commercial areas within Fremont remain economically viable. Industrial parks such as Bark Creek and Commerce Drive have retained their industrial occupants, and other businesses such as IAC on the west side of town have experienced significant growth. Similarly, commercial areas such as the Potter Village shopping center and the central business district have remained healthy, with some vacancies but some signs of investment including a Rite Aid drug store in Potter Village and use of city funding in past years for revitalization of the downtown. Nevertheless, the east side of Fremont on US 20 remains the home to several vacant commercial buildings, with the former east side Wal Mart recently resurrected as a Rural King outlet.

Similar areas of targeted growth exist in the county's other population centers. Clyde had focused attention upon its east side at the Clyde Commerce Center, with new infrastructure including a new water tower and roadway; another industrial area has been developed on the west side as well, and Whirlpool Corporation has undergone several expansions. Bellevue has experienced growth along its perimeter to the west along U.S. Route 20 (with several new industrial structures) and to the south along State Route 269 (with major investment by Wilbert Plastic Services and Tower Automotive). The Route 20 corridor in Clyde and Bellevue continues to experience revived bursts of new commercial and industrial activity.

The Village of Gibsonburg is focusing upon a targeted industrial area on the southeast side of town, as well as on the northern edge (Creekwood Farms, with 220 acres annexed into the Village on the west side of S.R. 300, with rail access), and infrastructure improvements have been planned for the southeast industrial site. As with the other communities mentioned, a general pattern incorporates the continuation and possible expansion of enterprises that have located in industrial “pockets” closer to the city center since the early 20th century, now complemented by targeting of sites for a cluster of new businesses on industrial parcels of 50 acres or so. These sites typically have access to a state highway or U.S. 20, and many also have rail access. Their development by the public sector has been aided greatly by the efforts of an active team of developers who have had repeated success in developing and selling or leasing industrial properties.

Residential growth has also continued, albeit relatively slowly, over the last twenty years, while the County’s population has decreased. The location of such new residential development continues to be split between population centers and rural areas of the county. This decentralized residential growth is most notable within Ballville Township, south of Fremont, and along road frontages of township and other county roads. Housing has been developed on Bellevue’s west side as well.

II. Purpose of the Plan

The Sandusky County Comprehensive Plan is a long-range plan used to guide growth and development. Among the duties ascribed to County and Regional Planning Commissions under Ohio Revised Code 713.23 are preparing such plans, including studies, maps, recommendations, and reports. However, while a variety of consulting duties of the commission are listed, the plans are not binding and not required to be followed because of the phrase “may adopt such plan”. This update to the 2003 plan thus presents current information on county demographics, development trends, and public facilities, and presents a set of recommendations for local decision-makers to consider.

A comprehensive plan establishes recommendations for determining what types and densities of development are most appropriate in what areas of the community, including where development may be best accommodated and where resources are readily available to revitalize already developed areas. The update also highlights the current condition of streets, water and sewer lines, and other public facilities needed to support future land uses and what important environmental and cultural resources should be protected.

The Comprehensive Plan is the statement of development policy for Sandusky County by the many public and private officials and residents who participated in the planning process. The Plan presents a series of goals and strategies to guide the preparation of future County regulations and the application of County programs. These goals and policies are organized in eight functional categories dealing with population and demographics, economic development, housing, quality of life (including historic preservation; parks, recreation, and open space; education; health and health care; and public safety), natural resources, land use, public utilities, and transportation. Each section contains a summary of important issues and trends, a statement of goals and a list of strategies, and recommendations that the County could use to address these goals. Also included is a chapter on current planning tools available to the County and its political subdivisions to promote and guide growth and development. That chapter is not intended to require or even suggest implementation of each strategy, but as a reference to inform the reader of options available within Ohio to help address locally-established goals.

The Plan works best with public support and understanding, as well as far-sighted leadership by public agencies, many of which were instrumental in the development of the Plan, to support its vision and goals. In addition to serving as a guide to the expenditure of public funds in the acquisition of land and the siting and construction of public facilities, the Plan provides useful information to help inform the separate development of locally-generated zoning and subdivision regulations, which are recommended for the health and safety of County residents, and to achieve orderly growth and a beneficial pattern of land use. Thus the Plan has no enforcement power to govern or enforce specific development decisions, but it offers a series of planning principles which, when consulted, can assist in preserving the positive vision for the County's future.

