

# Land Use Planning for Economic Development in Ohio

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION





# Strategic Land Use Planning: Driving Economic Prosperity in Ohio Counties

A Framework for Sustainable Growth and Investment



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## Driving Economic Prosperity in Ohio Counties

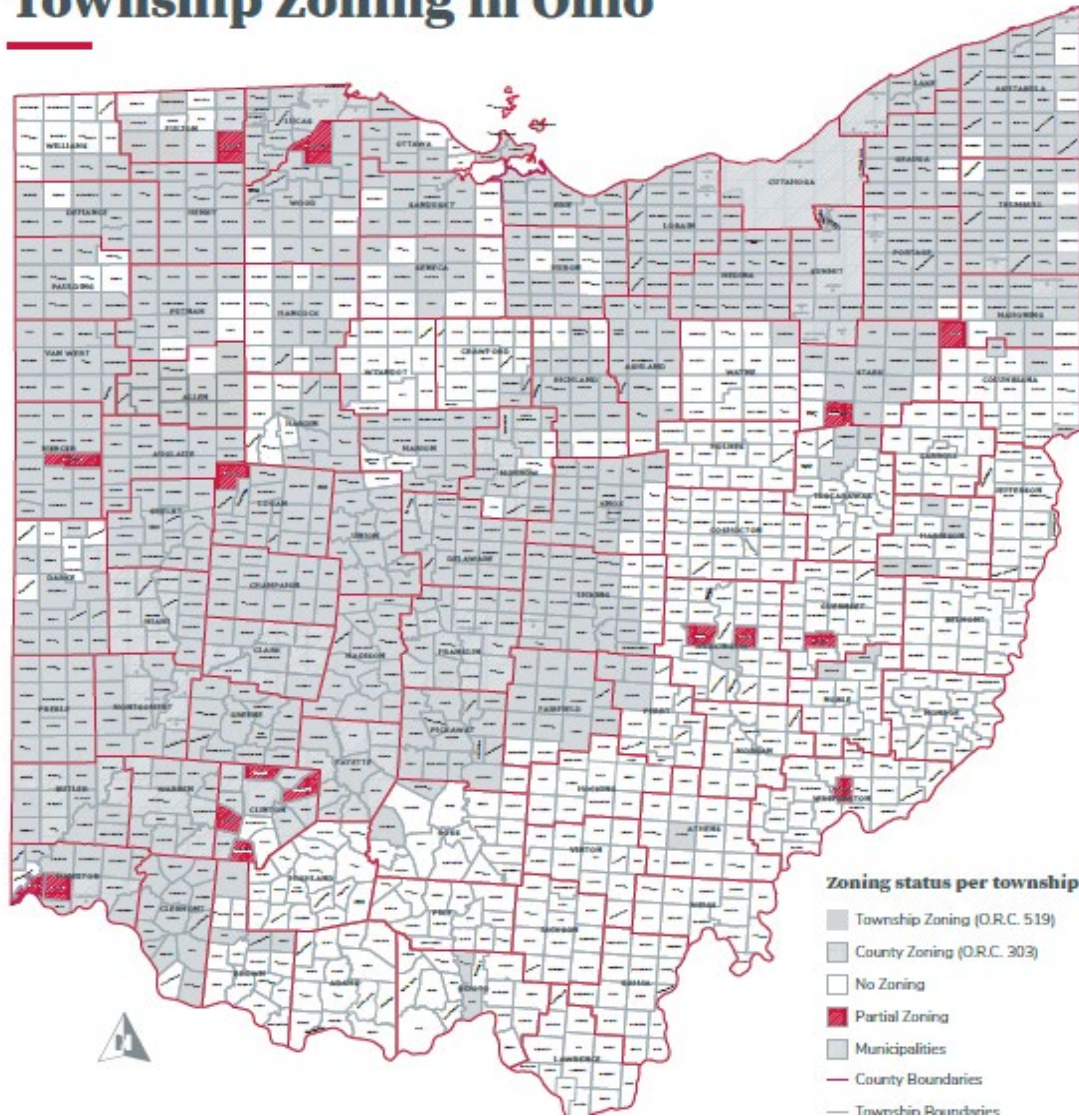
A Framework for Sustainable Growth and Investment

# Today's Discussion...

- **Why land use matters for economic development**
- **Key principles of strategic land use planning**
- **Tools and Strategies for Ohio Counties**
- **Case Studies/Success Stories in Ohio**
- **The Role of County Commissioners**
- **Q&A**



