

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 five 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 new 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 new U.S. Post Office, and Bob Evans, McDonalds, Burger King, Applebee's, and Ryan's Steak House restaurants. Industrial growth has followed in planned industrial parks to the east of commercial frontage along SR 53. One major employer, a plastics manufacturer, has recently located in the Fremont North Industrial Park. Railroad service is a key factor contributing to industrial growth in this area. It is also expected that the widening of SR 53 from US 20 north to the US 80/90 Turnpike will greatly increase 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 Sterling Inoac 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 few vacancies and signs of new investment including a new Rite Aid drug store in Potter Village and use of city funding for revitalization of the downtown. Nevertheless, the east side of Fremont on US 20 remains the home to several vacant commercial buildings like the former Wal-Mart.

Similar areas of targeted growth exist in the county's other population centers. Clyde has focused attention upon its east side at the Clyde Commerce Center, with new infrastructure including a new water tower and roadway. 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

Armstrong Air Conditioning and Tower Automotive). The Route 20 corridor in Clyde and Bellevue has also experienced revived burst of new commercial and industrial activity.

The Village of Gibsonburg is focusing upon a targeted industrial area on the southeast side of town, and infrastructure improvements have been planned for that 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 over the last twenty years, although the County’s population has decreased. The location of this 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.

II. Purpose of the Plan

The Sandusky County Comprehensive Plan is a long-range plan used to guide growth and development. A comprehensive plan establishes the basis for determining what types and densities of development are appropriate in what areas of the community, including where new development may best be accommodated and where resources are readily available to revitalize already developed areas. The plan also highlights the current condition of streets, water and sewer lines, and other public facilities needed to support the proposed future pattern of land use 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 that participated in the planning process. The Plan presents a series of goals and strategies to guide the preparation of 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, quality of life (housing, parks and recreation, and historic preservation), land use, public utilities, transportation, natural resources, and plan implementation. 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 reach 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.

The Plan requires public cooperation and support for its accomplishments. It also requires far-sighted and steadfast leadership by public agencies to support the vision and goals of the Comprehensive Plan. In addition to serving as a guide to expenditure of public funds in the acquisition of land and the construction of public facilities, the Plan forms the necessary background for the zoning and subdivision regulations. Zoning and subdivision standards are necessary to achieve orderly growth and an acceptable pattern of land use. Growth and change occur with time, and good planning principles must be established to preserve our vision for the future.

Sandusky County, as required by State laws, has prepared and continues 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. While providing more detailed information and policy, all plans and laws shall be in compliance with, and conform to, the County Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan provides policy direction and guides the development of these other plans.

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.

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 strength(s)/asset(s)?

- ✓ 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 strength in County's economic base
- ✓ Outside water purveyors placing water lines in rural areas of the county
- ✓ Loss of community 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.

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 2003 Sandusky County Comprehensive Plan 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.
2. Enhance business retention and expansion (R & E) efforts.
3. Guide future development contiguous to or near areas with existing or expandable infrastructure and land uses of like type.

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.
6. Facilitate the revitalization of declining commercial/industrial areas and obsolete facilities through redevelopment, rehabilitation and other available means.
7. Promote the selective use of public financing, tax incentives, and economic development programs in attracting new businesses and retaining existing and expanding businesses.
8. Expand visitor and tourism activities.
9. Continue support of organizations like the Sandusky County Regional Planning Commission, Sandusky County Economic Development Corporation and Sandusky County Chamber of Commerce.

Workforce Development Objectives:

1. Expand Sandusky County's available talent pool of skilled workers, and ensure that workers' skills are matched with current job opportunities.
2. 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.
3. Help small businesses gain better access to the workforce training system.
4. Facilitate regional coordination of workforce training and education.
5. Develop a monitoring program that measures achievements in terms of customer outcomes and increased local accountability.

Quality of Life

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

Quality of Life Component: Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Goal: To encourage the promotion and preservation of Sandusky County's links with the past.

Objectives:

1. Assist communities in preserving central business districts and historic resources. This can be achieved in part by using appropriate tools, such as Certified Local Governments, Main Street programs, National Register of Historic Places nominations, and historic tax credits.
2. Encourage zoning codes that include historic preservation overlay districts, such as the historic preservation district being implemented in Fremont.

Quality of Life Component: 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.
2. Promote housing developments in a safe, quiet environment that is healthy, convenient, attractive, ensures stable property values, and affords opportunities for all citizens.
3. Support the innovative re-use of vacant or under-utilized buildings for housing alternatives.
4. Utilize and periodically update the Sandusky County Community Housing Investment Strategy.

Quality of Life Component: Parks and Recreation

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 to expand operations and its recreational inventory.

Public Utilities¹

Public Utilities Goal: To perpetuate the County's infrastructure in a manner suitable to accommodate existing and future growth needs.

Objectives:

1. Promote industrial site planning in 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 noted water deficiencies.
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 industrial or other higher density development is anticipated.
6. Ensure new growth is accommodated by adequate public facilities.
7. Adopt zoning classifications that are appropriate to the availability of suitable infrastructure.
8. Develop cost effective methods to provide water/sewerage services to unincorporated areas of the county with documented groundwater and septic issues.

¹ 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).

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 resource areas within Sandusky County.
2. Establish conservation and preservation methods to assist in the retention of natural amenities and scenic beauty.
3. Encourage site design that protects the existing terrain, preserves significant vegetation and scenic views, and incorporates native trees and shrubbery into landscape plans.

Transportation

Transportation Goal: To facilitate the efficient and expeditious movement of people and goods throughout Sandusky County.

Objectives:

1. Utilize access management techniques to accommodate traffic flows and ensure safe vehicular and 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 streetscape design and signage standards within municipalities and across the County.
5. Develop "gateways" or attractive signage that physically mark the entrance to Sandusky County.
6. Continue to rehabilitate and repair County bridges.
7. Continue to monitor and correct unsafe roadway segments, intersections and railroad crossings.
8. Continue routine maintenance of pavements and culverts.

Land Use

Land Use Goal: To promote the coexistence of all land uses, with sensitivity to the needs 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 throughout the county, from Woodville to Bellevue; SR 53 north and south from Fremont, and SR 51 from the Turnpike at Elmore south.
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, other environmentally sensitive areas and habitats including the Sandusky River, 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 within the land use planning processes.

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.

VI. 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:

Mr. Dan Liskai, Sandusky County Commissioner
Mr. Brad Smith, Sandusky County Commissioner
Mr. Terry Thatcher, Sandusky County Commissioner
Mr. Kim Kocher, Sandusky County Regional Planning Commission
Mr. Bill Auxter, Sandusky County Small Business Development Center
Mrs. Robin Bessire, Sandusky County Farm Bureau
Mr. Dick Dagg, Clydescope
Mr. Scott Epstein, Terra Community College
Mr. Greg Gerwin, Gibsonburg Administrator
Mr. Steve Gruner, Sandusky County Park Director
Mr. Harold Hawk, Crown Battery Co.
Mr. Mike Jay, Fremont Economic Development Director
Mrs. Mary Ann Koebel, Sandusky County Board of Health
Ms. Charlotte Lee, Terra Community College
Mr. Jim Moyer, Sandusky County Engineer
Mayor Terry Overmyer, City of Fremont
Mr. Jim Reed, Madison Township Trustee
Mrs. Kay Reiter, Sandusky County Economic Development Corporation
Mrs. Holly Stacy, Sandusky County Chamber of Commerce
Mr. Gary Stair, Bellevue Development Corporation
Mr. Dan Weaver, Clyde City Manager