All decisions should be made in light of the strong history of private property rights enjoyed by citizens of our country. Sandusky County residents have chosen to allow most land-use control to be exercised at the township level in order to ensure that these controls are responsive to the needs and wishes of residents. The plan does not advocate the expansion of these controls at the expense of property rights or the reduction of local authority.

Sandusky County, local jurisdictions, and other entities, have prepared and will continue to prepare a variety of specific plans and ordinances. Among them are the County Comprehensive Water and Sewerage General Plan, Sandusky County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Sandusky County Comprehensive Housing Improvement Strategy (CHIS), Solid Waste Plan, various zoning resolutions, and subdivision regulations. In an effort to promote collaboration and continuity and effort has been made to dovetail the goals of those more specific plans with the recommendations and suggestions offered in this Comprehensive Plan.

III. How to Use the Plan

In simple terms, the Plan is a tool for dealing with change. More specifically, it can be used in at least the following six ways:

1. As a basis for the development of public programs and regulations, e.g., community services and facilities, thoroughfare, water and sewer services; zoning regulations; land use; etc.
2. As a basis for decision on specific land use changes as reviewed through zoning regulations.
3. As a basis for the measurement and evaluation of changes in the physical, social or economic makeup of the County. Out of this process may come modifications of the Plan.
4. As a means of intergovernmental coordination and understanding.
5. As a means of communication and education for the public.
6. As a basis for private decision-making regarding the nature and timing of land development and conservation activities.

This update has tried to describe a number of public works and capital improvements projects that are of high priority. Some will be undertaken in the short run, while others have a longer time frame for implementation. In most cases, implementation is dependent upon obtaining sufficient funding from outside and local resources. An overarching need is to constantly seek outside funding sources for the priority projects listed within

this document. This applies to most of the following chapters, ranging from housing to infrastructure and transportation. Because it applies to nearly every segment of this plan, and in an effort to minimize redundancy, seeking outside resources is not mentioned as a specific goal or objective in each, but that does not diminish from its importance within each topic covered by this plan.

IV. The Planning Process

A. Meetings with Local Public Officials

The purpose of the local public official meetings was to obtain input on the key issues and concerns that needed addressing during the update of the Sandusky County Countywide Plan. This process was part of an overall strategic planning procedure that focused on solutions to key issues facing Sandusky County over the next 5 to 20 years. The information generated from these numerous sessions formed part of the basis for the update of the policies, guidelines, and implementation strategies contained within the Sandusky County Comprehensive Plan, especially future land use.

B. Comprehensive Plan Advisory Board Meetings

Following some brief introductory remarks by advisory board members and the meeting participants. Below are the Visioning Exercise question the participants were asked:

- What do you think is the most important issue or concern facing Sandusky County and its residents today?
- What do you consider to be the County's biggest strength(s)/asset(s)? What do you consider to be the County's biggest weaknesses/liabilities? What do you consider to be the biggest threats to Sandusky County?
- What do you see as the biggest opportunities for Sandusky County?

Below is a summary of these common responses to each of the questions posed:

What do you think is the most important issue or concern facing Sandusky County and its residents today?

- Growth management
- Natural resources protection
- Attracting and retaining high-paying jobs
- Farmland preservation
- Historic preservation
- Infrastructure financing

What do you consider to be the County's biggest strengths/assets?

- Natural Beauty of the County
- Historic heritage
- Rural ambiance

- Quality of the schools
- Agricultural/rural character

What do you consider to be the County's biggest weaknesses/liabilities?

- Imbalance of residential to commercial/industrial uses
- Overcrowding of schools
- Infrastructure improvements not keeping pace with development
- Power of the development community/special interest groups
- Lack of high-paying, high-tech jobs

What do you consider to be the biggest threats to Sandusky County?

- Uncontrolled growth
- Shortsightedness of elected officials
- Loss of farmland/open space
- Elected officials unwilling to make the "tough choices"
- Lack of high paying/high tech jobs
- Lack of strength in County's economic base
- Outside water purveyors placing water lines in rural areas of the County
- Lack of County identity

What do you see as the biggest opportunities for Sandusky County?

- Resource management
- Learning from the "mistakes" of our neighbors
- Growth management
- Tourism
- Retention of viable agricultural industry
- Quality educational facilities – public, private, and higher education.