## Township Zoning in Ohio



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# 2024 Zoning Map

In partnership with the Ohio Township Association

Available at:

<https://comdev.osu.edu/news/osu-community-development-partners-ohio-township-association-ota>

## The Critical Link: Land Use & Economic Growth



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## Why Land Use Matters for ED

- **Foundation for Investment-** businesses need suitable land
- **Infrastructure Efficiency-** smart planning reduces costs
- **Quality of Life-** attracts and retains workforce
- **Resource Management-** protects ag. and natural assets
- **Competitive Advantage-** differentiates your county



# Why Land Use is Economic Policy

- ✓ **Infrastructure Costs:** Unplanned sprawl exponentially increases the long-term cost of roads, water, and sewer maintenance for the county.
- ✓ **Business Location:** Companies require certainty. They look for zoned, protected, and capable sites.
- ✓ **Quality of Life:** Talent is attracted to counties that preserve green space, historical assets, and housing quality.



# Economic Goals and Land Use Decisions

## Aligning Our Vision: Economic Goals & Land Use Decisions

- Job Creation: Designating areas for industrial/commercial parks.
- Tax Base Expansion
- Business Retention & Attracting high-value development.
- Providing suitable sites & infrastructure
- Community Revitalization: Reusing brownfields, downtown areas
- Tourism Growth
- Agricultural Preservation  
Protecting Ohio's rich farmlands:
- Tourism Growth:  
Enhancing natural historical assets



- Job Creation
- Tax Base Expansion
- Business Retention and Attraction
- Provide Suitable Sites and Infrastructure
- Community Revitalization/Re-Use
- Tourism Growth
- Ag. Preservation



# Key Principles of Strategic Land Use Planning

## Pillars of Effective Planning

- Comprehensive Planning:  
A holistic, long-term vision for industrial/commercial parks.
- Data-Driven Decisions:  
Using demographics, markets, infrastructure capacity.
- Stakeholder Engagement:  
Involving residents, regional communities
- Intergovernmental Cooperation:  
Working with municipalities, regional entities



- Not just zoning... comp planning is a vision for the entire county
- Data-driven for informed decision making
- Engagement- successful plans are community-owned... not just government imposed!
- Intergovernmental cooperation is key



# Economic Blueprint for Your County

## Comprehensive Plan: Your County's Economic Blueprint

- Long-Range Vision: 10–20 years for growth and development
- Key Elements: Land use map, transportation, housing, economic development, natural resources
- Policy Foundation: Guides zoning, infrastructure investments, and development review
- Economic Development Chapter: Identifies target industries, opportunity sites

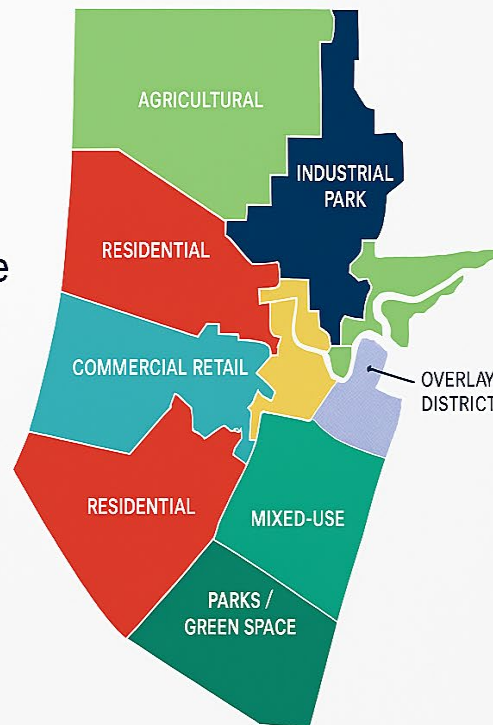


- Long-Range Vision
- Key elements included
- Solid policy foundation
- Economic Development Chapter- target industries, identify sites for opportunity, clarify infrastructure needs

# Tools for Ohio Counties: Zoning

## Essential Tools: Zoning Ordinances

- Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan: Translates vision into regulations
- Types of Zones: Residential, Commercial, Agricultural, Mixed-Use
- Overlay Districts: For specific areas like historic districts, floodplains, or innovation zones
- Performance-Based Zoning: Focus on outcomes rather than strict prescriptive rules, encouraging innovation
- Challenges: Can be rigid, require updates to reflect market needs



- Zoning is the primary regulatory tool for land use
- Well-crafted zoning guides specific types of economic activity to appropriate areas (e.g., heavy industry away from residential)
- Consider flexible zoning that allows for modern business needs, such as mixed-use developments



# Basic Zoning Concepts

- **Zoning Text-** the ordinance or text that lays out the exact regulations that zoning is created to implement.. Adopted by local governing body like city council or commissioners. Typically establish uses allowable in each zone (residential, commercial, industrial)
- Also includes information on procedures for zoning applications, appeals, and variances.
- **Zoning Map-** color-coded map shows the locations of zone districts throughout a community.
- **Comp. Plan-** long-term plan that guides all aspects of development over the next 20 plus years. Serves as the basis for zoning regs, describes goals for housing, econ. dev., transportation, land use, public facilities and the natural environment.