Since the development of the original plan, key users and stakeholders saw a need to update the plan to reflect current realities. The economic development practitioners within the County met in 2008 to draft a series of amendments to the plan. In 2012, these same stakeholders, as well as the new Director of the Sandusky County Regional Planning Commission, found a more pressing need to bring the plan up to the present. Funds were secured to underwrite the cost of an update to the plan, rather than an entirely new one. Officials from the Regional Planning Commission, the Sandusky County Economic Development Corporation, and WSOS Community Action Commission charted a "plan for the plan" that included convening an updated Advisory Committee, a series of meetings with representatives of local

jurisdictions (Townships and municipalities) to update their input and information, and additional meetings as necessary to ensure that information presented in the plan was current. Census and other data were updated as well. The result is a plan that has been updated and brought current to early 2013.

The advisory committee has assisted in editing the original plan, providing information from their areas of expertise, and meeting to ensure that the goals and objectives now reflect the priorities of the County and its subdivisions in 2013.

Advisory Committee members for the 2012-13 update are listed at the end of this chapter.

IV. Goals and Objectives of the Plan

During the development of the Plan, the comprehensive plan advisory board, public officials, and residents assisted in drafting the goals and objectives. Each section of this Plan has one primary goal, which is supported by several objectives. The Strategies and Recommendations section within each chapter then highlights methods and tools available to assist in attaining these objectives.

The goals and objectives of the 2013 Update are the following:

A. Economic and Workforce Development

Economic and Workforce Development Goal: To facilitate the economic health and growth of Sandusky County and its political subdivisions by enhancing the tax and employment base.

Economic Development Objectives:

1. Increase Sandusky County's visibility to selective outside economic interests by continuing to market the county.
2. Enhance business retention and expansion (R & E) efforts that address needs of existing business.
3. Guide future development within, contiguous to, or near areas with existing or expandable infrastructure and compatible land uses.
4. Promote coordination between economic development and capital improvements programming to ensure adequate infrastructure capacity to existing and new development.
5. Encourage the diversity and profitability of production agriculture within the county, and the preservation of prime farmland.
6. Facilitate the revitalization of declining commercial/industrial areas and obsolete facilities through redevelopment, rehabilitation and other available means; focus resources on acknowledged high-priority properties.
7. Promote the selective use of public financing, tax incentives, and economic development programs to attract new businesses and retain existing and expanding businesses.
8. Expand and coordinate visitor and tourism activities.

9. Continue support of organizations like the Sandusky County Regional Planning Commission, Sandusky County Economic Development Corporation and Chamber of Commerce of Sandusky County, as well as other county-wide and community based economic development practitioners and organizations.

Workforce Development Objectives:

1. Continue and expand the cooperation and coordination between local, state, and federal agencies and entities engaged in workforce development activities and decision-making.
2. Expand Sandusky County’s available talent pool of skilled workers, and ensure that workers’ skills are matched with current job opportunities
3. Improve the employability of the county’s labor force through the design and implementation of training programs and needed support services such as transportation and childcare.
4. Help small businesses gain better access to the workforce training system
5. Facilitate regional coordination of workforce training and education
6. Implement monitoring programs that measure program outcomes and support accountability.
7. Take steps to overcome personal barriers related to substance abuse that prohibit employment.

B. Housing

Housing Goal: To ensure an adequate supply of housing to meet the diverse needs of Sandusky County households, including housing size, amenities, location, accessibility and affordability

Objectives:

1. Provide housing alternatives to meet the needs of all segments of the population, particularly the elderly and LMI residents
2. Promote housing developments in a safe, quiet environment that is healthy, convenient, and attractive, ensures stable property values, and affords opportunities for all citizens.
3. Promote Energy Star new construction or retrofitting existing housing to increase efficiency and reduce utility costs to owners and renters.
4. Support the innovative re-use of vacant or under-utilized buildings for housing alternatives.
5. Utilize and periodically update the Sandusky County Community Housing Investment Strategy, or CHIS.

C. Quality of Life

Overall Quality of Life Goal: Promote Sandusky County as a place to reside, work, shop, obtain necessary services, and pursue leisure activities.

Historic Preservation Goal: To preserve Sandusky County’s rich history through renovation and restoration of its most vulnerable historic buildings and sites.

Objectives:

1. Identify properties that can be candidates for the National Register of Historic Places
2. Preserve identified public properties with local government (city, village and county) taking the lead while involving the citizens in a direct and decisive manner
3. Create an education plan that can be reproduced for all grade levels designed to enrich students history curriculum with a focus on Sandusky County's contribution on the state and national level including its formation, the ties to the War of 1812, Revolutionary War, Civil War, World Wars I and II and its economic significance from a historical perspective
4. Create a map identifying historical buildings and properties which includes a legend identifying each property's ownership status, whether or not it has been restored, is on the National Register of Historic Places and whether the property is vulnerable to near future demolition
5. Revitalize historic downtowns of Fremont, Clyde, and other communities as feasible in keeping with their historical significance
6. Identify properties ripe for development as a draw for tourism, which should include the creation of a strategic plan with a timeline to develop and market them as such

Parks and Recreation Goal: To promote the health and well-being of residents through the encouraged use of active and passive recreational outlets.

Objectives:

1. Provide a well-balanced array of recreational activities and outlets.
2. Pursue the feasibility of seeking additional revenues for the Sandusky County Park District and community park and recreation departments to expand operations and its recreational inventory.

Education goal: To maintain a coordinated system of education throughout the County with a consistently positive reputation for providing all students with a solid preparation for college, careers, and business success.

Objectives:

1. Support the development of new educational facilities when their location is consistent with good planning principles, need has been established, and construction design offers long-term compatibility with technology and education needs.
2. Support programming throughout the County that is coordinated, reduces redundancy and inefficiency among school systems, and responds to known needs of employers within the County and with national employment trends.

Health and Health Care Goal: To promote and encourage healthy lifestyles through community design, local programming, dissemination of educational information, and the promotion and development of superior health care facilities.

Objectives:

1. Incorporate planning and development elements that promote and facilitate healthy lifestyle choices, including walkable neighborhoods, pedestrian and bicycle safety, trails and green space, and other provisions for passive recreation.
2. Promote and publicize programming by local communities, agencies, and health care providers that offers education and information pertaining to healthy lifestyle choices.
3. Promote and publicize the availability of a wide array of both general and specialized health care providers throughout Sandusky County, and support their efforts to develop new facilities and capabilities in response to local needs.

D. Natural Resources

Natural Resources Goal: To protect and preserve Sandusky County's natural and significant resource areas

Objectives:

1. Identify areas of natural and significant resources within Sandusky County;
2. Establish conservation, restoration, and preservation methods to assist in the retention of natural amenities and scenic beauty;
3. Encourage site design that protects the natural terrain and groundwater, preserves or restores significant vegetation and scenic views, and incorporates native vegetation into landscape plans;
4. Limit or mitigate development within flood hazard areas.

E. Land Use

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;
 - } The US 20 corridor from Fremont to Bellevue and west of Woodville;
 - } SR 53 north from Fremont, SR 51 from the Turnpike at Elmore to the south; and
 - } other growth areas identified in the "Growth Areas" map included within this Plan.
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, and 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.

F. Public Utilities and Infrastructure

Public Utilities Goal: To perpetuate the County's public utilities in a safe and efficient manner to accommodate existing and future growth needs, by addressing the following objectives:

Note: In current planning practice, the term infrastructure involves a broad array of physical investments in the provision of utilities, accessibility, and amenities that render a site or area suitable for development. In the context of this comprehensive plan, public utilities includes water storage, treatment, and distribution; sanitary sewerage and treatment; storm sewerage and provision for drainage of developed property; distribution of power sources (electricity, natural gas), and information and communication networking (telephone lines, fiber optics, wireless communication towers and equipment).

Water and Sewer Services Objectives

1. Promote industrial site planning in designated growing or growth areas with sufficient infrastructure.
2. Guide development of adequate infrastructure to targeted locations.
3. Pursue the feasibility of providing water of adequate quality and capacity to special areas with documented health and human safety issues.
4. Establish standards and criteria for consideration of cumulative impacts of on-site septic systems upon surface and groundwater quality.
5. Discourage "rural water" infrastructure sized for low-density residential use in areas where future industrial or other higher density development is anticipated. The source and capacity of water provided should match the needs of the users in any given area.
6. Develop cost effective methods to provide services to unincorporated areas of the county with documented groundwater and septic issues.
7. Recognize the importance of programming and budgeting for maintenance and operation of existing infrastructure to maximize its useful life.
8. Approach storm and surface drainage issues on an effective regional or comprehensive basis.