# Basic Zoning Concepts

- Remember...changes to a **zoning text** affect an entire district, while changes to a **zoning map** affect a particular site.
- Zoning continues to evolve (Euclidean, mixed-use, form-based, overlays, etc.)



# Where do Communities Get Zoning Authority From?

- **Ohio is a home rule state... cities and villages can enact zoning and land use regulations directly from the Ohio Constitution.** Zoning regs are an exercise of police powers that the state constitution grants local governments.
- Cities and villages **do not** need to have a comprehensive plan to enact zoning ordinances.
- By contrast, **counties and townships** in Ohio are not granted home rule. Zoning authority is more restricted than municipalities and cannot deviate from state statute.
- **Zoning must be enacted in accordance with a comprehensive plan.**
- The Ohio Supreme Court ruled that a comp plan may be included in a township zoning resolution and does not need to be a separate document. (2015)

## What If We Don't Have Zoning?

- The ORC empowers local governing bodies to enact zoning; not all communities choose to use it.
- More than half of Ohio's 1,308 townships use zoning to control growth and to discourage LULU's... locally undesirable land uses.
- For rural communities with no zoning in place but wish to have more control over development, several regulatory tools can be used as an alternative...



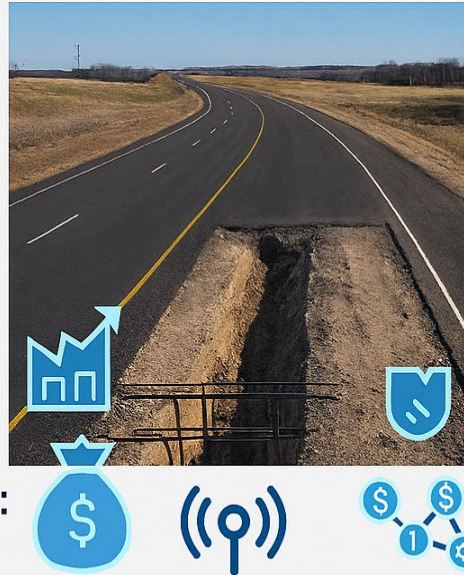
# Alternative Regulatory Tools for Townships

- **Comp Plan-** establishes a long-term vision and goals for development, don't need zoning to have a comp. plan.
- **Deed Restrictions-** private agreements between developers and buyers that limit the use of a property to maintain community character and prohibit nuisances. Can restrict certain uses near residential neighborhoods. Can be enforced by a local governing body to give extra power. Provides more flexibility than convention zoning and more autonomy to property owners.
- **Historic Preservation Districts-** used to protect aesthetics of an area without dictating what uses are allowed. Developers submit designs to architectural review board which could flag aesthetic issues on building exteriors that are not compatible with surrounding buildings.

# Incentives and Infrastructure Investment

## Essential Tools: Incentives & Infrastructure Investment

- **Infrastructure Prioritization:** Roads, water, sewer, broadband to target growth areas
- **Site Readiness Programs:** Preparing shovel-ready sites for development
- **Tax Increment Financing (TIF):** Capturing new property tax revenue for public improvements
- **Community Reinvestment Areas (CRAs):** Tax exemptions for new development or rehabilitation
- **Grants & Loans:** State and federal programs (e.g., Appalachian Regional Commission)



- Land use planning is not just regulatory... it's about creating attractive environments for investment
- Strategic infrastructure investments can unlock economic potential of certain land parcels
- TIFs and CRAs are powerful tools for ED in Ohio
- Enterprise Zones (EZ)- tax exemptions for real and personal property for business establishment or expansion



# Tools: Brownfield and Corridor Redevelopment

## Essential Tools: Redevelopment & Revitalization

- **Brownfield Redevelopment:** Cleaning up and repurposing contaminated sites
- **Ohio Brownfield Program:** State funding for assessment and cleanup
- **Corridor Planning:** Focusing development along key transportation routes and environments
- **Downtown Revitalization:** Leveraging historic assets and walkable environments



- Seek to redevelop existing sites, which often have existing infrastructure
- Look to the Ohio Brownfield Program as a resource
- Benefits of mixed-use development- can create vibrant places and reduce sprawl

# Preserving Rural Character

## Balancing Growth & Heritage

Agriculture is a major economic sector in Ohio. Planning isn't just about building; it's about protecting assets.

- 🌿 **Conservation Easements:** Permanently protect prime soil.
- ↔️ **Transferable Development Rights:** Shift density from farms to towns.



# The Power of Prepared Sites

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## "Shovel-Ready" Wins Projects

Businesses want speed and certainty. A competitor with a "risky" unzoned site will lose to a prepared county every time.

- ✓ **Pre-Zoning:** Remove the legislative risk.
- ✓ **Due Diligence:** Complete environmental (Phase I) studies.
- ✓ **Utilities:** Verify water, sewer, and fiber capacity.





# Zoning Modernization

## Beyond "Euclidean" Segregation

Traditional zoning often forces car dependency and separates people from services. Modern tools like **Form-Based Code** focus on the physical form and relationship between buildings.

**Benefit:** Creates the vibrant, mixed-use centers that attract young professionals and retain property value.



# Addressing Blight

## County Land Reutilization Corps

Land Banks (ORC Chapter 1724) are a crucial economic tool. They allow the county to acquire tax-delinquent, unproductive land and clean the title.

**Strategy:** Coordinate Land Bank acquisitions with the Economic Development office to assemble parcels for future commercial or residential use.





# Infrastructure Investment



- “People are like rats... they follow the sewers!” Dr. Don Lacy, OSU ret.
- Where pipes go, development follows
- When you extend water and sewer to designated “focus areas”, you are drawing a line on the map for growth
- Action: Prioritize capital improvements that align with the Comprehensive Plan, rather than react to developer requests in isolation.



# Some Ohio Success Stories...

# Ohio Success Story: Adams County

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## Winchester Industrial Park

- ✓ **Action:** County purchased land and secured a \$4.2M JobsOhio grant.
- ✓ **Strategy:** Proactive infrastructure extension (water, sewer, road) to create "shovel-ready" sites.
- ✓ **Result:** Attracted corporate investment in a federal Opportunity Zone.



# Ohio Success Story: Noble County

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## Caldwell East of I-77 Business Park

- ✓ **Partnership:** Commissioners partnered with JobsOhio and private developers.
- ✓ **Investment:** Secured \$4.8M for site work and a speculative building.
- ✓ **Outcome:** Overcame topography challenges to establish a competitive business magnet.



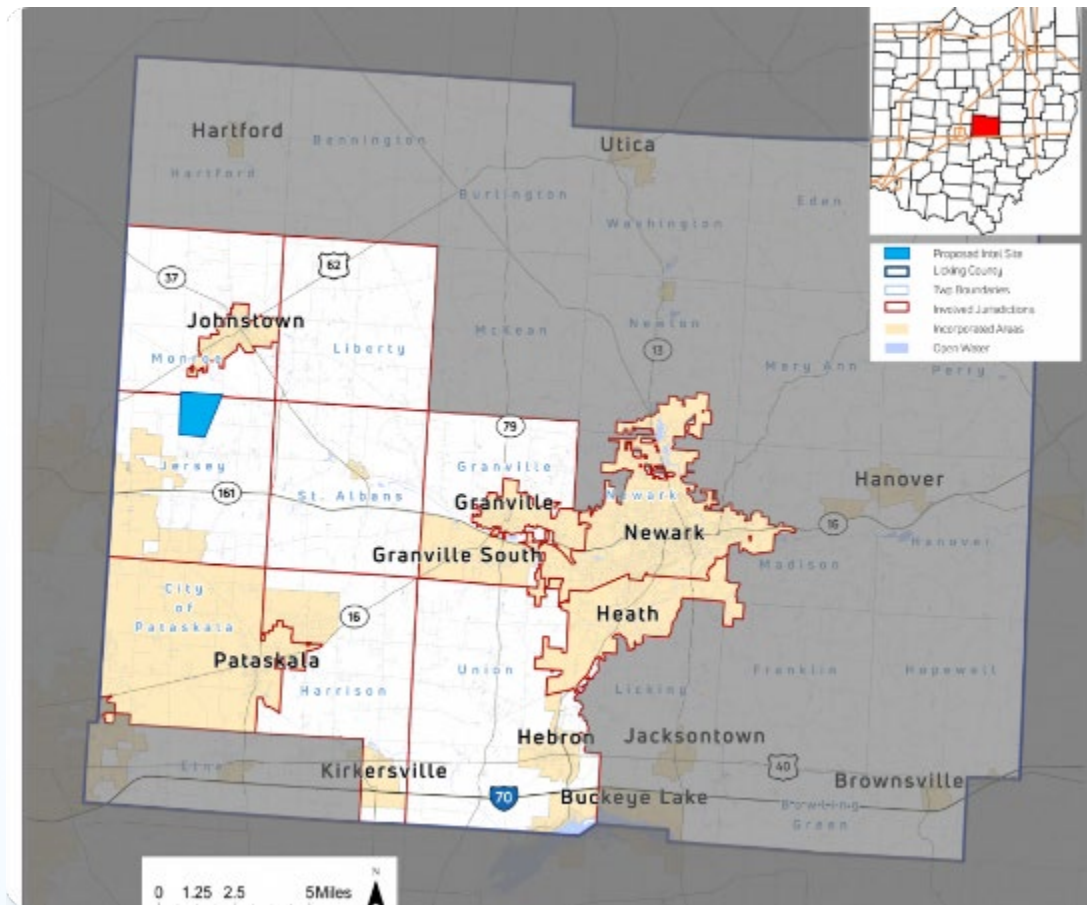
# Transforming Office Parks: Dublin's Metro Center