Telecommunications and Energy Infrastructure Objectives

1. Promote the proper placement and provision of telecommunication services throughout Sandusky County.
2. Similarly promote and facilitate the proper placement and provision of energy infrastructure components throughout the County, including but not limited to wind farms and solar arrays.

G. Transportation

Transportation Goal: To facilitate the safe, efficient, and expeditious movement of people and goods throughout Sandusky County, by addressing the following objectives:

Objectives:

1. Utilize access management techniques to accommodate traffic flows and ensure safe pedestrian usage.
2. Implement congestion management techniques at key intersections through redesign, additional traffic lanes, and improved signalization.
3. Promote effective use of public rural transit offered through TRIPS, the county’s rural public transit system.
4. Encourage the usage of safe and “walkable” streetscape design and signage standards within municipalities and across the County.
5. Develop “gateways” or attractive signage that physically marks the entrance to Sandusky County.
6. Continuing to repair County bridges and monitor and correct unsafe roadway segments, intersections and railroad crossings.
7. Continuing routine maintenance of pavements and culverts.
8. Promote alternate means of transportation that meet the above Transportation Goal, such as aviation, railroads, and bicycle transportation.

V. Updating the Plan

In order to keep pace with changing needs, the best of plans need to be updated and amended periodically. This includes revising data and re-evaluating the Plan goals, objectives, and strategies. The Sandusky County Comprehensive Plan recommends that the land use section and land use maps be updated every three years for urbanizing areas and every five years for rural areas. All Plan update processes will take place with the benefit of a full range of citizen involvement, including public hearings before the Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners.

2003 Sandusky County Comprehensive Plan Advisory Board Members

The direction for this comprehensive plan update was provided by an advisory board of public and private officials. The 2001-2003 Sandusky County Comprehensive Plan Advisory Board Members were the following:

- Daniel Liskai, Sandusky County Commissioner
- Brad Smith, Sandusky County Commissioner
- Kim Kocher, Sandusky County Regional Planning Commission

Bill Auxter, Sandusky County Small Business Development Center
Robin Bessire, Sandusky County Farm Bureau
Dick Dagg, Clydescope
Scott Epstein, Terra Community College
Greg Gerwin, Gibsonburg Village Administrator
Steve Gruner, Sandusky County Park Director
Hal Hawk, Crown Battery Co.
Mike Jay, Fremont Economic Development Director
Mary Ann Koebel, Sandusky County Board of Health
Dr. Charlotte Lee, Terra Community College
James Moyer, Sandusky County Engineer Mayor
Terry Overmyer, City of Fremont
Jim Reed, Madison Township Trustee
Kay E. Reiter, Sandusky County Economic Development Corporation
Holly Stacy, Sandusky County Chamber of Commerce
Gary Stair, Bellevue Development Corporation
Dan Weaver, Clyde City Manager

2012-13 Plan Update Advisory Committee Members

Bill Auxter, Director, Small Business Development Center
Warren Brown, Administrator, Sandusky County Commissioners
Matt Damschroder, Sandusky County Commissioner
Greg Edinger, Superintendent, Vanguard Career Center
Steve Fuhr, executive Vice President, Bellevue Development Corporation
Allan Gahler, Director, Sandusky County Farm Bureau
Steve Gruner, Director, Sandusky County Parks District
Bill Hammer, Woodville Township Trustee
Beth Hannam Interim Manager of Workforce Development, Terra State Community College
Rich Harman, Mayor, Village of Woodville
Mike Jay, Economic Development Director, City of Fremont
David Johnson, Administrator, Village of Gibsonburg
Ben Kenny, Community Development Coordinator, WSOS Community Action Commission, Inc.
Jerri Miller, Executive Director, Sandusky County Convention and Visitors Bureau
James Moyer, Sandusky County Engineer
David Pollick, Health Commissioner, Sandusky County Health District

Kay E. Reiter, Executive Director, Sandusky County Economic Development Corporation

Daniel Sabolsky, Director, Clydescope, Inc.

Steve Shiets, Sanitary Engineer, Sandusky County Sanitary Engineer Dept.

John Willey, Director, Sandusky County Regional Planning Commission