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- ✓ **The Challenge:** An aging, single-use office park with auto-centric design and high vacancy.
- ✓ **The Plan:** *Metro Center Revitalization Plan* rezoned for high-density mixed-use.
- ✓ **Key Tool:** New zoning code mandated walkable, urban-style development.
- ✓ **Outcome:** Created a vibrant economic district, increasing tax revenue per acre.



# Regional Collaboration: Licking County & Intel



- ✓ **The Catalyst:** Intel's \$20B investment created immediate regional pressure.
- ✓ **The Response:** "*Framework*" – A collaboration of 15 diverse jurisdictions.
- ✓ **The Strategy:** Agreed on a shared growth map to funnel development to areas with capacity.
- ✓ **Lesson:** Economic booms require **regional** planning, not just local zoning.

# Downtown Renaissance: Tiffin (Seneca County)

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- ✓ **Focus:** Revitalizing the historic downtown as the county's economic engine.
- ✓ **Tools Used:** Facade Enhancement Grants and Heritage Ohio Main Street Program.
- ✓ **Innovation:** DORA district increased foot traffic for retailers.
- ✓ **Results:** Over **100 new businesses** and \$100M+ in investment since 2011.





# Balancing Growth: Fairfield County

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## Plan: "Fairfield Growing"

- ✓ **Context:** Managing suburban pressure while protecting agricultural heritage.
- ✓ **Strategy:** Planning *for* agriculture as a key industry, not a placeholder.
- ✓ **Tactics:**
  - ✓ Zoning allowances for **Agri-Tourism**.
  - ✓ **Agricultural Easements** to protect prime soil.

# Your Unique Authority & Role

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- ✓ **Ohio Revised Code Chapter 303: Grants**  
Commissioners the explicit power to regulate building and land use in unincorporated territories.
- ✓ **Legislative Action:** You are the ultimate approval authority for zoning resolutions and amendments.
- ✓ **Executive Action:** Your decisions directly shape the economic landscape, creating the environment for investment.



## Regulatory Power

Zoning is your primary tool for managing growth.



## Strategic Vision

Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.

# Collaboration is Key

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## Unified Planning

Development does not stop at political boundaries.

Annexation wars hurt the regional economy.

- ✓ **Township Trustees:** Early engagement prevents conflict.
- ✓ **Municipalities:** Coordinate on Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDDs).
- ✓ **Regional Planning:** Utilize their technical expertise.



# Your Role as Commissioners

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## Legislator

Adopt and update zoning resolutions and comprehensive plans.



## Funder

Prioritize infrastructure investments that unlock economic potential.



## Partner

Collaborate with townships, CICs, and regional agencies.

# Action Items for Commissioners

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- ✓ **Lead with the Plan:** Ensure every zoning change aligns with the Comprehensive Plan.
- ✓ **Target Infrastructure:** Focus capital dollars only on designated growth zones.
- ✓ **Empower Experts:** Rely on your Planning Commission and Economic Development Director for technical guidance.
- ✓ **Use Your Tools:** Actively deploy Land Banks, JEDDs, and TIFs to shape the market.

# Questions?

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